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"I LIVE IN BOLEY, AMERICA": EXPLORING A CONTEMPORARY IDENTITY FOR AFRICAN-AMERICAN BOLEY RESIDENTS

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“I LIVE IN BOLEY, AMERICA”: EXPLORING A CONTEMPORARY IDENTITY FOR AFRICAN-AMERICAN BOLEY RESIDENTS

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Abstract

Boley's history for African Americans are stories filled with triumphs and challenges, specifically autonomy, slavery and Jim Crow. In this paper I address their past and consider a contemporary identity that incorporates history, kinship, church and spirituality. Through this collective perspective, black Boley residents claim to "live in Boley, America" and reflect an identity that unsuspends them from the past and speaks to their agency and community in Boley, Oklahoma.

Chapter One: Introduction

I recently visited the Boley Rodeo during Memorial Day Weekend and began chatting with black Boley residents when suddenly a young, African American female said, "I live in Boley, America". This statement made me think about my first year of fieldwork, back in 2008, when I frequently heard people speak with pride about coming from Boley. Initially I thought this statement served as a reference to the physical land of the United States within the Oklahoma region but the participants I spoke to are not landowners. This statement also caught my attention because there was no mention of living in Oklahoma, as if the state does not exist and I realized after speaking to these residents that "living in Boley, America" speaks to a proclamation of identity, referencing a mutual understanding of history and spirituality. Examining this phrase is significant because it contributes to the growing and diverse meaning of African American identity while "un"-suspending the Boley community from the past, providing a discussion that acknowledges Boley's rich history while recognizing their commitment to church, spirituality and kinship. In addition, this investigation contributes to the growing and changing meaning of African American identity in Oklahoma and the United States.

Questions

Questions that guide this research are: why is the phrase "I live in Boley, America", a clear distinction from Boley, Oklahoma, used by black Boley residents? What are they communicating about their current and past identity? Is this part of a formal town-branding process? What is Boley's history? Is it connected to this phrase and if so, why? Are church and spirituality related to the "I live in Boley, America" statement?

What can this contemporary definition of Boley identity contribute to our understanding of identity for blacks in Oklahoma and the United States?

According to James Shaw Sr., native of Boley and author of *Boley: Oklahoma's Famous Black Town*, their understanding of identity stems from "a sense of independence, attaining a comfortable life and offering a higher education to their offspring (18). Boley is a "reservoir of black American cultural roots and history, filled with traditions including community-based education, sustainable agriculture, folk art, food, family reunions, religion, sororities and fraternities because African Americans are a land-based people (Smiley: 146). At the core of this reservoir of history is spirituality, a non-tangible space that affords them to "live through moments of struggle and moments of peace and ultimately acquire a better life, a life that is filled with a deeper knowledge of God" (Fredrick: 14).

"I live in Boley, America" also speaks to the history of this all-black town that is guided by a commitment to church within the various religions that have and continue to exist in Boley. Each religion offers a reminder of Boley's history; however, to live in Boley in the 21st century speaks to the spiritual commitment that most Boley residents have made to themselves and to each other. It is this spirituality that sustains this community and, according to most Boley residents, will bring Boley back to the "shining star" that Booker T. Washington spoke of at the turn of the 20th century (Boley Progress: 1904).

A deeper investigation of "I live in Boley, America" reveals that spirituality is central to understanding the above phrase spoken by most Boley residents because spirituality sustains them. For the African American Boley community members that I

came to know, spirituality motivates their social interactions and is directly connected to their reality. This reality limits and defines the issues they bring before God, the choices they make, and the ways in which they live out their spirituality. According to Marla Frederick, "religion and its constituent parts convey 'order' and the saliency of social institutions. Spirituality conveys creativity, the ability to invent, to interpret, to move beyond some of the limitations of ritual and static notions of religion (10)". Their understanding of spirituality is accompanied with the hurts and triumphs of Boley's history.

To understand this perspective of spirituality within the context of the above phrase, it is necessary to remember Boley's history, specifically the influence of slavery, autonomy, Jim Crow, religion/Christianity and how these histories and influences were endured and attained by black people. It must be said that this understanding of spirituality runs counter to the idea of spirituality held by most religious traditions. These religious traditions, which "rely on shared text, shared doctrine, and shared institutional protocol" (Frederick: 11) do not mirror the current understanding of spirituality from black Boley residents. In fact, the spirituality I witnessed while observing black Boley residents pushes against a "secular spirituality", a term coined by Robert Wuthnow. According to Wuthnow, "at one time, theologians argued that the chief purpose of humankind was to glorify God. Now it would seem that the logic has been revised: the chief purpose of God is to glorify humankind [therefore establishing a 'secular spirituality' because] spirituality no longer is true or good because it meets absolute standards of truth or goodness but because it helps us get along. We are the judge of its worth. If it helps us find a vacant parking space, we

know that our spirituality is on the right track. If it leads us into the wilderness, calling on us to face dangers we would rather not deal with, then it is a form of spirituality we are unlikely to choose" (47).

This is where my observation and Wuthnow's theory contradict each other because the spirituality I witnessed believes that God is to be honored by man; that it is mankind's responsibility however, spirituality for black Boley residents is informed by shared historical experiences, knowledge and how they survived those experiences. It is informed first by an individual's relationship with God – nurtured by religious doctrine, Holy Scriptures, pastors and other mediators of faith. It is further informed by historical traditions – learned understandings of what it means to serve God and survive Oklahoma hardships. Finally, spirituality is informed by social relations – family relationships and kinships that in the United States are inevitably raced, classed, and gendered. These three contributing elements form vast and complicated systems through which black Boley residents navigate their identity by honoring their country, honing their spirituality and overlooking the state that gave so much pain.

Collective histories include assumptions passed down about what it means to serve God, how one should behave, and what types of activities one should engage in as a believer. The history of the black church thus inevitably informs these black resident's understandings of what they should and should not do within and outside the public realm. These ideas establish guidelines for them to measure the successes, each person believing that their faith contributes to their understanding that they live in "Boley, America".

Boley, Oklahoma

Before presenting Boley's history, it is important to provide geographic and demographic information about this historical black town. Boley is a rural town, approximately ninety miles east of Oklahoma City. Agricultural fields and unused, barren land surround it. As demonstrated in *Acres if Aspiration: the All Black towns in Oklahoma* (Johnson: 2002), some believe that Boley was a social experiment or a bet "beginning modestly on 160 acres of land acquired by Abagail Barnett McCormick, the daughter of a Creek freedman" (81). Mr. W.H. Boley, a Forth Smith and Wetern Railroad Company leader wagered that Negros could prosper if given the opportunity; Mr. Lake Moore, an attorney, disagreed. The amount of the bet or if a bet really took place is unknown, but this story has been passed down since the late 1800's as the origin of Boley's.

Several manmade lakes and ponds are scattered within the town. Towns that border Boley are Clearview, IXL, Sand Creek, Paden and Castle; Boley is nestled in the eastern quadrant of Okfuskee County. The primary language spoken is English, although other languages and dialects are spoken such as Spanish, Creek and Ebonics or African American Vernacular English (AAVE) seasoned with an Oklahoma southern-drawl. For example, "ya'll" is frequently used in Boley however, their pitch and delivery is different than what one hears in most of Oklahoma, offering a sound that combines rural and urban cadences. It is common to hear "wha' chya'll doin'?", "where y'all goin'?", "wha' chya'll eatn'?" I will talk more about language in Boley, specifically my initial interactions with one Boley resident and how our first conversation developed into an enduring friendship.

Vehicles and walking are the primary sources of transportation in Boley. Several decades ago trollies, automobiles and trains frequently moved throughout Boley, serving as the primary modes of transportations. At the turn of the 20th century, the Boley train station made this all-black town different from other predominately African American towns in Oklahoma and throughout the United States because it was "backed up by the Fort Smith and Western Railroad Company" (Johnson: 81). The train station and trollies no longer exist, which encourages pedestrian and auto traffic. Young adults, teens and children are the primary walkers in Boley, favoring in particular the main street, Pecan Street, and Highway 62 Monday through Saturday. Those with cars and trucks sometimes provide rides to pedestrians on Sundays and church services such as revivals; funerals and other church related events because they believe in preserving their "Sunday best" attire.

Boley no longer has a grocery store, just a convenience store/gas station, hardware store where one can pay pay water bills, a post office, a funeral home and local restaurant for most purchases. Boley residents travel by car thirty miles east of Boley to the Okemah Wal-Mart or travel to a "mom-and-pop store" in Paden, fifteen minutes west. Residents that live on the out-skirts of Boley, such as Sand Creek and IXL, own or have access to trucks and pick-up trucks. Because Boley is a rural community, this form of transportation allows residents to haul hay, feed, and other farming supplies to maintain farms, horses and cattle. Individuals who do not farm, which is approximately forty percent of the population and consists largely of the elderly/retired community, relies heavily upon family and friends to provide transportation.

Boley is extremely welcoming to visitors. Most residents and business owners sit "on da' front porch" and wave as tourists and residents go by. The most common non-verbal greeting is a slow raise/lifting of the hand accompanied with a genuine smile.

Figure 1
Boley Town Marker
Photo by Suzette Chang

The Boley Rodeo, which began during the 1960's, attracts people from all over the country. Individuals attend and witness the rodeo, which offers a "bar-be-que" festival, parade and an abundance of food. Unfortunately, due to a dwindling and elderly population, the Boley Rodeo does not garner the number of attendees it once did. However the Annual Boley Rodeo still occurs and still attracts attention (Chang: 2008; Johnson: 2002; Shaw 2012). Although various racial and ethnic groups live in Boley, black people are the largest population.

Figure 2
2012 Boley Rodeo
Photo by Struggle and Hope
http://struggleandhope.com/stories/boley-reclaiming-the-crown-jewel/

Meanings

For purposes of this paper, the term black, Negro, colored and African American are interchangeable because each term is used by Boley residents, and each speaks to the different generations that live in Boley. Black, colored and Negro are commonly used by the elderly to honor a community of people that "forged in the face of the institutions of slavery, Jim Crow and other forms of state-sanctioned racism" (Williams 56), while African American is the labeled used by forty-and younger residents that choose to acknowledge their African ancestry and their nationality. There are various colors of black. From a soft caramel to almost black-in-color (so black they are called 'blue" or "blue-black"), Boley offers a diverse array of what is phenotypically referenced as black or African American. This variance of color reflects the influence of non-black/African American ancestry, specifically white and First American ancestry. In addition, blacks with wavy, curly or "good-hair" verify a history of race mixing. I am not clear if people subscribe to the "one-drop rule" or whether individuals seek community inclusion, but most residents identify as black or African American first, then list their ancestral lineage of white and/or First American. For

example, when asked “what is your race or ethnicity?” common responses are “I am black but my mother was part Indian and my daddy was part white” or “I am African American but my grandmother was part Creek”.

Figure 3
Various hues of “black” or “African American” in Boley.
Photo taken at the Boley Rodeo/Parade – 2015 by Suzette Chang

Most research participants who identify as African American referenced President Obama as a reason to claim this label, smiling proudly and brightly, implying a racial connection. This implication is puzzling because President Obama’s nationality is African American, meaning his mother is American and his father is African (Obama; 2006). This distinction offers a different historical reference and understanding of “skin-color” for the term African American; Mr. Obama did not experience slavery, Jim Crow and other social/economic tragedies of the United States. However, each experience describes a people that forged ahead during Jim Crow and slavery or, can reference this history (Odell: 2000; Robinson 2000; Washington 1901) that strongly connects to land and agriculture (Burton: 1999; Chang 2010; Du Bois: 1903; Smiley: 2007). These happenings also speak to a people that have strong ties to family and church (Brady: 1990; Frederick 2003). In addition, both terms speak to surviving

inhumanity (Johnson: 2002; Smiley: 2006; Tolson: 1966); and subjugation (Hill: 2008; Smiley: 2006, Tolson: 1966) in "Boley, America".

What this Research Does and Does Not Do

This examination does not claim that the above definitions speak for the identity of all black Boley residents. The varied understandings of identity are far more expansive than the scope of this research. For example, *Imagined Communities* (Anderson: 2006) explores subjective understandings of "nation, nationality, nationalism" within the context of historical definitions, social understandings and how these definitions and ideas link communities together. Although this investigation of a non-tangible community offers some insight on a concept of nationality, Anderson identifies various communities that embrace these terms, offering comperatives and contrasts. Although methodical in approach, these understandings do not mirror my investigstion of Boley because communities are connected by an understand while black Boley residents choose understandings. Another investigation of identity *The Vezo Are Not a Kind of People: Identity, Difference and Ethnicity Among A Fishing People in Western Madagascar* (Astuti: 1995) contributes to the discussion of self-identity, allowing the Vezo community to define how they self-identify, furthering the discussion of agency. Like Anderson's examination, this too is a powerful investigation of identity that gives specific focus to "performance" yet claiming the label of "I live in Boley, America" speaks to a collective process that involes spirituality, history and family; this combined process is not applicable to the Vezo people. A different analysis of identity is *Falling into the Lesbi World: Desire and*

*Difference in Indonesia (*Blackwood: 2010) which pushes against the traditional understanding of "lesbian" and attempts to untangle an identity for gendered women in Pandang. This compelling research presents the childhood/tween experiences of Indonesian women and links these encounters to the progression of being "lesbi"; an identity that is specific to these women. Blackwood's transparent investigation is engaging however, it suggests an unconscious choice, as if this community of females "fell" into this lifestyle or did not make these very specific and defined gender selections. Another discussion of identity is *Ethnicity, Inc. (*Comaroff: 2009)which explores the commodification of ethnicity, tracing historical and contemporary identities to analyze the process of "copyright" or "patent" of an identity for the purpose of social/political/economic gain. This perspective of identity offers an extreme contradiction to the people in Boley that I spoke with. While Comaroff theorizes an aspect of capitalism within the reality of "creating and owning ethnicity", this perspective is not applicableto black Boley residents. In addition to *Ethnicity,Inc.*, is the examination and process of *Legalizing Identities: Becoming Black or Indian in Brazil's Northeast (*French: 2009) which investigates their politics of identity and is connected to land, history and money. This research is simialiar to the meaning of identity for the African American Boley community that I spoke with, specifically this influence of land and history but black Boley residents, nor the State of Oklahoma for that matter, do not seek to "legalize" themselves in the same manner as these Brazilian communities. Lastly, pushing aagingst the traditional understanding of Cherokee, *Becoming Indian: the Struggle over Cherokee Identity in the 21st Century* (Sturm: 2011) speaks to the "elephant in the room" and explores how various racial and ethnic groups

within Oklahoma and the United States claim and justify a "Cherokee identity". Sturm's exploration of the various meanings of "Cherokee" digs to the core of what it means, how it is developed and who creates it but by-passes black Cherokees experiences, specifically how this racial classification removed black Cherokees from this tribe. Shortly after publishing this book, I spoke with Sturm about this detour. She spoke vividly about the politics and pending legalities regarding the black Cherokee community and expressed her disappointment and sadness yet she and non-members of this tribe cannot amend this choice because the Cherokee nation is soverign. With that said, this investigation of black Boley residents garners from these examinations listed above of identity and interjects a perspective that speaks to an identity for African American Boley residents. This identity incorporates their past and present, and contributes to the growing and rich understanding of 21st century African American identity (Dollard: 1937; Hughes, Kiecolt, Keith and Demo 2015; Jackson: 2005; Obama 1995).

Methodology

To flesh-out a contemporary understanding of identity for black Boley residents, I gleaned from literature about Boley and attained knowledge from research participants. According to William E. Bittle and Gilbert Geis, the Negro experienced a painful adjustment transitioning from slavery to "second-class citizenship in the United States following the Reconstruction period" (1964). *The Longest Way Home: Chief Alfred C. Sam's Back-to-Africa Movement* documents an early twentieth-century effort to establish an all-Negro community allowing residents geographic and psychological distance from Oklahoma white settlers. Initially, these communities/all-black towns

thrived but after Oklahoma attained statehood in 1907, these black towns were challenged politically, compromising and ultimately temporarily terminating the rights of black voters for several decades. *The Color of Land: Race, Nation and the Politics of Landownership in Oklahoma, 1832-1929 (*Chang: 2010) claims that "Oklahoma is really exceptional only because it encapsulates so much American history within its border, revealing much about how the struggle over land has given shape to the ways Americans – indigenous, black and white – created and gave meaning to races and nations [because Oklahoma is referenced as] 'white man's country', the Black belt' and 'an Indian homeland" (4). *Journey Toward Hope: A History of Blacks in Oklahoma* (Franklin: 1971) suggests "life in black Boley and in similar Oklahoma towns did not offer total seclusion from mainstream society nor a solution to race problems. Political, economic and cultural developments led to contact between blacks and whites. The advantages of self-government, freedom of movement and association, distance from white racist and a feeling of strength in numbers commended Boley and other all-black towns to those who desired isolation; but these communities never really escaped dependence upon an economic society controlled essentially by whites (18). Pushing against this contention, I read an advertisement encouraging blacks to move to Boley during the turn of the 20th century claiming that Boley offers:

> "great opportunities for colored people where their children can educate and find an opening to execute the same. Men and women of every profession and still there is room for more. There are the bright prospects for farmers. There are twenty purchased by Negroes. Now is the time for you to come before speculators flood the world, that the Negro is a law-making and law-

abiding citizen, and help solve the great racial problem that is now before us" (Johnson: 81).

Boley: Oklahoma's Famous Black Town (Shaw 2012) argues that a "black ideology [is the cause] for Boley's success" (18), specifically that emancipation from slavery was not enough and, a desire to attain a prosperous and comfortable life. This was attainable through education and entrepreneurial opportunities. A small list of Boley business owners includes Hilliard Taylor (a successful cotton merchant); D.J. Turner, owner of a pharmaceutical store; W.C. Owens, a Boley booster; W.M. Blesoe a grocery store owner; and Bennie Dolphin, a black female and a successful accountant. In response to the political isolation imposed upon black Boley residents from whites, *Black History in Oklahoma* (Teal 1971) documents how Boley developed its' own newspaper, the **Boley Progress**. This daily periodical "was involved in the struggle, their editors were blunt, outspoken and told the truth as they saw it, without regard to possible consequences" (172). After several decades of holding Okfuskee County and the State of Oklahoma accountable for their inhumane treatment of blacks and denying African Americans the right to vote, on "October 28, 1926, Federal Judge Kennamer granted a permanent injunction restraining any person from interfering with the registration and voting of persons legally entitled to the right in Okfuskee County, and issuing an order that all such persons be granted immediate facilities for registration" (222). *The Black Oklahomans* (Tolson 1972) elaborates upon the idea that Oklahoma was slated to be a black state. This idea was executed by African Americans until the early 1900's and stopped by white Oklahoma legislature who found this plan "amusing".

> "by August 1, 1879, over 7,000 needy blacks have arrived in Kansas, inspired by circulars that described the great opportunities there. However, the exodus to Kansas died out following the severe winter of 1879-1880, which proved to be a nightmare for many blacks, who were thereafter left destitute, lacking food, clothing and shelter in order to survive in Kansas. Having failed in Kansas, black separatist began to look in other directions, particularly toward the Twin Territories or Oklahoma, for a suitable area or region in which to realize their long-delayed objective of establishing within the United States a state owned and governed by blacks" (73).

In addition to this literature, thirty (30) African American men and women participated in this investigation. These individuals represent a small number of black Boley residents, range in age from 18 - 93 and represent two (2) economic backgrounds. Some are working-poverty, meaning their annual incomes are less than $24,000.00 (2012: Oklahoma Policy Institute) per year while other participants earn over $80,000.00 per year (Chang 2014). I also attained over thirty hours of observations and field notes from black Boley residents. They wanted to talk, so I listened and recorded. Boley is also home for several white, First Americans and Latino communities; however, the prominent group in Boley are African Americans. I use pseudonyms to protect the identity of research participants, excluding Mr. James Shaw; he asked that his name be included in this research.

The methodology for this research involves collecting qualitative and quantitative data. Techniques to support this methodology include developing a rapport; collecting statistical data about Boley's shifting and declining population

during the past several decades and the number of church attendees, specifically the number of church visits and church event participation. I also gather interviews, snowball and conduct participant observations. These techniques are more appropriate due to the subjectivity involved regarding the topic of identity. In addition, I obtained information about Boley from the Oklahoma Historical Society, Inter-Library-Loans from the University of Oklahoma and the Metropolitan Library System, the United States Census and the Oklahoma census. This method provides a broad coverage of Boley's history and present day status.

I also developed a rapport with the previous Mayor of Boley with the intention of developing a long-commitment with her. This relationship became reciprocal, based on a mutual trust and understanding. During my eight years of research, the citizens of Boley appointed a new mayor and I developed a good working relationship with her as well. Fostering a relationship and developing dialog in person and by phone with both mayors allowed me to continue gathering interviews, networking with social leaders, residents and political leaders. Overall, my fieldwork in Boley was a wonderful and educational experience.

During the one-on-one interviews, I asked questions and listened. Interviews began informally with opportunistic questions. My initial questions were passive, allowing opportunities for the interview to shape. These questions transformed into conversations, providing an understanding of daily life and offering different interpretations and context. Because I searched for participant understandings of events and actions, I listened to conversations and slotted germane questions that addressed research questions. This allowed opportunities for gradual and subtle conversations

around specific topics. Therefore, as themes emerge, questions became more direct and focused. I also took pictures and wrote notes during interviews and events.

Several African American Boley community members refused to participate in this research. Their reasons include lack of interest, distrust in academic research, and insufficient time to participate. Considering these factors and perspectives, I made the choice to trust and respect the information provided to me.

To those individuals that participated in this research, I am confident that not all information given to me is perfectly true. I believe this is due to the non-verbal and verbal communication from research participants. Some research participants winked at me during certain parts of their interview while others gave comical or blank stares followed by laughs. A commonality is age; each was over the age of sixty-five and have the gift of storytelling. According to Mieka Polanco and William McAuley, seniors like to "stretch-the-truth" because older-folks enjoy telling stories (Polanco 2014; McAuley, William 1997). I was quickly reminded that embellishing for dramatic effect is an important part of their performances because this is not just oral history; this research looks at how black Boley residents choose to construct their sense of history on there own terms which in turn impacts how they construct their collective identity. Therefore, I took the responsibility to untangle the content of their interviews, separating truth from embellishment which afforded me the wonderful opportunity to appreciate their "stretching of the truth" as part of a creative process that we [the participants and I] engaged in.

During the initial stage of my field research, I experienced an embarrassing moment. I am a forty-seven year old African American woman, raised in the "black church" (information about the "black church" is addressed in Chapter Two) and attended predominately white schools in Northern California. I have engaged, communicated and interacted with many blacks from around the world. Sharing my age and color/race is significant because both acknowledge a generational, racial and cultural understanding among most black people. Many African Americans over the age of forty, regardless of geographic location, gender, dialect, class, socio-economic status or any other demographic influence greet each other. Exercising good manners/politeness is a necessity within the African American culture (McAdoo: 1981; Smiley: 2006) and I discuss manners in Chapter Two. Greeting each other typically begins with eye contact for approximately two-three seconds. This time period appears to be longer than when communicating with non-blacks, which suggests that blacks greet each other with a gaze. If eye contact last longer, African Americans smile at each other followed by verbal greetings and typically, smiles result in conversations. The discussion may develop into a networking opportunity; an opening to learn from each other, a chance to enjoy a home-cooked meal or, it can be the opportunity to share experiences linked to racism in America (Delgado and Stefancic eds.,: 1997). Whatever the conversation leads to, most African Americans are excited to meet a new black person. My visits to Boley mirror these non-verbal and verbal experiences because several Boley residents expressed a genuine interest in my research; however, my first visit to Boley was embarrassing.

My first Boley interview happened in 2008 at the Boley Community Center. Most buildings in this rural community are not labeled and do not have a visible address. I made eye contact with an older man and after our verbal greeting, I asked for directions. He paused, with tears of laughter in his eyes. He said "you ain't from around her' are ya?" Before I could say "no" he said, "You sound like a white girl" and continued to laugh at me in a teasing, affection and friendly way. Embarrassment covered my face as he laughed for a few more seconds. He immediately apologized while continuing is laughter. From that day forward, he became a valuable informant and a wonderful friend. In addition, he was the first African American Boley resident that claims "Boley, America" as his home.

Chapter 2: Questions and Black Townships in Oklahoma

African Slavery in the United States

To understand black identity in Boley, it is necessary to address slavery in the United States and in Oklahoma. Most historians of slavery in the antebellum south emphasize the gradual yet complex evolution of slavery. "Slavery was an financial asset at its earliest forms during the colonial period until the middle 19th century. The first Africans brought to the North American English colonies arrived in James Town, Virginia on a Dutch ship in 1619" (Mannix and Cowley: 14). There is some debate of the status of these first arrivals. It is not clear if the first Africans were slaves or bondservants. The importance of this statement lies in the fact that slavery had not yet received legal recognition in the colonies yet early records of this period refer to Africans as servants and bond servants (Aptheker: 1963; Bancroft: 1931). Early colonies exploited unpaid labor wherever they could find it, whether that was among First Americans, destitute whites or captures Africans (Teal: 1971). At this time, bondage was not yet synonymous with blackness nor a permanent condition however, during the next few decades, that quickly changed. By the turn of the 19th century, blackness was identical to slavery. Other historians believe Africans were indentured servants and this term offers ambiguity because bondage was common for whites brought to the colonies as debtors and convicts (Jacobs:2000; Matory: 2005). Historical records show that the status of blacks during the turn of the 17th century was similar to that of white indentures servants yet somewhere during the 18th century, Africans were deemed as "less-than-human" having fewer rights and lesser legal status as white indentured servants (Teal: 1971; Tolson: 1966). Slavery was a basic yet

complex institution, offering whites the opportunity to be financially secure from the free labor offered by black slaves while dehumanizing Africans and using Christianity to support this animal perspective. While Karenga (2002) maintains that African slavery in America was "the holocaust of enslavement [claiming that] black slaves experienced moral monstrousness and destruction of human life" (134), this research pushes against the usage of the word holocaust because this word is permanently tied to inhumane experiences of Jews. However, Karenga's contention that Africans endured inhumanity and immorality as slaves offers a broad yet necessary explanation to black slavery in the United States. *Slaves Without Master: The Free Negro in the Antebellum South* (Berlin 1974) recreates the history and culture of free southern blacks before the Civil War giving specific attention to a meaning of freedom for African Americans primarily due to their unplanned transition from slave to freed-man. Berlin argues that the antebellum south was not monolithic in its' attitudes towards slavery, suggesting that whites were divided on what to do with the new position of African Americans. Although it is argued that Oklahoma is not part of the "deep south" or "Old South" and did not experience slavery, the question of freedom for blacks surfaced and Oklahomans did not know what to do or how to define freedom for blacks. This was a pressing issue as more and more African Americans sought to make Oklahoma their home.

One Boley interviewee shared his ancestral knowledge of slavery. At the time of this interview, Mr. Jacobs was ninety-three years old. He was a dark skinned man that lived alone. He allowed me to interview him at his home in 2008. Photos of family and

friends covered his walls. Mr. Jacobs also used the term "Boley, America". He died four years ago.

> "My father's mother was name Sylvia. She was a young woman with one child living in Alabama when she with a bunch of slaves, was put upon the auction block to a slave dealer. Sylvia, with Abe Redford and his young wife, Elizabeth, were all sold to the same dealer, who was bringing slaves to the Indian territory and selling them to wealthy Indians. Sylvia's mother was there and was crying but it did no good, there just chattels and were sold, regardless of what any of the relatives did or said. Whether that relative was husband, wife, mother or child, it did matter to the dealers, if they did not happen to want them all, they did not mind separating families. Sylvia was permitted to keep her little boy but that was the last she saw of her mother. Because very few, if any of the slaves, knew how to write letters and they just didn't know how to write. A few of them might have known how to write but they wouldn't have known what to do with a letter after they would write it, even if they had been permitted to do so. It simply was not done by slaves in those days".

Mr. Jacobs then spoke of his childhood. He talked about growing up in Boley and that getting a good education was important.

> "We had to go to school. We had to learn our lesson and we had to do well. If we did not, we got a beaten' from our parents. And if the neighbors found out, we got a beaten' from them too".

Another black Boley resident, Mr. Folks, talked about slavery. Mr. Folks, a ninety-year old Boley resident, also shared stories given to him. He said that during his childhood his grandmother gave this story to him. He is very thankful that he still remembers everything his grandmother told him.

> "The dealers tied the slaves together and drove them along the road just like cattle. The white man that bought my great-great-grandmo' rode in what the Negroes called a 'Chariot." I guess it was just a fine carriage. The white man had a fine team and it was driven by a Negro slave. They rode alongside the walking slaves. My great-great-grandmo was a part of them walking slaves. Them white men had whips, and flicked any who lagged along. My great-great-grandmo told the story that they [white folks] were cruel to them. The weather was cold and she did not have much clothing on. In fact, most slaves did not have much clothing on. Some slaves had broken shoes".

Slavery and Oklahoma

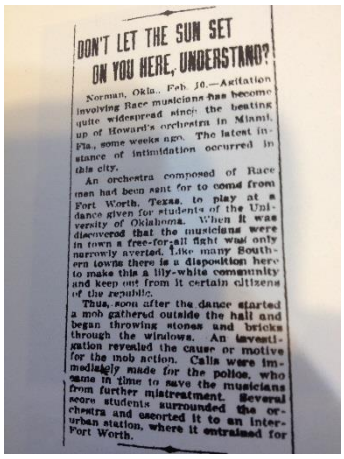
The 19th century served as a significant time in the development of Oklahoma. In 1830, Congress passed the Indian Removal Act (Chang 2010). This forced Eastern Woodlands Indian tribes to leave their homelands and move to Indian Territory, which is now the state of Oklahoma. By 1840, nearly 100,000 Indians were evicted and forced to move to Oklahoma (Tolson;1966). During this journey close to 15,000 died of disease, exposure to elements or malnutrition along the journey. This event became known as the "Trail of Tears" and many African Americans accompanied First Americans during this process (Chang: 2010; Franks 1994). *Journey Toward Hope* (Franklin 1982) offers a collective and historical perspective of the relationship between African Americans and First Americans during the 1800's, contending that "historians face immense difficultly in generalizing about the nature of slavery in Indian Territory. Some of them accept the view that the institution never existed in the form characterstic of the Old South, that it was essentially tempered with tolerance. It is generally agreed that the Creeks and Seminoles displayed much more liberality in the treatment of their slaves than did the Choctaws, the Chickasaws, or the Cherokees, who adopted many features of southern slavery" (4). The Seminole Nation is less than 30 (thirty) minutes south of Boley and many African American Boley residents claim ancestry to the Seminole Tribe. According to Kevin Mulroy,

> "the relationship between Seminole members and African slaves offered a different experience compared to other Indian tribes. Most Seminole slaves enjoyed a gred deal of idepedenced and autonomy. Four reasons best explain this. First of all, the ethnohistorical

experiences of the Seminoles, which larely determined the course of their relations with the maroons, was fundamentally different from that of the other slaveholding tribes. Long after Removal, they held fast to there indigenouse beliefs and practices. The Seminoles had the lowest rate of white intermarriage and were the least acculturated of the Five Tribes. During the antebellum period, as Native customs went tinto decline due to both internal and external pressures, slaveholding elites composed of weathly intermarried whites and their mixed-race offspring emerged among the Cherokees, Creeks, Choctaws and Chickasaws. Those elites assumed positions of economic, social, political and cultural leadership and came to direct tribal policy regarding Indian-black relations. That highly acculturated plantacracy instigated the adoption of capitalist economies, democratic elections, constitutional governments, Christianity, school-based education, written laws and law enforcement agencies, institutionalized slavery, and severe black codes.[1] In contrast, the Seminoles experienced few of those changes. They remained a nation of subsistence farmers and hunters maintaining a southeastern indigenous culture governed by hereditary chiefs. Typically, Seminole slave owners were traditionalists who adhered to aboriginal notions of servitude. As a whole, Seminoles showed little

[1] Black Codes were laws developed and maintained by Southern States during the 1800's. These laws restricted African Americans from the freedoms experienced by whites, forcing blacks to work in a labor economy based on low wages or debt. Black Codes were part of a larger pattern of Southern whites trying to suppress the new freedom of emancipated African American slaves.

interest in plantations, manufacturing, or other capitalist ventures and did not develop commercial agricultural enterprises after removal (86-87).



DON'T LET THE SUN SET ON YOU HERE, UNDERSTAND?

Norman, Okla., Feb. 10.—Agitation involving Race musicians has become quite widespread since the beating up of Howard's orchestra in Miami, Fla., some weeks ago. The latest instance of intimidation occurred in this city.

An orchestra composed of Race men had been sent for to come from Fort Worth, Texas, to play at a dance given for students of the University of Oklahoma. When it was discovered that the musicians were in town a free-for-all fight was only narrowly averted. Like many Southern towns there is a disposition here to make this a lily-white community and keep out from it certain citizens of the republic.

Thus, soon after the dance started a mob gathered outside the hall and began throwing stones and bricks through the windows. An investigation revealed the cause or motive for the mob action. Calls were immediately made for the police, who came in time to save the musicians from further mistreatment. Several score students surrounded the orchestra and escorted it to an interurban station, where it entrained for Fort Worth.

Figure 4.
Example of Black Codes in Norman, Oklahoma
Photo courtesy of James Lowen (Sundown Towns: 2005: 282)

David Chang, author of *The Color of the Land: Race, Nation and the Politics of Landownership in Oklahoma, 1832-1929,* claims that "Oklahoma is America [because of the] available land and people that sought claim to it. Oklahoma is really exceptional only because it encapsulates so much American history within its borders, revealing much about the struggle over land has given shape to the way Americans – indigenous, black, and white – created and gave meaning to races and nations" (1). However, African American immigration into Indian Territory opened a rift between black settlers and Indian Territory Freedmen.

Prior to Oklahoma's statehood, newcomers did not have citizenship rights in Indian nations. African Americans had limited rights, forcing them to work for First Americans, be slaves to Native Americans or squat on the land (Johnson 2012). Working for Native Americans or being a slave was not a problem for most African

Americans. Several First American tribes treated their black workers or African American slaves as family. Many tribal members married and produced offspring with blacks. This alliance and family relationships infuriated many white Oklahomans (Chang 2010: Johnson: 2002; Shaw:2012).

For those African Americans that chose not to squat, serve as slaves or work for First American tribes, there was the growing option of living in an all-black town. Although most blacks attained the impression that Oklahoma would be an all-black state, African Americans had to accept a terrible truth. "The terrible truth is that by the beginning of the Civil War the status of free black persons had deteriorated to the point that they were pariahs of the land, unwanted, virtually helpless, and with no substantial basis for relief or redress of grievances under the constitution" (Franklin: 1982:22). In addition, African Americans knew that manumission was insufficient and wanted to be self-sufficient.

According to Hannibal Johnson, "when blacks were asked if they preferred to live scattered among whites or in separate enclaves, twenty black leaders responded emphatically that, in light of chronic racial prejudice, [African Americans] preferred to live in separate communities" (44). This is because blacks wanted quality education, the right to exercise their right to vote and the financial responsibility to sustain themselves. Land ownership became the top priority (Chang 2010) and initially, the United States government rejected this request claiming that only freed tribal slaves had land rights. This was an inevitable blow for African Americans seeking autonomy.

The United States House of Representatives entertained bids by Radical Republicans like Charles Sumner, Thaddeus Stevens, and George W. Julian to

confiscate land from southern Oklahomans and distribute to newly freed blacks (Johnson: 2002). But, it was argued by lawmakers that the failure to grant land to freed slaves would result "in a permanent underclass of oppressed, exploited, and powerless black servants in a feudal-like agrarian system" (Chang: 2010:53). Later another financial opportunity presented itself from another government initiative, meaning the Freedmen's Savings and Trust Company, also known as the Freedmen's Bank of 1865 which was designed to assist freedmen in their transition from slavery to freedom, providing African Americans the opportunity to own land. Unfortunately, due to poor management, the bank foreclosed and Oklahoma African Americans were faced with another temporary but devastating set-back to becoming self-sufficient.

While the United States government offered blacks flopped-opportunities, First American tribes sought ways to assist blacks. Again, the alliance between African Americans and Oklahoma Native American tribes made the U.S. government uncomfortable. The government "voiced concern about tribes pledging to extend tribal rights to the freedmen, so the government contemplated the creation of an all-black zone or colony in central Oklahoma" (Shaw: 52). Although this idea remained a thought for several decades, First American tribes continued to be an alliance to Oklahoma blacks.

The Oklahoma legislature fought the idea of turning Oklahoma into an all-black state. Legislator J.W. Swartz spoke of the endangerment of Oklahoma's statehood due to the pressing views of black Oklahomans. [He wanted] to rid separate and equal accommodations in the state. After tabling the measure and selecting a special committee to address the issue, Oklahoma lawyers advised that upholding "separate but

equal" would jeopardize statehood which in turn would limit, if not terminate, financial support. Among Swartz's claim of Oklahoma statehood is the statement from Legislator Hill "provoking laughter after the reading of the special committee report [to make Oklahoma a black state] had been concluded by offering a motion to refer the matter to Booker T. Washington." – Boley Progress - Feb. 27, 1907. This statement by Legislator Hill is a small example of the contention and smoldering outrage white Oklahomans had regarding blacks desire to make Oklahoma an all-black state and after much frustration about this reality, African Americans began the process of developing all-black towns because it was the national trend of legalized segregation and racial restrictions that aided in reinforcing attitudes that led, in 1907, to a Jim Crow system in Oklahoma (Johnson 1971).

Boley as a Black Township in Oklahoma

During the time of Reconstruction, most African Americans lived in what is now the eastern part of the state of Oklahoma (Chang 2014;Johnson 2002; Shaw 2012). A majority of black towns were developed in this area during the late 1800's (Franklin: 1982; Teal: 1971). Only a few of the state's twenty-seven black towns existed in the western portion. Several theories contend that eastern Oklahoma offered less complications for blacks (Lowen: 2005; Polanco: 2014) while others suggest practical reasons, meaning blacks could support and protect each other when all-black towns are geographically closer to each other (Bittle and Geis: 1964;Stein and Hill: 1993;).

Figure 5

Oklahoma All-Black towns include: Liberty, Langston, Ferguson, Lincoln, Cimarron, Emanuel, Udora, Pleasant Valley, Zion, Wellston Coly, Iconium, Douglas, Chilesville, Boley, IXL, Clearview, Bookertee, Grayson, Lee, Yahola, Redbird, Tullahasee, Rentie, Sanders, Brushy Creek, Gibson Station, Wybark, Clarksville, Taft, Melvin, Summitt, Mabelle, Chase, Rentisville, Melvin, Summitt, Mabell, Foreman, Huttonville, Lewisville, Vernon, Carson, Lima, Macedonia, Boggy Bend, Bluff, Oberlin, Wiley, Douglas, Homer, Sweet Home, Tatums, Bailey, Jerusalem.
Photo Courtesy of Oklahoma Historical Society

An objective for these towns resembles that of similar all-black towns founded in other sections of the United States. African Americans were tired of passively or violently responding to racism (Franklin 1982; Lowen: 2005; Marable; 1991) and having their own land, town, businesses and community allowed them to live without harm or danger, or so they thought. In addition, all-black towns served as a manifestation of their slave ancestors hopes and dreams (Johnson 2012).

According to James Lowen "black towns emulated white towns" (82). Black town development was marked by a sense of self-respect and completion. In essence, African Americans wanted to outdo white towns. In addition, they hoped to provide employment and political opportunities not available elsewhere. With this in mind, black towns operated their own post offices and hired African Americans as Post Masters. This choice infuriated President Woodrow Wilson and many other white government officials because Wilson "sought opportunities to shut blacks out of work" (Johnson: 49). In addition, black towns ran their own precincts allowing African Americans to vote (Teal: 1971).

Black town development began during an opportunistic and dangerous time in American history. The growth of black towns transitioned into a social and economic movement (Teal 1971). For Boley, a promoter named Thomas Haynes sought opportunities to sell land to African Americans, while building relationships with white Texas businessmen (Bittle, William and Gilbert L. Geis: 1957). Haynes was successful, with the assistance of James Barnett and W.H. Boley (a railroad official) (Johnson 2002; Shaw 2012). Having a railroad was a symbol of affluence and town-validation. After attaining a railroad, townspeople gave the town of Boley its' name due to this railroad official.

To stop the black town movement, according to Chafe, "county and state legislators were manipulative and conducted redistricting tactics and suffrage restrictions –ranging from literacy tests and property clauses, to requiring applications to memorize and recite selections of the United States Constitution – all with the goal of preventing African Americans from voting and owning land" (34). However, this did not stop the new community of Boley and other Oklahoma all-black towns as African Americans were committed to investing in each other and their all-black towns. According to Johnson, "by 1908, Boley had 2,500 residents, a post office, a rail road, two banks, two cotton gins, a newspaper, a hotel, and a college, the Creek Seminole College and Agriculture Institute"(52). Boley competed with Okemah, Weleetka, and Henryetta, nearby white-majority towns, for economic and political influence in the area (Bittle and Geis: 1964: Lowen and Sallis: 1980). Although black towns served as an opportunity for African Americans to have autonomy and be self-sufficient, black town residents were not removed from the growing influence of racism. Gradually

Boley's residents realized they would not have a real chance at social, economic, or political rights (within the county and state), owing to forces outside their town and beyond their control. This reality challenged black Boley residents to manage and control what they were responsible for, meaning Boley land, Boley economy, Boley education, Boley politics and Boley pride. Unfortunately, making the choice to maintain Boley did not stop neighboring towns from conducting illegal acts against Boley residents.

Boley is located in Okfuskee County. Okemah, the county seat, was founded as a sundown town, "a town that is an organized jurisdiction that for decades kept African Americans or other groups from living in it and was thus 'all-white' on purpose" (Lowen: 2005: 4). The actions taken to ensure that a town remained all white is wide and hanious, including lynching, killing and destroying the property of blacks. As blacks moved from the south to Okemah (because Boley was being developed), violence often irrupted. For example, during "January 1907, whites dynamited the homes of the only two black families in Okemah. Later that year, Okemah businessmen leased a building and set up a hotel for African Americans who traded with the local merchants or had to attend court and could not get back to Boley by sundown. By April 1908, this hotel was profitable and doing well. However, this ended when other whites placed a heavy charge of dynamite under the front wall of the hotel. The building was badly damaged" (Shaw:56). This unfortunate event brought a quick end to the African American population in Okemah. According to an interview provided by Ms. Williams,

> "the Democrats of that time eliminated Boley as a voting precinct and forced people to vote in a smaller town about 12 miles away. I wasn't alive at that time but my momma told me she could not vote in Okemah no more. My momma told me that black folks from all over Boley went to Okemah, complainin' to white folks. They said they had a right to vote. My momma said they took [accepted completed voting ballots from African Americans] their votes but she believed that they did not turn those votes in".

During the early 1900's, Democrats amended the Oklahoma constitution with the "grandfather clause" (Franklin: 1980: 22; Rapport: 1981;Schmidt 1982) . This clause set up literacy requirements to keep African Americans from voting: whites were exempt so long as their ancestors could vote in 1861. Blacks' grandfathers, which were slaves, could not vote, so the combination of granting votes to white Americans and the grandfather clause took away the ballot from African Americans. However, black Boley residents continued their commitment to be self-sufficient, vote and run their own affairs in their own town. Several historians contend that Boley is the product of a general agreement opportunity between the president of the Fort Smith & Western Railroad, two white men that urged the town's establishment and recommended that it take its name in honor of W.H. Boley, who believed in the ability of black people (Franklin 1982; Johnson 2002; Shaw 2012; Washington 1908). According to historian John Hope Franklin, all-black towns had,

> "a special meaning for those who settled and lived in them, but the little community of Boley has become the most celebrated. A popular belief prevails that Boley began as an experiment that spouted from two opposing views of [African Americans]: one view posited the notion of {African Americans having the] inability to govern themselves and to make social progress; the other held that only the lack of opportunity and encouragement hampered {African American} development" (Franklin 17).

"Boley began on 160 acres of land acquired from Abagail Barnett McCormick. As the daughter of a Creek freedman, James Barnett, Abagail received the land via government allotment. Mr. Barnett, acting as his daughter's guardian, obtained permission to sell the land" (Johnson: 2002: 81). Although life in Boley was compromised due to racism and inhumane acts, Mr. Thomas Haynes – Boley's first mayor and chief promoter – worked diligently to bring more blacks to Boley. The continuous migration of African Americans to Boley, in addition to the progress made, attracted star attention.

On September 22, 1904, Booker T. Washington visited Boley. This day was the formal opening and celebration of Boley and during Washington's speech, he referred to Boley as the "new Midwestern mecca that is most enterprising, and in many ways the most interesting of the Negro towns in the United States" (Tolson: 56). Mr. Washington also said,

> "Boley, like the other Negro towns that sprung up in other parts of the country, represents a dawning race consciousness, a wholesome desire to do something to make the race respected; something which shall demonstrate the right of the Negro, not merely as an individual but as a race, to have a worthy and permanent place in the civilization that the American people are creating. In short, Boley is another chapter in the long struggle of the Negro for moral, industrial and political freedom" Boley Press 1904.

Several years after Mr. Washington's visit and speech in Boley, Okemah residents lynched a mother and son who lived in on the outskirts of Boley in 1911. This inhumane yet bold statement confirmed that living in a black town did not always provide a safe harbor from white vigilante justice. Racism, lynching and "a decline in cotton prices contributed to Boley's initial decline in population. [In addition], blacks had a lack of respect for whites and this continued as [Boley's] economy and population began to dwindle. However, as Oklahoma and the rest of the United States approached the Great Depression, black Boley residents found opportunities to build their community.

Figure 6
Lynched mother from the outskirts of Boley, Oklahoma
Courtesy of Oklahoma Historical Society

At the turn of the 20th century, Boley had over 7,000 citizens and became the largest African American town in America (Johnson 2002; Teal 1971). According to Hannibal Johnson, "by 1912, this bustling town was home to over fifty-four business establishments including grocery stores, hotels, restaurants, cotton gins, drug stores, insurance agencies, photography businesses, lumberyards, doctor's offices, a water plant and an ice plant "(Johnson 82). Boley was a self-sufficient and self-contained town due to the collective efforts of primarily African American townspeople; they made Boley a town to be reckoned with. At that time, no other African American town had resources, organization and independence like Boley (Teal 1971; Shaw 2012; Vidich and Bensman 1968). It rivaled all other African American towns and in some cases, Boley was more progressive than several white Oklahoma towns, with its advanced education system, social arenas, political affluence and independence (Johnson 2002).

Like the rest of Oklahoma, Boley weathered the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl. The production and selling of cotton was a financial staple for Boley. According to Hannibal Johnson "after World War I, cotton ceased to be king. Efforts to find a successor to the cash-crop throne failed. Alternatives such as peanuts proved to be a woefully inadequate substitute, causing farmers to struggle financially and ultimately go farther west to sustain themselves and their families" (Johnson 86). In 1946, Boley's population declined significantly compared to previous decades (Shaw 44). However, Boley gained national attention due to visits from comedians Flip Wilson and Red Foxx. These famous individuals brought much needed attention to the town, helping the attendance of the Boley Rodeo to grow by thousands every year (Johnson 2002).

One of the most emotional and challenging interviews for me was from Mr. Johnson. He was Boley's only mortician and maintained a funeral home for several decades. Mr. Johnson is now deceased but before his death, Mr. Johnson spoke in great detail about his experiences as a black, male growing up in Okfuskee County. These are his words.

> "Growing up in Boley was good back in the day. All you could need or want was right here in this town. But ya know', being young and black and male and stupid, we would get bored. Me and my friends, we were about 20-something and we got tired of church and work and school and seeing/doing the same thing every day. Our parents warned us about leaving Boley and this was around the 50's and 60's. So sometimes we would sneak out of town at night. Ya' know, just to hang out and see what was out there. Most times we did not have problems. We would go to Okemah, get some alcohol and come back to Boley. But after a while, the county and state police was watching us. And we realized that we were causing more problems for ourselves just because we were bored. [He began to weep and laugh at the same time due to his experiences of being black, male and living in Okfuskee County]. You know I know people that have been lynched. People thinking lynching is done but it still goes on, people just don't talk about it. I am kin to that black woman they lynched here in Oklahoma. When people outside of town asked us where we were from, we told them we weren't from Okfuskee County, we were from Ok-Fuck-Me County".

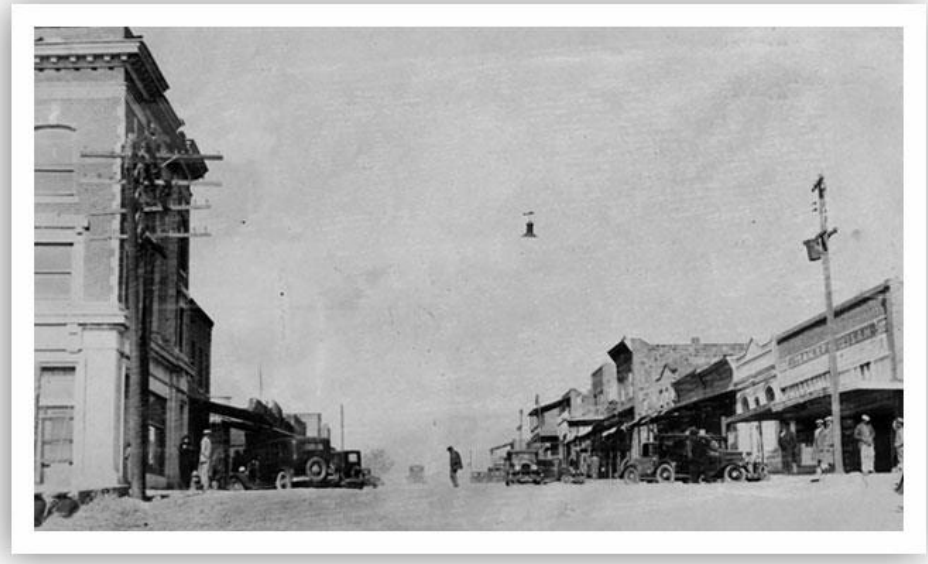


Figure 7
Main Street Boley – 1922
Photo courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society

In 2005, a vacant building became Boley's History Center and the town historian, Mrs. Jasmine Jefferies, provides group and individual tours. I took a tour to view Boley's historical items and documents. As we concluded the tour of the two-story history center, Mrs. Jefferies guided me to the front of the building and pointed toward Pecan Street. She identified several Boley landmarks specifically a bank, the previous location for Boley's post office and buildings that once housed their elementary, junior high and high school students. Boley's school system is now closed and reasons for its closing include lack of student enrollment and funding. Most buildings are vacant and in much need of refurbishment.

For the past two years, Boley's mayor and Young City Council, which consists of Boley residents between the age of 18 and 25, meet monthly to talk about opportunities to revitalize Boley. The Young City Council are committed to bringing Boley "back to

its hay-day" and believe this can be accomplished by maintaining close ties to Boley's aging population and sharing this information in social media. In addition, the mayor has spoken to businesspeople that transition towns into resorts and hospitality community. As of 2014, discussions to bring hotels and fast-food restaurants to Boley were in the works (Chang 2014).

Figure 8
Boley Parade Main Street – 2015
Photo by Suzette Chang

The Contemporary Boley Rodeo

The annual Boley Rodeo is a three day event during the Memorial Day weekend. On Friday and Saturday, family/friends and visitors from around the world enjoy bull-riding, horse racing, the parade, food and great stories of Boley. However, on Sunday everyone is welcome to attend church which is the pillar of African American communities since the beginning of slavery. *Slave, Religion and Black Theology* (Hopkins 2000) contends that Christianity or "the black" church began with the founding of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in 1787 and the first African Baptist Church in 1788, serving as a "spiritual sanctuary and

community against the violent and destructive character of slavery" (77). Interestingly the meaning of Christianity and black church are intertwined for black Boley residents . Mr. Shaw speaks about being "Christ-Like", inferring that it is synonymous to the black church because it is this desire to be like-Christ, meaning the choice to be forgiving and resilient, that "sustained black Boley residents" during Jim Crow and slavery (39).

Figure 9
The One of the Oldest Churches in Boley - Antioch Baptist Church
Built in 1903 (estimated)
Photo courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society

This position does not reflect the argument presented by E. Franklin Frazier, author of *The Negro Church in America (*1974). Frazier contends that due to the Negro experience, the black church consists of "five major structural patterns that have characterized the history of the Negro experience" (22). Due to these categories blacks experienced a development of social patterns and religious beliefs that were both a function of white control and an expression of the needs emanating from the Negro experience. Although Frazier's argument does not mirror the beliefs of Boley residents, I think it is important to acknowledge his claim because his perspective speaks to the complexity of Christianity/religion for blacks and the social constructs that impact African Americans currently and historically.

According to Maulana Karena

> "after enslavement, [the black church] remained a wall of defense and comfort against racism and its accompanying attacks on black dignity, relevance and social worth. The black church serves as an agency of social reorientation and reconstruction, providing reinforcement for the old values of marriage, family, morality and spirituality in the face of the corrosive effects of enslavement. In addition, the church became a center of economic cooperation, pooling resources to buy churches, building mutual aide societies which provides social services for free blacks and setting up business for economic development. [The black church also serves] as an engagement center in both public and internal educational projects, setting up schools and training ministers and teachers and raising funds to carry out these projects. Finally, [which is extremely relevant to this study of Boley African American residents, the black church] is an invisible spiritual community" (264-265).

It is this spiritual community or spirituality that leads and guides these residents due to the history of the black church in Boley and the contemporary understanding these individuals have created. At the request of my dear friend and informant, I visited a "holiness" church in Boley during the 2008 Boley Rodeo Celebration and learned from an interview that this church congregation and building are approximately thirty years old. This is significant because other churches in Boley are much older that sixty and most black Boley residents

reference this “holiness” church as the “new kid on the block”. After church services, I was introduced to cousins, uncles, nephews and countless titles that identity individuals as “family members” and “kinfolk”. Each time I assumed the relationship to be biological, I was quickly told “no, that my kinfolk by marriage” or “we kin cause I known him/her for a long, long time”. This was also the first time I recall hearing the phrase, “I live in Boley, America”.

My first observation of this church ceremony echoed my experience as a child and the observations of Elaine J. Lawless, specifically that participating in a black church service is emotionally charged and these ceremonies offer a temporary relief from the pain endured, historically and currently, by blacks. *The Night I Got the Holy Ghost…”Holy Ghost Narratives and the Pentecostal Conversion Process,* Lawless explores religious practices at Pentecostal church, giving specific attention to the “tarrying” at the altar and trance practices that involve “stretching out their arms, crying, shouting and moaning”. In her investigation she notes “women have substantially more dramatic encounters than men. Female narrative accounts of these religious experiences, too, are more fully developed and delivered more often in all contexts than those told by males…because women are perceived to be closer to nature, in a sense, and more likely to exhibit emotions and uninhibited behavior, they are thought to be more tuned to the world of God and spirits” (240). Another example of an emotionally charged black church service is during my childhood. I believe I was five or six years of age and my mother, sister and I were seated in an all-black church in Berkeley, California. My mother is part of the Great Black Migration; this choice was made for her after a male

family member died during a local lynching in Cal, Texas during the 1930's. According to James Loewen,

> "the number of African Americans went up by nearly 60%, from 7,388,000 in 1890 to 11,759,000 in 1930. Moreover, beginning about 1915, African Americans from Dixie started moving north in large numbers, a movement now known as the Great Migration or Great Black Migration, in response to the impact of World War I, which simultaneously increased the demand for American products abroad and interfered with European migration to northern cities. More than 1,000,000 African Americans moved north between 1915 and 1935"; my mother was born during the early 1930's (58).

Due to my curious nature and frequent talking, my mother required that I sit next to her at all times during church service. My sister, on the other hand, was quiet and my mother viewed my sister's personality as someone not to keep a close eye on but me, due to my constant talking, required close attention. This often frustrated me but I was a child and my mother is the adult, so I had "no say-so". I am accustomed to loud music during church service and this ceremony was no different.

The music was very loud; drums playing, organ blaring and tambourines jingling to the same beat. I am not sure if the minister was preaching or talking but I do remember several church members standing, clapping, waving their hands and/or singing while standing. Mom was to my right, seated at the end of the third row pew and her large, black, patent-leather purse with wide stripes and silver buckles sat between us. I remember looking to my left to see several people jumping and screaming (I later found out that these church participants were shouting). Their eyes

were closed as they yelled and cried; some foamed at the mouth and I guess that scared me to see this. I turned my face to my right and saw that mom was no longer seated next to me. She was standing and jumping up-and-down, just like the other church members. The combination of loud music, high emotions and mom no longer seated was more than my juvenile emotions could hand, so I immediately grabbed my mother's left arm with my two hands. I had tears in my eyes and I did not understand what was happening to my mother. Mom immediately removed herself from this trance and pulled my hands from her left arm, only to begin shouting again. This did not comfort me, so I began to cry again and grabbed her with both hands. She removed my clutch from her arm and a member of the church immediately took me away. I screamed and wailed for what seemed like an eternity because I did not understand what was happening to my mother and, I did not know who was taking me from her. I was told many years later that my godmother took me so that my mother could "praise God". But as a child, a precocious child that idolized my mother and did not understand, I never forgot those moments and those feelings of fear and anxiety resurfaced as I observed a holiness black church ceremony in Boley for the first time.

As I walked into this holiness church, I observed a sunlight that filled the sanctuary as white window covers danced to the rhythm of instrumental music. A pulpit fall gently cascaded the lectern and the organ sang a peaceful lullaby. Church participants offered tranquil humming and moaning while women slowly rocked forward and backward; their arms were wrapped snuggly around their torsos. Men sat, as if in a daze, as drumsticks gently caressed a standing drum-cymbal. It was truly a calm and peaceful time in this church, worthy of a "Hallmark moment". As I slowly

moved through the crowd of over two hundred people to find a seat, I witnessed children quietly talking to each other and, without notice the mood shifted.

A black man appeared and abruptly walked to the pulpit. His demeanor was abrupt, pushing against the tranquil mood that permeated the church. As he grabbed the microphone he claimed, "the devil is working hard to distract you! But we won't let him do that, will we?" As if awakened from a melodic trance, several congregants hastily respond with "Amen!" The black man interprets their response as a green light to begin the prayer ceremony and he starts to pray; his voice was forceful and harsh. He fumbled to keep the microphone in his hand; his impatient voice is accompanied with a Joker-esk smile and immediately, his mood changed which in turn causes the mood in the church to change as well.

During the next fifteen-minutes, he prays and church congregants quickly approach the pulpit creating a human barrier around him. The creation of this human barrier suggests that this is a common practice because, like dominoes, everyone falls into place to build this human shield around him. His eyes are closed; foaming-saliva rolls from his mouth. His hands are stretched in a cross-like position as salty water stains his face. He is spinning in circles; sometimes his arms move from the cross position to a horizontal/vertical position. He screams repeatedly, "Lord forgive me" and his screams pierce the air. His body bumps against the human barrier and the black man begins to wail. Several barrier members cry and congregation members yell "let Him use you". After several hours of this church ceremony, most congregants smoothly shift back to calmness that once rested in the church however, I am emotionally exhausted and not comfortable to leave after witnessing raw-emotion, so I

patiently wait and greet/speak to each church participant as they exit the sanctuary. Mr. Gunn, the black man, walks towards me, slowly wiping the tearstains from his eyes and face. I ask him if I can speak with him and before I can ask questions, he sits next to me and begins to talk.

> "You know, we're little country church. Everybody know everybody. Although most people born and raised here in Boley, sometimes we forget our past. I just need the Lord to forgive me cause sometimes I thank that my children is suffering cause of my bad choices. My son used to always get tickets. Back then, the [Okfuskee County] police would only write tickets to black folks. I saw white folks breaking the law and them white police would not write a ticket to the white folks. For a long time I thought that only happened in Boley, America. You see it happen so much, ya start to think it only happening to you. But I would pray about it and give it God. Stuff like that made me want to increase my faith in God. I know what impact the church played in my life when I was growing up and I know how we had to go to church and be involved. My parents were committed to the church and for most of my childhood, I thought it was about the singing and dancing and loud music. As I got older, I realized there is a certain peace you get by going to church in Boley, America (he laughed). You know, I used to think that was for young folks to say, 'Boley, America' but it is for all of us that live in

Boley. We are the heart of America cause we are right in the center of the United States and don't no body want to think about what Oklahoma did to us back then".

I found out later that Mr. Gunn is the man that is accused of killing his wife (this is discussed in more detail on page 50). This might explain his emotional church experience and why church congregants respond to him in that manner. He is currently in prison and only Mr. and Mrs. Levias spoke of the accusations filed against Mr. Gunn; no one else discussed it with me.

Another church participant, Ms. Joyce said that,

"The people that I talk to in Boley really care about the future of Boley. We get together and we talk about the things that are going on here. I can see people want to support each other and support the town. It is good to see the bond growing. The previous mayor kept things to herself so nobody knew what was going on. I am doing my best to talk to people about the future of Boley and what we can do as a community to make things strong again". The seniors of Boley are the ones that make this town Boley, America because they stayed and worked hard. I went away for a while and now I am back but people who stayed here and attended to the crops and maintained this historical community…and I always say, if it were not for these people there would be nothing to come back to. But, they're the people that's at the bottom of the totem pole, financially. I mean they have limited or no resources. Most of them are on social security but they stay".

During another Sunday church service, about a week later, I had a very different church experience. At a local Boley Baptist church, approximately twenty-five people attended church that day. All church participants are African American/black/colored/Negro and their sex and age include male/female; child/adult/ teenager and senior citizen. Some church attendees wore hats, suits and dresses, while others wore pantsuits, coats, jeans and sweaters. Some accompanied their clothing with scarves and ties while others wore pendants and suspenders and were seated in groups. For example, three people sat at the front-far right of the church and four people sat at the rear-far left, several groups of two sat at the center, front and back. Each group member spoke to each other and before the church service began, their conversations were lively and engaging. Each person laughed and smiled with and to each other. Although their conversations appeared happy and inviting, church participants outside each group did not engage with other groups. It appeared that each group had their own imaginary bubble and everyone remained in their selected bubble, talking to and with each other and did not remove themselves from their bubbles while seated. The church building appeared several hundred square feet in length and width and can accommodate over one hundred church participants. The seating area consisted of several church pews, approximately twenty and span from north to south of the church with three aisles; one center aisle divided each pew and two additional aisles are to the right and left of each pew.

This church service consisted of several ceremonies, including "praise and devotional", "responsive reading", "congregational hymn", "scripture reading", "choral selection and several others. Most ceremonies were interactive and encouraged participants to talk, hug, give a friendly-kiss or hand shake. The coordinator of these services believes that "we should always greet each other with a 'Holy' embrace".

This Sunday service was designated as Black History Month Celebration Day and members of this church chose to honor the history of Boley and its African American community. For Mrs. Kent, an eighty-five year old black woman, remembering Boley's history is "bitter-sweet". The church, inviting all members of Boley to attend, organized the entire day of celebration and on this day, the day to celebrate Boley's Black History, Mrs. Kent shared her story/testimony.

> "Well, mostly I give thanks. I thank God for my health and strength. I thank God for His traveling mercies. I thank Him for my children and I thank Him for all that his has done for me and I would pray for the His continued mercies. I just let God know that I thank Him and when I do that I just feel good. I say 'thank you Lord, I just thank you for everythang you done for me. Ya' know some times I just get right happy. Cause I am ole' and can't move like I use ta', I just put my hand in da' air and just waive it from side-to-side. God knows what that means, even if I can't tell it or y'all don't understand it, God knows my heart".

With this last sentence, she smiled to herself because she "gets carried away when she thinks about God's goodness". According to Mrs. Kent, "what she has and lived through in Oklahoma is because of God's mercy". She then slowly stands to her feet and shares her story of "God's mercy".

> "I remember one night when I was growing up [in Boley], coming from church, just singing, and can't sang a lick…and I was driving my car when all of a sudden another car came in the same intersection I was in. I know that car had to be going at least 80 mph and if it had been say, four seconds earlier, I would be dead right now but God's mercy said not that day"

Figure 10
Choir singing during Black History Month celebration – 2015
Photo by Suzette Chang

Sharing stories or "testifying", not only brings spiritual renewal, but also offers an emotional distance from the history of Oklahoma. "Black folks" as she explains, sometimes, "can't handle the past; it's just too much sometimes, so it is easier to act like it don't exist". Her spiritual experiences have changed the way she remembers Jim Crow and slavery in Oklahoma, allowing her to "block the past but not forget it".

Mrs. Kent's expression of gratitude mirrored the beliefs of Mrs. Jones, a resident of IXL that attends church in Boley. Mrs. Jones is a black woman, approaching 70 and is " a faithful member of her church". In addition to leading the choir, serving on the Women's Board and conducting testimony service, Mrs. Jones also welcomes visitors and reads the announcements every Sunday. Her welcomes are lively and genuinely heartfelt, as she looks at each visitor, smiles and invites non-members to "clap yo' hands, stomp yo' feet, play musical instruments or do whateva' the Lord leads you to do because y'all are welcome here". As she concludes the welcome, closing her manila folder and heading toward her seat in the choir stand, she stopped for a moment and peered over the folder, looking directly at the congregation. She then proclaimed with tremendous conviction "God is good! Jesus didn't have to die fo you and me. Hallelujah! God is good. All the time!" Her words garnered only a meek reply from the fairly solemn congregation. She then retorted, "I said, God is good! And I don't care if you praise Him or not, I'm going to praise the Lord." This dramatic statement left congregants both stunned and in gleeful laughter, at which point they responded with an enthusiastic "Amen".

The significance of gratitude as an aspect of spirituality is a profound expression in the lives of the black Boley residents I spoke to. For those that struggle to raise children, gratitude becomes an expression of endurance "believing that God will provide means for getting food, restoring utilities" and, "gratitude is a reminder not to give up when hopelessness seems inevitable". The experiences of these residents are a historical and sometimes daily struggle with progress and setbacks. Choosing to be grateful in the midst of these and other circumstances is a reflection of both an

expectation of God's blessings and a realization that God has historically provided for them. In addition, it also speaks to an acknowledgement of "what Oklahoma did and did not do for blacks". In essence, the African American residents that I spoke to do not blame Oklahoma but hold the state accountable for the "empty promises" and "poor treatment of black folks" yet each are grateful for every experience believing that each challenge was an opportunity to make them stronger and endure.

Chapter 3: Boley Family and Kinship -

Histories of family in Boley are embedded in discussions about the present, and repeated in different context. Inevitably, each story is slightly different, highlighting particular aspects of a person or even depending on the context within which the history is being told. This kind of historical transmission produces "thick" histories (to borrow Geertz's [1973] term) – dimensional and dynamic narratives that are continually produced - consciously connects their past to their present and affirms a shared sense of family.

Many family histories I learned from Boley residents were told during conversations that focused on other actions: helping clean someone's living room, enjoying a meal after church; riding in the truck while witnessing cows and cattle graze or otherwise engaged in some activity. Because of my age (sometimes I spent time with older residents and sometimes I spent time with younger residents) and familiarity with the significance of family for African Americans, I was almost always welcomed to participate in every event, ceremony and church/family dinner. This allowed my presence and participation to blur from being an outsider to being a family member.

Figure 11
Local Boley residents sitting in front of the Boley Hardware Store
Photo by Suzette Chang

With this understanding of family came the challenges of small town politics. Although I am family, I was constantly learning the proper things to say and do in different circumstances. This schooling and learning came from seniors, who gently took me under their wing and patiently talked to me about the different politics of Boley, choosing not to scold me or give disapproval due to my lack of knowledge regarding Boley small town politics. One factor that offered challenges to me is manners. This is another embarrassment for me because I was raised to have "good manners"; I am reminded that "good manners" is a key component for black communities and it can never be overlooked, specifically during events or circumstances when all participants are black and, older individuals are present. *The Socialization Values of Low-Income Appalachian White and Rural Black Mothers: A Comparative Study* (Peterson and Peters 1985) argues that "middle-class parents, for example, are exposed to work and educational environments that require considerable degrees of abstract thinking, intellectual flexibility, and freedom from supervision. These experiences, in turn, encourage middle-class parents to adopt socialization values emphasizing self-direction and internal standards of conduct. Conversely, the occupational and educational settings of blue-collar and low-income parents tend to emphasize the manipulation of physical objects, greater standardization of tasks, less intellectual flexibility, and closer supervision. As a result of these conditions, blue-collar and low income parents tend to value obedience, conformity and neatness in their children" (76). Peterson and Peters argument is applicable to the Boley community members that

I spoke with although the label "low income" or "blue-collar" is not applicable. What I gleaned from these experiences is that there is a long and consistent tradition of using "good manners" in Boley and class/sex/gender cannot mitigate this expectation. Therefore it is customary to hear/say a "yes, sir" or "no, mam" in "Boley, America".

Manners and Values: effecting well upon the Family:

Mrs. Adams, an affluent and retired educator, claims

> "my mother raised me to always be respectful to others. It took me a little while to understand that during my educational process. While I attended school in Boley as a child, we [meaning children] always greeted adults first. I was raised that way and so were my classmates. But when I went off to college and attended school with non-blacks, it was different. My white classmates did not greet the teacher like I did. In fact, white kids just walked in the room and sat down [her face shifted from calm to annoyance]. I did not understand that and often talked to my mother about why white people are so rude. She told me they do not have home training".

The content of this interview mirrored that of many other older African American Boley residents that grew up during a time when manners were extremely important. Manners confirmed a specific class status, suggesting those without manners or "respect" were of a lesser social class. This social value, which is currently exercised in Boley, speaks not only to those that have "good manners"

but also to those that taught this value. For those that are not polite or are disrespectful, this is an egregious act that is discussed within storefront and front porch conversations. In addition, bad manners place an embarrassment or shame upon family members, suggesting a child or adult "was not taught right". Attaining this label is almost unforgiveable in Boley and I asked Mrs. Adams to elaborate upon a meaning of home training and she said,

"Baby, home training is how a child is taught to act. I was taught at home how to cook, clean and study. My mother was very clear to me that because I am black I must be better and smarter than white people because I had two strikes against me, meaning I am black and I am a female. I did not want to accept that until I experienced racism and sexism for myself but back then we did not really understand sexism but we understood racism. So, I had to be polite and have good manners even if my white classmates did not. I did not like that but it made me stronger, permitting me to handle situations that many people, specifically white people, could not handle. I am very grateful for those hard times".

Sometimes I forgot to say, "yes mam" or "no sir" and Mrs. Levias laughed at me with understanding.

"That's alright," she said. "That is the way it is in small black towns. Everyone is related and people can be unkind to each other but we still love each other. The Bible says all have sinned and come short of God's word. If I sit around and tell you that I never did anything, that would mean I'm making God out to be a

liar – and I wouldn't do that. God is good and he is merciful and is grace is everlasting"

I had two previous conversations with Mrs. Levias before this one. These prior conversations were pleasant and our exchange created a connection in both of us. Mrs. Levias is convinced that this change is God because we each found out something about each other's past that as mere acquaintances we were not supposed to know. We learned that we have unpleasant and almost unforgiveable family experiences. Mrs. Levias hugged me tightly and signaled me to follow her into her garden. As we walked together, she muttered, "I love your spirit Suzette" and she hugged me tightly again. We walked back into her home and her husband sat in the living room as we entered. Mrs. Levias and I sat on the couch and watched her beautiful ten-month-old granddaughter smile brightly and the three of us talked about everything – from raising children to the sweet smell coming from their vegetable garden. As we talked, Mrs. Levias peppered the conversation with stories about the past – both his own experiences and those of other people that live in Boley and its surrounding areas. There were a few stories that I knew about vaguely from the interviews I conducted during previous years but for the most part the stories that the Levias Family shared with me while sitting in their home, I heard for the first time.

> "Suzette, right down the street, a man killed is wife a few months ago. We go to the same church and she was a faithful member. Right after he killed her, he called me, I guess because I am his pastor. He told me that he did it and I told him to turn himself in and he did. That there is probably one of

the toughest phone calls I eva took. She was a good woman and I still to dis' day don't understand what would make a man kill his wife. Ya' see, we is a lovin' and forgiving people here in Boley, we have to forgive cause' that is what God told us to do but we don't have to forget. That is what I tell everybody".

I was stunned by this interview and I asked Mrs. Levias "where is he now?" Mr. Levias responded and said " oh, he is goin' to jail,..just a matter of time".

How to Tell a Story: Quality of Exchanges

This and other interviews are examples of how I came to distinguish between distinct types of historical exchanges that I would have with Boley residents. Informal interview settings, residents' historical narratives mirrored the kinds of exchanges they have learned to expect of academic researchers: exchanges in which the narrators are often object of investigation but never themselves narrators of that history. Apart from interviews, historical knowledge is continuously shared on very different terms. During these exchanges, histories are never told as complete narratives, specifically those stories that identify family connections. I share this perspective because the man that Mr. Levias spoke of is his son's father-in-law.

More often than not, participants identify other Boley residents as "kinfolk" and provide their names but the complete history and the relationships that developed, dissolved and reconnected were not shared. The fragmented nature of these narratives meant that outsiders did not have access to these histories however, because I was embraced and welcomed as "family", I recognized the

inferences that were being made during conversations. In a very real sense, such historical transmission defined quite clearly who was – and who was not – part of the family.

As I spent more time with different Boley families, each claims biological, marital or relational ties to each other. With this knowledge, I began to grow more familiar with some of the histories that residents told about people and places in Boley. Unfortunately, these histories were rarely told as complete narratives in Labov's sense of the term (Labov and Waletsky:1967). I often heard part of a story on one day and a different part on another day –a different aspect or angle, different details, another dimension to the story. Some histories were told to me enough times and with enough variation that I could produce my own version of the events. Others I heard only once or twice, and I didn't accumulate enough fragments to get a sense of the event as a whole or have my own interpretation of it – though participants did serve to clarify different topics that we talked about at that time.

Histories are not narrated as contained events that are (or even could be) recounted in full. Some recounting stem from the joy of storytelling with an emphasis on how the story is told. Other recounts speak to diseases that take away a humans ability to remember certain components or factors of a story. For example, Mr. Berry tells the story of growing up with his siblings; he is one of sixteen and very close to his mother. Recently his mother received an Alzheimer's diagnoses and she called Mr. Berry by his brother's name. This is a very sensitive topic yet Mr. Berry continued to share his story with me. He informed me that,

> "he told his mother that he was not that sibling and told her his name. She looked at me and paused, stating that I was correct and called me by his cousin's name. Unfortunately, this conversation went on for several minutes and I finally decided to agree with my mother after several claims that I am not my sibling, my cousin and even my uncle". After he shared his story, he paused and said, "we all grew up together in Boley. Our parents were very close; we were always together at school or church. That is what Boley is and has always been about – family. It don't get no closer than us". Mr. Berry later told me that his mother died from this dreadful disease.

Family histories are embedded in conversations about other contemporary issues, such as the current and future status of Boley and adding meaning, shedding light on, and talkers' understandings of the present. Although most Boley residents are optimistic about Boley's future, there are several that do not support this perspective, claiming Boley "has had its' hay day". During my interview in 2010 and before the current mayor accepted the responsibility of leading Boley, I spoke with Mr. Matlock , a seventy-four year old black man, he said,

> "Oh, I don't love it here so well, but I've been here forty years and I couldn't establish friendships any stronger anywhere else at my age now than I have here, I don't think. It would be impossible for me to come back over what I've gone over—in other words, I couldn't build a new home like I built here. So to go someplace else in the condition that I'm in, why it'd be

almost impossible for me to get by at all. I just couldn't, unless I had my- well, I just couldn't do it. If Boley is ever to be anything, it must change. The political element here has got to change. That's from the Mayor on down, yes mam, it has got to change. I would advise Boley to unify themselves, 'know ye one another and make friends with your enemies. If we can make friends with the oppressor, can get his friendship, we have a chance, but until we get that. [and then he was silent]. I asked Mr. Matlock, "who is the oppressor?" and he responded "white folks".

The longer I spent in Boley, I could identify narrations of the same events. As the growing intimacy of our relationships blossomed, so did the narratives. Each story transformed in focus and context, and my own ability to glean multiple layers of meaning grew from the narrative act itself.

Figure 12
Boley, Oklahoma circa 1950
Boley School Marching Band
Photo from the Oklahoma Historical Society

Family Narratives

Family and the history of family are extremely important to Boley residents. Due to the relatively recent existence of slavery and Jim Crow laws in local memory, black Boley residents created and sustained fundamental relationships and called these relationships family. From these relationships, familial networks developed in Boley and other Oklahoma all-black towns. Boley African Americans also formed supportive communities that organized economic, educational, political and religious institutions. These associations developed from the belief that self-help and mutual aid is necessary to raise children, care for the sick and assist the destitute. Untangling biological and relational family ties is almost impossible in Boley because there is a spirit of responsibility for and to each other. In addition, due to their commitment of family, black Boley residents have developed a moral economy that creates and fosters solidarity.

Kinship ties serve as a primary source of socialization. Hylan Lewis examined a predominately African American community in a small southern town, noting family as a vehicle to socialize. His investigation took place during the height of Jim Crow. According to Lewis, "the family assumes a number of forms in Kent. Frequently found are such forms or features as the extended family (with or without male head); the multiple family; the family with a skipped generation; the family with half-brothers and half-sisters or adopted children and boarding out" (93). My investigation of family in Boley mirrors Lewis's examination, specifically that black Boley residents receive most of their socialization from family.

Mr. Charles Dogerty, a sixty-six year old man, born and raised in Boley, shared his experiences with me.

"Boley experienced several decades of poverty. It was impossible not to see the racial segregation between Boley and surrounding all-white towns. When you live in Oklahoma and have been in Oklahoma all your life, you could find [places to eat and sleep] without looking. Most of Oklahoma was laid out in the same fashion as Okemah County, basically, and you could use your senses and sense where you [as a black person] are and where you're not allowed. But I always knew when I was coming back to Boley; it ain't nothing like knowing you are close to ya family. All these folks here in Boley are my family; we kin by blood or cause I have known them all my life."

Churches are vital centers of African American Boley families. These sanctuaries minister to the spiritual and temporal needs of the black Boley community. The church serves as an affirmation and celebration of their lives. Church revivals are great religious and social events for African American Boley residents, frequently drawing the whole town to one church building. Baptisms bring families and neighbors closer. According to Mrs. Jamison, "being a member of a church in Boley makes you somebody, you are important and being a member of a church is a part of your daily life. When I was growing up, many young people met their future husband or wife while attending church" (Chang: 2014) because the black church is a safe space. In Boley, the church served as a place to host local National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) meetings.

The significance of the church for black Boley residents is further discussed in Chapter Three.

Fraternal organizations formed another layer of family for African American Boley community members. According to Mrs. Hubbard, "fraternities and sororities were burial societies. We met in lodges. These places became our safety net and allowed us to maintain our connections with [relational and biological] family. We cared for the sick and helped feed and maintain the people in Boley that could not take care of themselves". Reflecting on the need to pool resources, Mrs. Sutton spoke of her sorority lodge and the role it played in the lives of her neighbors. "Like if your husband was a farmer and his mule died and you belonged to Ladies Industrial Club, everybody that had a mule had to give your husband a day's work, until your husband could get another mule" (Chang: 2014). This was the level of support family offered for black Boley residents. Although few social organizations currently exist in Boley, the commitment of family remains.

One fundamental component of family is teaching dignity to children. During slavery and Jim Crow "black men and women, confronted by brutal racial stereotypes, struggled to find ways to assert their dignity in the face of humiliating treatment" (Chafe: 2001). Women were often subjected to sexual insults, but within predominately African American communities like Boley, women were respected. According to Mrs. Pritchett, "women were the moral role models in the home and in Boley. Black women uplifted the race in Boley". Due to this belief, Boley residents embraced sexual and social moral codes, and an aspiration to

maintain a "middle-class standard" of conduct, dress, and speech as part of uplifting the race. "These aspirations expressed the ideals of the 'New Negro', of well-brought-up men and women whose behavior was impeccable (Johnson: 15). As Mrs. Pritchett recalls, "it was unheard of for a young lady to get an apartment. You stayed home until you got married. And if you didn't ever get married, you stayed home". Boley African Americans speak to a morally stricter and supportive community, rooted in knowing one's neighbor and watching out for each other, because according to Mrs. Pritchett, "that is what family does for each other. We were treated like second-class citizens back then [outside of Boley]. We found strength in family". It is also apparent that the institution of family for black Boley residents was created and nurtured in response to slavery and Jim Crow. Although slavery and Jim Crow are no longer prevalent factors in Boley, most seniors and adults continue to embrace the fundamentals of family and community, believing this commitment will sustain the next generation of Boley residents.

According to Ms. Victoria Stream, life gave her a variety of happiness and hardship. Ms. Stream is an Africa American woman, born in 1924 and she grew up on her grandparent's farm in Boley, Oklahoma. Bringing to mind her father's and grandfather's baptisms, Stream explained the significance of church, noting that the role of religion for rural black Americans was a time for witnessing and also served as opportunities for family and community bonding. During the Second World War, Stream looked for employment to support the war effort and she worked for several months in local factories in Oklahoma City before going back to Boley to assist her family. When she returned to care for her sickly father, an old

elementary school friend, Henry Stream, courted her. She spoke of their courtship and life together as a young married couple. Stream spoke of their love for each other and the struggles the newlywed couple experienced after the war.

According to Mrs. Stream,

> "I can recall my grandmother. I always thought that she was too good. Every Sunday, everyone came to her house. The preacher and church folk came and ate Sunday dinner. We would get ready every Sunday because that was a big thing for the preacher to come to your house on Sunday and eat. Every Saturday we killed chickens and got the meat ready for Sunday dinner. My grandmother would talk about the Lord so much; sometimes I thought that was all she had to say. If something good happened in Boley, she would say 'Oh, Lord, the Lord did that. If it hadn't been for the Lord, I don't know what I would do'. We had to join the church; it was not a choice. We all had to be Christians in those days or else my grandmother would worry you to death with fear. We had to attend every revival and we had to attend until we were converted. My grandmother (and most of the women and men of the church) did not care how long it took for us to be converted into a Christian, we were going. Back then, we had mourner's benches and everybody that was a sinner in the church had to go up front and sit on that mourners' bench and hold our heads down. We could not raise our head until we gave our life to God. Sometimes that meant that one of us had to speak in tongues; I know I faked it a few times so my grandmother would leave me along [Mrs. Stream said that with a laugh].

In between the pregnant pauses, laughter and tears, Mrs. Stream made a cup of

coffee for herself and a cup of tea for me. She returned to her red chair and sat down. Mrs.

Stream said that:

> "Back then they called the waiting period mourning. I guess, because we were supposed to be Godly sorry because we was sinners. The preacher would ask if we were sinners and we could not tell a lie. Back then, nobody told a lie because we were too scared of the minister and we would not lie in church. Well my grandmother knew I was not the best child so as soon as I came into the church, she grabbed my hand and let me to the front of the church and made me sit on the mourning bench. She did not wait for the preacher to ask if anybody wanted to go to the bench. At that time, they wanted people to be at least twelve years old and they say you'd know what you were doing and all that stuff, meaning by the age of twelve you know right from wrong. Also, Jesus was about twelve years old when he started talking to God so I guess that is what they meant back then. My grandmother told me that I was going to be a Baptist and that she did not care what church I went to just as long as I was a Baptist. We had to be baptized because Christ was baptized. So, I had to be baptized in the river because she told me that my sins would be washed away, so I did it. I met my first boyfriend at the church. I did not know he was my boyfriend or

what a boyfriend was at that time. I had fun with boys and girls; it did not matter to me. Back then girls and boys would go back in the woods and get hickory nuts for each other. He knew that he loved me so every Sunday, he got nuts for me and he would give them to me at school. He worked and bought candy for me and he would pick blackberries and give the blackberries to me. I just saw him as a friend and still do. To this day, when we see each other, he still gives me that same look he gave me over sixty years ago. He always gives me that certain smile. His family was crazy about me. My family really liked him too but I could not get past him just being a friend. I hate that I did not love him, but I didn't" (Chang: 2014).

Mr. Pope, another Boley senior citizen, spoke of the church as a place to see his family and friends. He said every Sunday and whenever he attended church services,

"the adults always knew where we [the children] were. If we went to Oklahoma City, which was a big deal, the adults knew. One time we went to watch the picture show in Oklahoma City. It was a group of us. Well, once we got to Oklahoma City, some of the kids slipped off to get something to drink [alcoholic drinks]. Most of us was teenagers and we thought we were grown. My father told me that if I did something I had no busy doing [like drinking, smoking or messin around with girls]; he would know it before I did it. Not only would he whoop me but everybody in town would whoop

me too. Too many people raised me in Boley and none of em' would have me cuttin' up out of town and shaming the Boley family".

The significance of family is still strong in Boley and an understanding that everyone is family, regardless of biological connection, is still applicable. Foster children and grandchildren are the primary population of Boley juveniles. "Boley is home to approximately one hundred children" claims Mrs. Jacobs, a Boley resident. She further stated, "they walk the streets because there is nothing for them to do here. Most businesses don't have work for them to do and they don't have transportation, so they walk the streets. They [the children] steal and cause problems a lot around here. And I know it is because they are bored. I work at the community center and we try to keep them involved but if they don't come to the center, we can't give them things to do". During an observation, I noted over sixty children walking on Pecan Street, Boley's main street, within a one-week period; this observation happened during spring break of 2014. The racial make-up of these kids includes African American, First American, mixed race and white. Most children walked in groups of four to five, talking and laughing with each other. The youngest child within each group appeared to be approximately five years of age; the oldest appeared to be about seventeen years old. Because Boley is a rural community and everyone considers each other as family, the issue of crime is not comparable to Oklahoma City or other metropolitan areas in Oklahoma. However, according to Mrs. Jacobs

"crime is rising in Boley and it is increasing because these kids don't have anything to do, they don't care and their grandparents can't keep an eye on the all the time. That is why we have this community center. We do not have much money but what we do have we spend our money on programs for these kids and sometimes the kids come. Since the [Boley] schools closed a few years ago, we try to keep them [the children] busy. All these kids are bussed to Prague and Okemah to go to school. It ain't a bad thing, I just wish we still had our schools here in Boley".

Figure 12
Boley kids having fun at the 2012 Boley Rodeo
Photo by Suzette V. Chang

Speaking with Mrs. Jacobs afforded me the opportunity to talk to Boley new adults[i]. As of 2014, Boley's new adult population is growing. Several new adults live in Boley and gave their stories to me, specifically their experiences of living in a historical all-black town, their ideas and attitudes about the future of Boley. Specific topics such as the stereotypes connected to this historical black town,

what it means to be a new adult in Boley, living in a rural community with few economic and social advancement opportunities.

To be a new adult in this historical black town is economically restrictive and socially stifling. As a mother, I saw the frustration in their eyes and truly wanted to bring them to Oklahoma City at the conclusion of my fieldwork. In fact several asked to "catch a ride with me" knowing they would not have a way to get back to Boley but that was not a concern for them. Their question struck a tender chord in my heart; I am a mother that truly wants to help. However, I know that my purpose is to listen to their stories and document what I am told. So before telling them that I could not do that, I asked "do you write your thoughts about Boley on paper?" One new adult said, "no, I draw." I asked, "may I see your drawings?" He said "sure, next time." I then asked, "how would you get home?" And I was immediately told, "awww, I got family in Oklahoma City, so I'd be aight."

Figure 13
One of Boley's new-adults (during a church service) that claims
She lives in "Boley, America"
Photo by Suzette V. Chang

I asked, "how do you feel about living in a historical black town?" One new adult claims, "sitting at home is all I do now. There is no work and we have one car to get around. Momz needs the car, so I sit around the house and it is a drag but what can

I do? I could hang with the d-boyz (drug boys) but that will get me in trouble. I at least know that. All I hear is what Boley use-ta-be, but what is it doing for me now? Ain't nothin' here but church, jail and drugs. I am tired of this, really tho. I try to please momz but this aint working no mo."

Without pause, another new adult immediately said,

"I grew up here [Boley] and all I hear is what type of town Boley use-ta-be. I know about all the stuff they use ta do and outside of riding horse, aint nothin here. So we go to church, try to live this good life dey keep talkin' bout, but I don't see it [while shaking his head] I don't see it at all." Another new adult chimes in and said "dey made this big whoop-de-do about that jail here telling everybody that we would get jobs. I aint old enough to work there but dey already had people to work those jobs. My momma wanted to work there but aint got nowhere with it, so why shood I try? I jus know dat a nigga can loose it here. I mean really, really, loose it."

Another new adult wondered why Boley is still called a historical black town. He explained that

"all kindz of people live here now, so why we gotta be black? Its cool and all that Obama is president but what that got to do with us? The last I checked, we aint black. Everybody here mixed with sumtin, you know Mexican, Indian, white. So why we gotta be black? Do dey call people in Northeast Oklahoma City black? I don't think so! An, we get all this attention fo da rodeo, but then wat? Jus tired man, sorry mam, I mean, I am tired."

I honestly did not know what to say or how to respond with the flood of personal information shared with me. So, I listened and wrote. After thirty minutes of listening to this group of new adults, they made the choice to walk the streets of Boley.

The number of children in Boley is growing and most Boley seniors are grandparents. Boley seniors provide daily care for their grandchildren. Most grandchildren are between the age of six and twelve, although a few are young adults. Several grandchildren live with their grandparent because the parent is absence. According to Mrs. Ford, "their parents [the grandchild's parent] is gone" and due to a collective commitment of family from elderly black Boley residents, grandparents are raising their grandchildren or great-grandchildren.

During several interviews with black Boley grandparents, a child [the grandparents grandchild] was present. Most children were very inquisitive about my presents in their grandparent's home. I was often asked "why are you talking to my grandma?" or "why is that light flashing on that machine (meaning my recorder)?" Most grandparents supported their grandchild's curiosity, while others thought it "disrespectful for a child to ask me questions". Mrs. Donald an eighty-year old grandmother of two grandchildren told me the following:

> "I got four children. The oldest is Ronnie. The second oldest is Correy. Then then next one is Tricia and the next one is Jacky. I raised dem by myself. Dey father died when they was young. They all went to school. I wanted to give dem as much as they could get in

school. I didn't have the opportunity myself; and it takes more to get by with. I wanted them to be able to take care of demselves. Well, dey moved from Boley; all four of-em. I thought Ronnie would be all right in Oklahoma City but he got shot [Ronnie died from a gunshot wound in Oklahoma City. Mrs. Donald paused for several seconds with tears in her eyes. I asked if I could give a tissue to her and she said yes. I placed the tissue in her hand and she held my hand tightly and looked into my eyes for several seconds. As she did this, the female grandchild asked what is wrong? Mrs. Donald let go of my hand and shifted her attention to the child. The grandchild had concern for Mrs. Donald. Mrs. Donald thanked me for the tissue and showered her grandchild with hugs and kisses. We continued the interview]. This child here is my great-grandchild; Ronnie is her grandfather. I don't know where her momma or daddy at. I think dey strong-out on that stuff [drugs]. I don't know if dey dead or alive. I know if I did not take her [the great-grandchild], dey [Oklahoma Department of Human Services] would take her. I don lost too many people in my family. Ya' know. And it is hard takn' care of a child on a fixed income but dis is my kinfolk and she gon' stay right here with me".

Another factor closely linked to family is living in a rural community. Boley, like most of the rural south, is a reservoir of African American cultural roots and history. Black family influences passed on through centuries can be found in the everyday rituals and routines of Boley life. From preparing natural remedies and family recipes to more renowned traditions, including family-based education and sustainable agriculture, family is a pillar for black Boley residents.

Ms. Etta Jae gave an interview to me, claiming that family and living in a rural community is all she knows.

> "I was born in the rural south. I grew up in a time and place where rural was mostly all I knew. I have lived in several major cities across the country – Boston, Atlanta, Chicago, Detroit, New York and Washington, DC. But I had to come back home to my family in Boley. My momma got sick a few years ago and I needed to come and see about her. I thought I was coming to visit, but it turns out that I needed to stay and be with my family. I found peace in the slowness [pace] of Boley. Being here with my kinfolk is sacred to me. I can't get away from this place, not that I want to anymore. This is my home. My family is here and there aint no place like it" .

Figure 14
Ms. Etta Jae
Boley Community Center

Conclusion

Family for African American Boley offers a contemporary look at the evolutionary meaning of black families, concluding that these families have adapted to changing conditions, staying committed to their understanding of what family means. The meaning of family is rich in historical references, linking 21st century realities with traditional understanding of "home training" yet the black family is not dead. Boley's history speaks to the resilience of family and illustrates clearly that present-day black family structure includes two basic levels of socioeconomics but these two levels are not distinct. In fact, the parameters of both classes are blurred by the importance of "good manners". Since slavery and the influence of Jim Crow, Boley African Americans have been creative and practical in adapting their family structure, including foster children and neighbors/friends as family. What is transparent is that family is one factor that keeps black Boley residents going and surviving; family is the human resource available to any individual at any time. One participant claims that

"family is everythang'. We might fuss and fight sometimes, but when it is all said and done, and whin' we go home from that cruel world out' dare, we got family. They'd the ones that will pick ya up when ya fall and lord' knows family gone' poke fun at cha but dat' is alright, cause we still got each other. Can't be black and live in Merica [America] and not have family- ya just can't live whit out em".

Chapter 4: Conclusions

What was learned from the phrase"I live in Boley, America" is a conscience choice by African American Boley residents to establish a distinction between Oklahoma and the United States, believing that Oklahoma is not and has not been a just and honorable state to the Boley residents that I spoke to. This choice stems from a history based on fundamental beliefs about reality, specifically that Oklahoma invited and told blacks to come only to terminate the invitation. This investigation does not give attention to the injustices of black Boley residents but attempts to understand how they navigate through these injustices with history, family and spirituality. Exploring these three components, within the context of Boley, reminds us that the meaning for black or African American in the 21st century is still changing and morphing into a variety of meanings.

As an institution, the black church has been and continues to be a pillar for the African American community. I heard several Boley residents say "I don't know where I would be without my church". This statement suggestions that the community that has emerged from Boley is strongly committed to the values attained from attending and being a member of the black church. From this commitment resonates a contemporary understanding of spiritiuality that allows us to see the myriad ways in which these residents engage in creative agency. Historically, the black church is free of surveillance and free of intimidation because "within the [black]church, members control the money, the lights, the dialogue, the confrontation, the selections of speakers and most important, the entrance and exit of people"

(Frederick: 82). There is freedom and transparency for blacks in the church and they assume responsibility for each other, regardless of biological ties and lengthy disagreements, because they are family.

While kinship is frequently examined within the African American community, the history of family in a "historical black town" reveals tremendous agency on their part as they accept the past while redefining what this term means to them and how that meaning sustains them as they move into the 21st century. What is transparent is their understanding of gratitude for material and nonmaterial blessings and empathy for those who are without. Gratitude and empathy reveal the levels of frequent and consistent work these individuals do in Boley. From fostering a child, caring for a grandchild, being a listener, helping a college student navigate through town politics or retelling the stories of their ancestors, this community is invested in sustaining themselves. Gratitude, for the people I spoke with, provides the possibility of hope in the midst of sometimes depressing cirucmstances. The ability to acknolwege what is good – related to physical manifestations such as health, family and material gain or spiritual manifestations such as salvation, joy, or peace – offers these residents incentive to engage in the present and future of Boley while never forgetting the past. I must be clear; gratitude does not make them blind to, for example, limited funding, inadequate living conditions and many moments of hoplessness however, it does make them grateful for their present resources, both tangible and non-tangible.

Empathy coincides with gratitude in developing a sensitivity to the needs of others. Most black Boley residents do not have everything they want however, beging grateful for what they have is a reminder that they have something to give. For most seniors,

they give their time and storytelling, believing that one or more tall-tales might put a smile on someones faces and give a snapshot of times past. For the children, young adults and new adults, they try to give their time as well but do not offer the level of investment that the elders offer. Most seniors are confident that as this next generation gets older and wiser, an "attitude of graditude" will take over and remind the young people of Boley that all will be alright.

For the African Americans that I spoke to, historical traditions inform their lives by giving them a standard against how to measure their spirituality. These historical tradtions are both personal and collective. For some black Boley residents, testimonies about how they learned about God and developed a relationship with God form much of their understanding. For those that developed a spiritual life as an adult, they link their experiences to others which furthers their understanding of family and kinship.

Located in a rural community, black Boley residents participate in and reflect a traditional southern understanding of whaat the label African American can mean. This ideology is intersected by a number of influences, but the residents that I spoke to incorporate a national perspective of what it means to be African American or black in America. Contemporary interpretations of spirituality, accompanied with their history and the commitment of family, is a standard expectation for black residents and this expection is shared among the three generations I observed, meaning young adults, adults and the elderly.

The influence of national identity produces much more complex and layered subjectivies than labels such as "African American", "black", "historical black town" can suggest. In Boley, black residents access national circuts of

African American experiences and see themselves as part of a national community, but differentiate themselves from the identities promoted and encouraged by other black Americans. African Americans in Boley can relate to racism and inhumane experiences of blacks within the United States. In fact several expressed their concern and anger with the choice of police officers to kill an African American in Ferguson, Orlando, and Los Angeles. The people I spoke to can relate because inhumane choices from Okfuskee County Sherriffs Department and surrounding police departments against black Americans has been, and continues to be, a way of life in Boley. Each participant spoke of or referenced life outside of Boley, claiming frustration, disgust, anger and sometimes moments of hopelessness as the memories of life-in-black-skin came to their minds. Although most residents do not reference Okfuskee County as "Ok-Fuck-Me County", they too have a smoldering rage for the historic treatment from law enforcement toward African Americans in Boley yet they choose to manage their anger and focus their energy on opportunities to better themselves and their community with family and spirituality.

The meaning of family is rich in historical references, linking 21st century realities with traditional understanding of "home training". This perspective of "home training" mirrors the aspiration of what is believed by the people I spoke to as middle class status. Older black Boley residents seek to inculcate the younger Boley generation with social graces, dress, demeanor, and gentility esteemed in the late-nineteenth-century American society. The elders want to see teens and new adults as farmers, cooks, bankers and dressmakers while knowing how to maintain

proper demeanor and an appreciation for cleanliness and sanitation. During my field work when entering a seniors home, it was customary to hear the participant say "I am so embarrassed; my house is not clean" yet each room I observed was spotless. After hearing this statement several times, I realized this is a standard saying for older black Boley residents, specifically women, and I suspect this was an opportunity for them to show me that, in fact, their house was clean and this is their way to bring my attention to it. Accompanied with this statement, I was referenced as "mam" and was often told "thank you" which again was a reminder to me to say "yes, mam", "no, sir", "please" and "thank you" because manners is a pillar within the social structure of Boley however the teens and young adults I spoke to do not support this belief of good manners. The young adults I spoke with found it increasingly difficult to maintain their feelings about "home training", claiming it to be an embarrassment and noting that it has been a conflict within their familes. Most Boley new adults do not understand the committment to "home training" but to reduce conflict within their families, the black 20-somethings in Boley obey the instruction of their elders.

Exploring the term "I live in Boley, America" expressed by black Boley residents allows us to be exposed to a different identity that links history to the present. As a town that has been historically characterized as "all-black" and "historical", it is common that these terms take over the identity of Boley suspending this town, and the people that live there, in time. By claiming the title "I live in Boley, America", the black Boley residents I spoke with challenge the logic and tradition of identifying with city/town and state. The complexities of this claim makes it impossible to align them

with other blacks/African Americans and points to the need to continue the dismantling of what it means to be black or African American in the 21st century. At the same time the importance of class, history and race is a reminder that there is not one definition for black/African American. Although I am confident that most people know that, I also believe that we tend to forget the contextual meanings of blackness/African Americanness and how there is overlap and separation for this community in relation to other black communities. Within the geographic framework of Boley, to tell the whole story of Boley's varied identities would take more people and much more time, since it is a rich and relatively an unexplored field in anthropology. African Americans have played an important role in this state's history and many blacks, like the ones I spoke to in Boley, choose to remember the past yet separate themselves from this state.

Many African Americans choose to accomplish this separation by removing themselves from an aspect of it, meaning disconnecting themselves from Oklahoma the state, and claim "Boley, America" as their home. They make this distinction because "we were invited here" and unlike slavery or Jim Crow, both factors that were imposed upon African Americans, black Boley residents were told to come to Oklahoma because "it [Oklahoma] was supposed to be an all black state." These individuals find and maintain solace through their relationships with biological and relational kinships, gleaning from each other's experiences while never letting go of the past. There is a strong bond among black Boley residents; they frequently tease and joke with each other but "at the end of the day, we are still family – we are all we got". Attending church, specifically engaging in spiritual reminders of grateful and thankfulness, helps these residents maintain themselves and each other from hating those that caused hurt

and inhuman acts upon them and their ancestors. For many, they are grateful for the inhumanity because it has made them stronger.

Figure 15
Panoramic photo of a Sunday church service in Boley and a few of the congregational songs, sang during Sunday service, are listed below.

Thank you Lord for One More Day

Lord you kept me, from all hurt and harm
Lord you kept me safe in the cradle of your arms
Lord I want you to know, I won't complain
Everytime I think of your goodness, I gotta praise your name
Lead: Thank you Lord
Choir: One more day
Lead: For one more day
Choir: One more day
Lead: Lord you been good to me
Choir: One more day
Lead: For just one more day
Choir: One more day
Lead: ad-lib
Lead: I said thank you
Choir: Thank you
Lead: Thank you
Choir: Thank you

We've Come this Far by Faith

We've come this far by faith
Leaning on the LORD
Trusting in His Holy Word
He never failed me yet
Oh' can't turn around
We've come this far by faith

(Repeat)

Verse

Don't be discouraged
when troubles is in your life
He will bear your burdens oh
He will remove all our misery and strife
And that's why

Chorus

Just the other day
I heard a man say
He didn't believe in God words
But I can truly say I'm a living witness today
And God has never failed me yet.

Just A Little Talk With Jesus

I once was lost in sin, but Jesus took me in
And let a little light from heaven fills my soul.
He bathed my heart in love, and He wrote my name above
And just a little talk with Jesus makes me whole

Have a little talke with Jesus
(Let us) tell him all about our troubles
(He will) hear our fainted cry.
(He will) answer by and by.
(When you) feel a little prayer wheel turning
(and you) will know a little fire is burnin'
(You will) find a little talk with Jesus makes it right.

I may have doubts and fears, my eye be filled with tears
But Jesus is a friend who watches day and night
I go to him in prayer, He knows my every care
And just a little talk with my Jesus make it right

Have a little talke with Jesus
(Let us) tell Him all about our troubles
(He will) hear our fainted cry
(He will answer by and by
(When you) feel a litter prayer wheel turning
(And you) will know a little fire is burnin'
(You will) find a little talk with Jesus makes it right

Jesus Will Fix It

Trouble in my way (Trouble in my way)
Have to cry sometime (I Have to cry sometime)
Trouble in my way (Trouble in my way)
Have to cry sometime (I Have to cry sometime)
Lay awake at night (Lay awake at night)
But that's all right (That's all right)

Chorus 1:
I know that Jesus (Jesus, He will fix it)
I know that Jesus (Jesus, He will fix it)
I know that Jesus (Jesus, He will fix it)
After a while (After a while)
Stepped into the furnace (Step into the furnace)
A long time ago (Long time ago)
With ole Shadrach (Shadrach, Meshach)
And Abed-Nego (And Abed-Nego)
Hey, but they weren't worried (They weren't worried)
This I know (This I know)
Chorus 2:
They knew that Jesus (Jesus, He will fix it)
They knew that Jesus (Jesus, He will fix it)
They knew that Jesus (Jesus, He will fix it)
After a while

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[i] New adults are individuals between the age of eighteen and twenty-five years of age. The term new adult was first coined by St. Martin's Publishing company in 2009. The publishing company developed this term for this audience to advance a new genre of fiction with protagonist within this age group. New adults have different experiences than teenagers or individuals over the age of twenty-five, specifically attaining the right to vote, attending college but may still need the financial support and guidance of their parents and family members.