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GOOD FOR WHOM?

AN ANALYSIS OF DESEGREGATION EFFORTS IN OKLAHOMA'S HISTORICALLY BLACK TOWNSHIPS

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AN ANALYSIS OF DESEGREGATION EFFORTS IN OKLAHOMA'S HISTORICALLY BLACK TOWNSHIPS

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND POLICY STUDIES

BY THE COMMITTEE CONSISTING OF

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Acknowledgements

Whew! How I have waited for this day! This is the final task of this huge feat I have undertaken, and as I reflect on how I got here, I am overwhelmed with gratitude for the people who helped carry me along the way.

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Our greater is here.

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Abstract

In 1954, the Supreme Court's ruling in Brown *v.* Board of Education declared de jure racial segregation in public schools unconstitutional, which many had hoped would lead to greater opportunities for Black students. While scholars have examined school desegregation at length through the perspectives of Black youth, most existing research focuses on urban and suburban contexts, leaving research on school desegregation in rural areas underdeveloped. This dissertation investigates the retrospective perspectives of ten Black adults, ages 66 to 76, who were educated in rural public schools in Oklahoma's historically Black townships during the implementation of desegregation initiatives from 1954 to 1974. By using narrative inquiry, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with ten participants and analyzed thematically. The participants described how they encountered school desegregation at different ages, grade levels, and community contexts. From the analyses, the following central themes were derived: *loss of cultural identity and community institutions, legacy of strong Black educational communities, emotional and social challenges of desegregation, and recognition of expanded opportunities.* Together, these themes suggested that school desegregation disrupted Black educational ecosystems in certain ways. However, Black adults also described what they used to succeed in desegregated schools. By examining experiences with school desegregation in rural Black townships, this study contributes to scholarship on school desegregation by documenting an under-explored context. This study further offers suggestive evidence that school desegregation policies may have carried unintended consequences that reshaped educational, cultural, and communal life in rural Black townships in lasting ways.

Introduction

"Bombers" Vignette

In 1956, two years after the monumental Brown *v.* Board of Education, a high school football team in Southwest Oklahoma chose to desegregate before their schools did. Known as the "Bombers," the team brought Black and white players together despite resistance from townspeople and local businesses. Parents objected, with some white parents pulling their children from the roster while others debated the case. Yet their coach persisted, insisting the team would compete as one.

Over the course of that season, historians chronicled how the players of Black and White backgrounds formed bonds on and off the field (Tramel, 2007). They practiced, traveled, and stood together in the face of hostility. When restaurants refused to serve Black players, the entire team left without eating. Their solidarity culminated in a state championship but also drew backlash. During the final game, a fight broke out between a Black player and a white fan. Not only did his Black and white teammates defend him, but also Black and white fans stood behind the team.

The Bombers' story illustrates how community solidarity could have served as a model for educational desegregation, an idea central to this study's investigation of Oklahoma's historically Black townships. This story is a salient example of what integration could have looked like if approached with courage, unity, and leadership. If schools had this same mindset, courageous leadership, community support, and student solidarity, then the story of educational integration might have been one triumph rather than tension.

School desegregation initially gained steam following the Supreme Court case of Brown *v.* Board of Education of Topeka (1954) decision. The landmark decision declared segregation in

the United States public school system to be unconstitutional (Brown *v.* Board of Education of Topeka, Shawnee County, Kansas, et al, 1954). The case marked the beginning of the end of segregation by race in the United States. In 1951, a group of Black parents in Topeka, Kansas filed a lawsuit against the Board of Education alleging that their children were being denied an opportunity for an equal education when compared to their white counterparts. There was a school closer to their home attended by white students, but Black students were forced to attend a segregated Black school. The facilities at the Black school did not mirror those of the white school. Therefore, since educational access was not 'separate and equal,' the family decided to file a lawsuit (Brown *v.* Board, 1954).

After exhausting all local attempts to desegregate, they took the fight to the Supreme Court. During the case, the Supreme Court considered several key issues, including whether segregation in public schools violated the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, which guarantees that all citizens be treated equally under the law (U.S. Const. amend XIV; Griffen & Schools, 2019). The Court's decision explored whether segregation had a detrimental effect on the education of Black children by being harmful during the development of a child's self-worth (Brown *v.* Board, 1954; Bergner, 2009). In 1954, after approximately three years, the Court issued the ruling in Brown *v.* Board that segregation in public schools was indeed unconstitutional. The Court's decision was based on the idea that segregation was detrimental to the self-worth of Black children; thus, making that educational experience inherently discriminatory (Bergner, 2009; Brown *v.* Board, 1954).

The Brown decision was touted as an advantageous achievement for students of color nationwide as they would now have access to the educational resources and support white students utilized for decades (Crain & Mahard, 1978; Stephan, 1978). With school desegregation

came the idea that Black students would benefit from the opportunities their non-Black colleagues were allowed to experience. Those schools were thought to prepare the students for their future since they had better physical plant facilities, pupil-teacher ratios, counselors, materials, and resources (Bell, 2004; Frankenberg, Lee & Orfield, 2003; Reber, 2005; Walker, 2001). Some believed that the students stood a longer life expectancy by attending schools that had largely white populations (Reber, 2005; Stephan, 1978;). The educational rationale for school desegregation rests largely upon claims that it improves the access of minority students to the higher quality education generally available to white Americans and therefore improves both minority students' educational outcomes and life chances (Mickelson, 2003). Some were insulted by this outlook.

An article by Hale-Benson (1990) stated that Black people believed racial desegregation was not necessary to improve the academic achievement of Black children. Some observers in the Black community believed that Black students would receive a stronger education in their segregated schools (Philipsen, 1994) than they would in desegregated schools. Black students may have attended more aesthetically pleasing school facilities, but some of the racial discrimination that students experienced in desegregated buildings may not have been worth it (Morris, 2001). There were other factors that made school desegregation detrimental to Black educators and the Black community at large. One significant factor was the firing of excellent Black teachers, a consequence of the Brown v. Board decision that continues to effect schools today. Other factors included the closure and renaming of Black schools, the exclusion of Black communities from desegregation decisions, the loss of culturally affirming curricula and school traditions, the unequal transportation of Black students, hostile racial climates within formerly white schools, and the continued segregation of students through tracking, discipline, and

restricted access to advanced educational opportunities. Collectively, these practices demonstrate that desegregation frequently required Black communities to surrender their institutions' educators, and cultural authority without receiving equal power within the schools they entered. With race-based segregation now illegal through the Brown decision, many researchers and proponents of this legislation failed to account for how this could affect students who were the most directly affected by the decision.

Rural Areas and School Desegregation in Oklahoma

Black townships predate statehood in many cases as their inception came after the Civil War when freedmen received land allotments because of revised treaties forcibly signed by the Five Civilized Tribes (McAuley, 1998). In these townships, there were post offices, stores, schools, barbershops, and other amenities. These small, rural Black townships were, in some ways, unique to Oklahoma and drew in many other Black people who wanted to experience what was considered the promised land (McAuley, 1998). The late Cassandra Gaines described Black Townships as “small and quiet but having a lot of quality of life” (Overall, 2007). These spaces “served as spatial identity markers used for sharing and exchanging cultural values, traditions, beliefs, and knowledge” (Oliver & Cox, 2022, pp. 42-43).

There were about thirty Black townships founded in the state's pre-establishment from 1865 to 1920 (McAuley, 1998). The land where the townships were established provided rich soil that made farming lucrative for the people (Oliver & Cox, 2022). These agrarian communities were common in the All-Black townships. After the Great Depression, many of the Black townships did not survive due to residents relocating to find jobs. Today there are thirteen inhabited townships. The remaining historical Black townships in Oklahoma are Colfax, Clearbrook, The Visionary Prairie, The Legacy Crossroads, Dunbar, Harlan, The Blues Frontier,

Glenview, Millford, Redding, The Phoenix Settlement, and Crossell (Ragsdale, 2005). Some of the townships are more popular than others, but all of them have a special place in the hearts of the people who established their lives there. There was pride in the Black residents of the townships that presented itself in all aspects of their lives (Luke, 2017).

Many Black townships established Black schools that provided what was considered good education to the citizens of those communities (Cayton, 1976). Schools were of utmost importance to the residents because they believed education was the way to a better life. Teachers were a familial presence for their students, acting as a liaison between the school and the community (Franklin, 1990). Lisa Delpit refers to Black teachers in schools in her book, *Multiplication is for White People* (2012, p.77), as "warm demanders." As warm demanders, teachers put pressure on students to do their best work while being on their best behavior. Students were expected to do well; that was not an option. Teachers in the Black community enjoyed a fictive kinship with the students that allowed them the liberty to do whatever was necessary to make sure students were successful in all facets of school (Chatters et.al., 1994).

Black townships are special places for understanding school desegregation compared to other places because they have received little attention in scholarly literature. It bears understanding how the people narrate their experiences and how those experiences may have affected the lives they went on to live. Secondly, the students in Black schools experienced a high level of school pride because they belonged there. There was a sense of community resilience and agency. By exploring the experiences of Black students within the communities in Oklahoma's Black Townships during school desegregation efforts, it can highlight the resilience and agency of these communities. It also unveils how they were able to navigate and respond to challenges, demonstrating the strength of the community.

Previous Research on School Desegregation and Outcomes

Previous research on school desegregation and its outcomes is predominately quantitative with some studies indicating positive outcomes from desegregation efforts (Hanushek et al., 2009; Palardy et al., 2015). However, some studies reveal consequences of desegregation that remain unresolved. The dismissal and displacement of Black teachers threatened the economic, social and cultural stability of Black communities and ultimately eroded the Black institutional authority that had sustained Black schools as centers of community life. Because Black teachers often serve not only as educators but also as community leaders, cultural advocates, mentors, and economic anchors, their removal weakened the network of support that had historically sustained Black students and their families. According to Holmes (1995), many Black children showed low levels of academic achievement, not because they were isolated from the mainstream society as they knew it, but because they were isolated from their own cultural roots by attending predominately white schools. Recent research indicates that students who have teachers whose racial background reflects their own score higher on standardized tests have more favorable classroom behavioral and academic outcomes (Egalite et.al., 2015; Redding, 2019). These positive outcomes also extend to students' feelings of belonging and overall positive perceptions of instruction and educational aspirations (Egalite & Kisida, 2018; Sageman, 2026). More pointedly, Black teachers have been shown to beneficial to all children's educational achievement (Blazar, 2024) and test scores (Cleveland & Scherer, 2026).

Cumulatively, there are several research studies focused on desegregation in suburban and urban settings (Caruthers & Poos, 2015; Coats, 2010; Lind & Bell-Tolliver, 2015; Milner & Howard, 2004). Carruthers and Poos (2015), for example, found that the five students who participated felt that teachers had high expectations for them which were developed through

relationships with the teachers. The students applauded the teachers for having those high academic expectations and spending time with them while engaging them in their learning. The difference between this study and some of the others is the attention paid to the affective outcomes, not just academic outcomes. An ethics of care and justice were a large component of the findings.

Lind and Tolliver (2015) study was an autobiographical and biographical exploration conducted to examine the experiences of one of the authors who was the only student to desegregate to a junior high school in early 1960. Braddock (1980) data show that Black, Latino and white students who attend desegregated schools were more likely to work in racially mixed workplaces. Blacks with white coworkers hold jobs of higher rank and pay than those who attended segregated schools. Parents who attended desegregated schools are more likely to have attended college, had better jobs, and lived in desegregated neighborhoods.

From the Braddock (1980) study, Braddock surveyed 253 Black undergraduates attending four Florida institutions, 2 predominantly white and 2 predominantly white. The students reported their high school experiences in those respective settings. Braddock's findings support the idea that school segregation can reproduce itself across educational levels. Black students who attend predominantly white high schools were more likely to enroll in predominantly white colleges, while students from predominantly Black high schools were more likely to enroll into similarly segregated college settings. This pattern remained significant even after accounting for factors such as social class, academic performance, and college costs.

The longitudinal research referenced in the Braddock study was taken from an analysis of survey data from the National Longitudinal Study of the high school class of 1972. It showed that the effects of desegregation varied by region. In the North, Black students from

predominantly white high schools and persist through college. Greater college persistence can increase the likelihood of degree completion, stable employment, higher lifetime earnings, occupational mobility, improved health outcomes, and greater economic security. In the South, however, desegregated schooling did not consistently produce the same benefits, suggesting that simply placing Black students in white schools was insufficient without supportive and equitable institutional conditions. When these institutional conditions were absent, desegregation was less likely to translate into long term gains such as college completion, stable employment, occupational mobility, higher earnings, economic security and improved health in adulthood (Johnson, 2011).

Qualitative methods for gathering data were across previous studies. For example, Carruthers and Poos (2015) employed oral history and counternarratives to collect participants' accounts, while other researchers used qualitative narrative analysis data to examine learning experiences and memories of teachers' behaviors. Preston-Grimes combined oral history interviews with archival records, curriculum guides, educational reports, and participants' artifacts to investigate the teacher experiences of five Black women who taught in segregated southern schools. Crawford and Bohan (2019) similarly collected oral histories from five members of the Atlanta 9 and triangulated their accounts with school records, board minutes, news reports, legal documents, and other archival materials before coding the narrative for recurring themes. Morris (1999) conducted a three-year qualitative case study of an all-Black elementary school, using in-depth interviews with educators, parents, business owners and other stakeholders to examine the relationships connecting the school, Black families and the surrounding community. Narrative inquiry, an approach to studying human life as a way of honoring the lived experience was the chosen approach used by Lind and Bell-Tolliver (2015) to

understand the two questions asked of participant LaVerne with the main question being, “How did her experiences with segregation shape her life?”.

Outcomes from the research on desegregation have yielded mixed results. While the ruling in Brown *v.* Board of Education marked a legal turning point, subsequent studies show that its educational and social impacts were uneven across regions and communities. On one hand, scholars have documented measurable gains (Drury, 1980; Kurleander & Yun, 2005; Patterson, et al., 2008; Williams & Byars, 1970), including improved access to school resources, higher graduation rates, and expanded opportunities for Black students, particularly in districts where desegregation was meaningfully enforced. On the other hand, research also highlights significant costs (Stephan, 1978; Williams & Byars, 1968), such as the closure of Black schools, the displacement of Black educators, and the loss of culturally affirming educational spaces that had long served as anchors in Black communities. These effects were often more pronounced in rural and historically Black towns, where schools played central social and cultural roles.

Additionally, patterns of white flight, shifting district boundaries, and policy cutbacks contributed to resegregation in the decades following initial integration efforts. Taken together, the literature suggests that desegregation was not a singular or uniformly successful reform, but rather a complex and ongoing process shaped by local context, power dynamics, and the persistence of structural inequality.

Moreover, Anderson (1988) and Bonastia (2012) highlight how rural districts often resisted desegregation longer and more intensely, sometimes shutting down entire school systems rather than desegregating. Additional work by Vanessa Siddle Walker (1996, 2000, 2001) documents the closure of Black schools and the displacement of Black educators in rural communities, emphasizing the loss of locally rooted institutions that had historically sustained

Black educational life. In rural contexts, long travel distances, sparse populations, and economic constraints frequently meant that desegregation resulted in Black students being bused far from their communities, weakening ties between schools and local culture. More recent scholarship demonstrated that school resegregation is not confined to urban settings but also affects rural communities across regions including the south and Midwest. Logan and Burdick-Will (2017) identified persistent racial segregation and unequal access to educational resources in rural schools, with patterns varying substantially by region. Wilcox's (2021) study of rural Georgia similarly illustrated how the historical legacy of segregation remains embedded in contemporary schooling and community racial discourse. Examining seven southern counties, Taylor, et al (2019) found that the creation of new predominantly white school districts increased segregation between districts and made district boundaries an increasingly significant source of both school and residential separation. Collectively, these studies suggest that rural resegregation is sustained through the interaction of racial sorting, district fragmentation, and boundary lines that place students in racially distinct educational environments.

Coats (2010) resembles the present study in that interviews were conducted with students in the segregated South between 1940-1969. This study is pertinent because before the Brown *v.* Board decision, Black students were firmly established in segregated schooling. After the Brown decision, students were able to compare the two experiences. That information is crucial to the body of knowledge on this topic. However, missing from the Coats' study is the transition students experienced through desegregation efforts. Carruthers and Poos (2015) used the following question to guide their research, "What were the schooling experiences for Black graduates in this segregated setting?" While this study was conducted in Kansas City, Missouri (KCMO), the setting was completely different from those of the Black Townships. However,

despite this, there seemed to be some similarities in how students and teachers "did school" in segregated settings. Thus, in this research study, I build on this research strand by asking the question: "How do individuals who experienced school desegregation in the Black Townships narrate their experience?"

Gaps in the Literature

There are many studies on school desegregation efforts following the Brown decision (Braddock & Dawkins, 1984; Katz, 1964; Silverman & Shaw, 1973; Stephan, 1978). Many of them examine archival records and their general conclusions are that students fared better educationally because of desegregation. Some studies employed interviews to understand what students went through during desegregation (Bell-Tolliver, 2018; Norton, 2021). What was less clear from these studies is how people of color responded to leaving their schools and attending schools with people who may or may not have wanted them there. Lastly, there has not been a study that investigates specifically the historically Black Townships and how students perceived leaving their schools and attending predominantly white schools. Collectively, these studies reveal the persistent erasure of rural Black voices; a gap this study attempts to address. It is an essential piece needed to advance our understanding of Black experiences with school desegregation. Taking the time to listen to people who attended schools in Black townships and trying to understand their experiences will yield information vital to better understanding how desegregation efforts were experienced by those marginalized groups who were intended to benefit from it. Closely examining desegregation efforts in Black Townships will give insight into the development of effective education policies in distinct settings, such as under-explored rural locales.

The Present Study

This study will examine the educational and socio-emotional impacts of school desegregation from the perspective of Black people who directly experienced desegregation efforts in rural public schools in Oklahoma's Historical Black Townships in the twenty years following the Brown decision (1954-1974). With this purpose in mind, I sought to answer the following research question: "How do Black students who experienced school desegregation in Oklahoma's Black townships narrate their educational journeys and identities?"

Guided by Critical Race Theory, this study uses narrative inquiry to elevate participants lived experiences as a potential counternarrative to dominant integration discourse. In critical research, counternarratives are necessary tools for analyzing the common culture of race and confronting dominant interpretations (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Counternarratives get at the "real deal" of the experience they had. Cumulatively, this study is centered around the voices that are relegated to the margins when referring to school desegregation and integration, Black students. Counternarratives will serve as the lens through which this study examines the experience of school desegregation in schools in historically Black townships.

This study is, therefore, qualitative: Participants, who were those who attended school in one of the Black Townships in Oklahoma during the study period (some of which are no longer in existence), were interviewed to obtain retrospective information about their experience with school desegregation. For this study, I ultimately recruited 10 participants who experienced school desegregation from 1954-1974. This twenty-year period is intentional due to race relations at that time. Oklahoma has a unique historical context regarding race relations and segregation. Understanding the specific history of Black Townships in the state can shed light on the experiences and the challenges of Black residents they faced during periods of segregation.

Contributions of the Study

There are several important potential contributions of this study. First, this study is significant because this subgroup of participants will add to the canon surrounding school desegregation. The current research regarding educational desegregation takes many forms, but the literature lacks the perspectives of students who attended school in historically, Black rural townships. It is important to understand that some students attended school in Black Townships but did not necessarily live there at the same time. While school desegregation is the focus of this study, the information garnered from participants will be potentially useful for future planning of school desegregation efforts. While some would argue that educational spaces are completely desegregated, the data suggests that simply is untrue (Denton, 1995; Owens et.al., 2016; Sohoni & Saporito, 2009). Therefore, having these conversations centered around past educational desegregation efforts chronicled in this manner tells a side of the story that may not have been told prior. Using this information coupled with archival records will tell a more holistic story of school desegregation and how it affected Black students. The information gathered from participants can also give significant insight that will be useful during future educational desegregation efforts.

Implementing Brown changed Black educational communities in the following ways: 1) Busing Black students out of their own spaces to attend schools that were predominately white; 2) Reassigning Black bodies to meet racial quotas; 3) Socializing Black students away from their communities which was potentially dangerous for them, and 4) Redefining the triad of church, school, and community, which is the backbone of Black life. Evidence suggests that many of these students were bussed into educational settings that did not want them there, instilling a lack of belonging in these spaces (Karpinski, 2006). Then there was the conundrum of where to place Black teachers and administrators. Many Black teachers were not allowed to teach in the

predominately white schools; therefore, they were left unemployed (Fairclough, 2004; Haney, 1978; “Negro Teachers Promised Help”, 1956).

Historians have chronicled how the lack of Black professionals at desegregated schools created a substantial breakdown in the school experience for Black students as their teachers were an extension of their families (Chatters et.al., 1994). African American teachers represent surrogate parent figures acting as disciplinarians, counselors, role models and advocates. This role allowed Black teachers to enjoy a leadership role in their community as liaisons between the school and home (Fairclough, 2000; Karpinski, 2006). This was disrupted mainly due to school desegregation when many of them lost their positions within educational sites (“Negro Teachers Promised Help”, 1956). Experiences resulting from school desegregation are a topic that has been researched heavily (Braddock & Eitle, 2004; Crain & Mahard, 1978; McConahay, 1978). However, the perspective of those who experienced this event in Black rural townships is largely missing from the literature. The data speaks to the fact that the experiences of Black students have had in some cases, questionable events happen to them despite school desegregation efforts. Many did not feel as if they belonged. They were not welcomed into the school, even to the extent of feeling like “an unwanted guest in a strange land” (Parker & Scott, 1985). Low achieving African American students benefit most from relationships with African American teachers (King, 1993).

The Brown *v.* Board (1954) decision came about declaring that segregating schools based on race, was now illegal and indeed harmful to the self-worth of Black students. Although schools are not necessarily segregated by race, research has shown that they are potentially segregated in different ways. There are schools within schools that do not allow students of color based on specific criteria that they do not meet (Horsford & McKenzie, 2008). Advanced-level

classes are not offered to others to keep all students in their predetermined space. On the outside, one can say that segregation is not based on race, but ultimately that is the goal, and separating students based on contrived ability accomplishes that.

Lastly, insights from the study of school desegregation in Oklahoma can inform policymakers about the historical legacies that may still influence educational policies today. This understanding is essential for developing effective and equitable education policies. It is crucial to understand all aspects of school desegregation so that when (not if) we must make changes in the make-up of the school population, we will have some insight that could help us make sure the students experience a smooth transition.

Chapter II: A Review of the Literature

To situate the review of the literature within the context of the current study, it is important to explore the robust literature that addresses the history of schooling. In the literature review, I will delve into the history of schooling in the US, education for Black communities, Oklahoma's educational history, the road to Brown, Black educational spaces pre- and post-Brown, anti-Blackness in educational spaces, Black townships, and Black schools. This literature review will build the foundation on which this study will be established.

History of Schools in the U.S.

Schools in the United States were originally developed to serve the needs of white men, particularly those of property-holding status (Thattai, 2001), while largely excluding women and people of color. Early colonial schools were designed to provide religious and civic training to white boys, leaving girls' education confined to domestic or moral instruction. Enslaved Africans were legally forbidden from learning to read and write in many slaveholding states, while Indigenous children were often forced into missionary boarding schools designed to assimilate them into white Christian culture (Spring 2016; Kaestle, 1983).

Education for White Students

Before there were any plans for a universal or unified method of schooling, there was public education based in Connecticut and New Hampshire (Thattai, 2001). Due to the indoctrination these religious schools provided, by the middle of the next century, private schools would become common. It is important to note that this system of schooling was only available to those who were white, wealthy, male, and landowners (Thattai, 2001); males who did not come from a family with means were taught through apprenticeships (Adams et.al., 1941). This enabled them to gain skills that could later be used to support their families.

White girls had a notably different educational experience with their education being solely focused on becoming successful homemakers, wives, and mothers (Noltemeyer et.al., 2012). This severely hampered the educational pursuits and achievements of white women at this time. However, in some spaces, there were shorter, less extensive classes in the evenings for them (Hogan, 1992). Despite this disparity in opportunity, it was still evident that education was important to the young nation's citizens, so much so that after the Declaration of Independence, seven states had provisions for education within their state constitutions (Thattai, 2001). Regarding public schooling, one of the earliest plans for a system of schooling that would provide free public education to both male and female students was introduced by Thomas Jefferson in 1779 (Thattai, 2001). He proposed that elementary schools would teach reading, writing, and computation to their students. The students would attend the school for three years free of charge. After three years of free education, the most talented male students would be selected for further education at the public's expense.

This plan revived interest in public education and created a conducive environment for the creation of the first system of schools and later the first Board of Education in Massachusetts (Adams, et al., 1941). The plan was to convince citizens that education would create better citizens, unite the country, and reduce both poverty and crime (Burgess, 1967; Spring, 2019; Thattai, 2001). Public education reformers were able to garner public support for these limited plans. However, the educational opportunities they promoted were not equally available to racial minorities, most women, or people experiencing poverty. A major proponent of this plan was Horace Mann, called the "father of American education" (Baines, 2006; Finkelstein, 1990). Mann believed that schools should not only produce leaders but train citizens (Moss, 2011). Democratic values and beliefs should be taught in schools as he believed there to be political,

intellectual, economic, and social purposes for schooling (Baines, 2006). His plan and increased advocacy resulted in a larger number of affluent white females now being granted access to education and educational spaces (Noltemeyer et al., 2012). By the end of the 1800s, free public elementary education was available to most white students because of a few legislative measures. However, these offerings differed vastly by gender with many supporting a movement to equalize education for white females (Franklin et al., 1991) to bring it up to par with male educational offerings.

It is important to note that education was not utilized for the betterment of diverse cultures and communities that were in the United States at this time. In fact, education was utilized as a weapon to strip communities of color of their language and heritage (Spring, 2019). As a result, schools and schooling looked vastly different in communities of color. Black communities had very different experiences with the American educational system.

Education for Black Communities: Enslavement to Reconstruction

The history of schools for Black students in the United States is complex, influenced by historical, cultural, and political factors. Black students' experiences have been shaped by issues like enslavement, discrimination, and anti-Blackness.

The Enslaved

It is important to note that before their kidnapping and forced servitude in America, there existed an extensive body of African scholarship that long predated European introduction to such spaces (Swartz, 2007). Contrary to the popular historical canon, enslaved Africans did not come to America without knowledge and intelligence. Unbeknownst to their oppressors, these individuals had maintained societies, livelihoods, cultures, and the like for millennia.

However, once enslaved, there were few opportunities for Africans to learn how to read in their new place. Those who learned to read only did so when it benefited their owners. Therefore, few were taught to read, write, and solve simple math problems (Levine & Levine, 2014). This was only done when there was no other option. Both de jure and de facto laws explicitly prohibited the education of enslaved Africans with severe and direct consequences for those who did not adhere (Du Bois & Jones, 2017). There was virtually no formal schooling for the enslaved Africans or their children; however, there were various accounts of enslaved African children learning to read accidentally while engaging with the children of their enslavers.

The Free

Despite their exclusion from many historical accounts in America, there have always been free Black individuals in the United States of America (Levine & Levine, 2014). This omission may be because the legal status of these free Black individuals was constantly in a state of flux during both the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Higginbotham & Bosworth, 1991). However, these individuals came to this country as indentured servants who worked for years to pay off their debt accrued with passage to the country along with clothing and food (Levine & Levine, 2014). Others utilized their skills to earn small wages that could be later used to buy their freedom. The last group of free Black individuals were those who were freed, based on their owners' morality, in a process called manumission (Levine & Levine, 2014). All these factors contributed to the population of free Black citizens. In fact, when the Maryland Certificates of Freedom were compiled between 1806 and 1864, it was reported that 35% of Black females were born free along with 24% of males (Komlos, 1992). In New York, it was recorded that free Blacks made up 33.5%, 56.8%, and 83.8% of the Black population in 1790, 1800, and 1810 respectively (White, 1988). There were similar communities in Philadelphia as well (Kammerer,

2017). These free Blacks were not limited to Northern communities; there are reports of these communities existing in the South in Louisiana (Ingersoll, 1991), South Carolina, and Florida (Ingersoll, 1991; Landers, 2013; Schweninger, 1990).

While these individuals were free in a sense, their freedom did not come with the level of access that was available to white citizens of the time. These groups of citizens were still bound by several antebellum "Black codes" that limited almost every area of their lives (Levine & Levine, 2014). One benefit of their free status was a right that was unavailable to their brothers and sisters who were still enslaved, education. Unfortunately, there were scarce educational options for Blacks and as a result, educational pursuits were relegated to private schools or public schools established by Northern missionaries in New England (Levine & Levine, 2014). The more progressive communities established schools for their students and paid tuition for them to attend.

Post-Civil War

However, after the Civil War, Black people were granted citizenship thus making them eligible for education through the 13th and 14th Amendments to the United States Constitution (U.S. Const. amend XIII, U.S. Const. amend XIV). Immediately following, many formerly enslaved departed from agrarian education ideologies (Anderson, 1988). As a community, Blacks collectively realized that their maintained freedom would be secured through education and literacy specifically. Anderson (1988) quotes Booker T. Washington as saying, "It was a whole race trying to go to school. Few were too young, and none too old" (Washington, as cited in Anderson, 1988, p. 5). This spoke to the foundational period of Black education. To further this aim of collective education, many groups accepted aid from Northern missionary societies, the new Freedmen's Bureau, and some sympathetic whites who were aligned with their cause

(Levine & Levine, 2014). During this point in time, there was no universal system of schools in the United States. However, in the South, the movement for a unified school system was fueled by the formerly enslaved Blacks (Anderson, 1988). W.E.B. Du Bois was even quoted saying, "Public education for all at public expense, was, in the South, a Negro idea" (Du Bois, 2017, p. 570). This vision was furthered by the Freedmen's Bureau, which aided in the founding of approximately 3,000 schools that later became the nucleus of the South's public educational system (Levine & Levine, 2014). While these schools were established by the Freedmen's Bureau, they were maintained and protected by the communities in which they resided. Many of the Northern teachers secured by the Freedmen's Bureau to aid in the education of the formerly enslaved were astonished to find that these communities had created education collectives and associations that were uninterested in having their educational system controlled by white Northerners (Anderson, 1988).

Reconstruction

Reconstruction (1865-1877) was the period immediately following the U.S. Civil War when the federal government attempted to reintegrate the formerly Confederate states into the Union and redefine the social, political and economic status of formerly enslaved Americans. During this time several amendments were passed giving Black Americans critical rights that led to the passing of the Civil Rights' Act in 1964. The Thirteenth Amendment formally abolished slavery and involuntary servitude throughout the United States, except as the consequence for a crime. The Fourteenth Amendment, a cornerstone of the United States Constitution, granted full citizenship to all natural born and naturalized persons.

In post-Civil War Reconstruction America, previously Confederate states were tasked with writing new state constitutions before they were allowed to be readmitted to the union

(Levine & Levine, 2014). During this time, newly freed Blacks vocalized their right to education under federal law. Most states complied with vague wording about free, public schools, open to all students, but laws requiring attendance at integrated schools failed (Levine & Levine, 2014). Legislatively, the law did create a free, public education for all students; however, inequities and bias led to the creation of two distinct educational systems that were rooted in both white supremacy and the myth of Black inferiority. These systems were able to be maintained through a new educational policy that was based on the outcomes of intelligence quotients or IQ tests (Franklin et al., 1991). These examinations were used to permit or deny admittance to schools based on the scores of Black children. These tests were created and utilized to ensure that the posterity of the formerly enslaved Africans would remain, by American standards, uneducated. IQ tests created an unjust stigma about the capabilities of Black children while concurrently limiting their upward mobility (Franklin et al., 1991) keeping them economically subservient to the white majority. While this idea of IQ-based educational tracking was not new, this widespread scientific rationalization for those who belonged in educational spaces was a new one (Franklin et al., 1991).

Reconstruction to Brown v. Board

In the time leading to Brown *v.* Board, it is important to note that just as many Black parents wanted their students to attend white schools as those who did not (Levine & Levine, 2014). The reasons stemmed from the mistrust of white people, fear of their students being treated poorly in a place where they were not welcome, and lack of diversity in teaching staff. As a result, there were no viable liaisons connected with the community from which the Black students came (Levine & Levine, 2014). Supporters of segregation believed that the students received a good education in segregated schools (Walker, 1991). While these families

understood that they could have utilized better facilities and books, they believed that teachers had high expectations of student achievement in school that reinforced their community values (Fairclough, 2000; Walker, 1996; 2000; 2001).

Regardless of individual families' feelings about school desegregation, during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s, many Black and white Americans fought for the educational desegregation of schools. The landmark Supreme Court case Brown *v.* Board (1954) declared segregation unconstitutional (Brown *v.* Board of Education of Topeka, Shawnee County, Kansas, et al., 1954). School desegregation was met with resistance through violence and intimidation as Black students slowly integrated into previously all-white institutions. Even through challenges, Black people made significant contributions to education for their children.

This progress made in Black schools continued until Brown *v.* Board of Education in Topeka ruled that segregation was harmful to students and who they grew to become (Brown *v.* Board of Education of Topeka, Shawnee County, Kansas, et al., 1954). It was after this monumental legislation that the spaces created for Black students to grow and flourish began to erode. This had dire consequences for Black students (Wells, 2000). However, before Brown *v.* Board, there were a few court cases that began to turn the tide on how inequities and inequalities were viewed by society.

Road to Brown

The United States educational system was founded on the idea that education is the key to gaining access to societal resources and compensates for the inequalities among social groups (Beck & Muskin, 2012). Substandard educational opportunities are unfavorable, even injurious to some learners at a time when human capital was a determining factor in their lives as successful citizens. This type of inequity in education can halt the forward progression of a

people (Codrington & Fairchild, 2012). Educational levels and race are major factors in the prediction of socio-economic status in families, life span, and overall quality of life. Therefore, the absence of quality education can have irreparable consequences for a family and eventually the people (Frazier, 2009). It was believed and stated by a retired teacher from Prince Edward County, Virginia that "had we stayed 'separate, but equal, our [Black] children would have been better off educationally" (Fairclough, 2004, p. 44).

School desegregation was a way that power structures in the United States conceptualized equitable funding and practice for segregated Black schools. Some proponents of school desegregation posited that Black schools were subordinate (Bell, 1980) in the type of education they provided their students; the teachers were ill-prepared in their profession and Black students were biologically inferior to white people concerning intelligence (Morris, 2020; Washington, 1973). These ideas have long remained in the conversation about the education of Black people. Instead of tackling these misconceptions head-on, the urgency to desegregate schools resulted in surface-level changes in education sites—students moved from one school to another. This left the real work of attending to assumptions, strategies, infrastructure, policies, and praxes that may have met the needs of all students undone (Milner and Howard, 2004).

Brown *v.* Board of Topeka (1954) is the most recognized court case in the fight against segregation. Linda Brown became the face of all those who were concerned about educational inequities (Brown *v.* Board of Education of Topeka, 1954). She represented the families that took part in the class action suit, ending separation according to race in our nation's education system. While it is well-documented how Black educational staff were largely fired as a result (Haney, 1978: Thompson, 2022), few studies highlight how students of color coped with this new educational environment. In the 70 years after Brown *v.* Board, the US Public Education system

remained largely segregated (Garcia, 2020). However, several cases acted as a foundation for this monumental legislative victory.

Plessy v. Ferguson

Plessy *v.* Ferguson (1896) was a case that highlighted the idea of 'separate, but equal'. Plessy was a man who was ⅛ Black with the appearance of a white man (Golub, 2005). He was on the train and a white man got on needing a seat. It was asked of Plessy to give his seat to this man and Plessy refused (Groves, 1951). He was arrested and charged. Rather than taking the consequences of the charges without question, he decided to fight his case in court. Plessy contended that his 14th Constitutional rights were violated because of his arrest (Golub, 2005; Groves, 1951). Ultimately, the high court decided that if there was to be separation, the facilities would have to be equal.

Murray v. Pearson

Murray *v.* Pearson (1936) was a case that came about because Donald Murray wanted to attend the University of Maryland but was denied based on his race. Thurgood Marshall took this case, as he had been denied admittance to the University of Maryland Law School. Unlike Murray, Thurgood Marshall decided to attend Howard University, an All-Black university, instead of obtaining his degree in 1933 (Jackson, 1994). Citing Plessy *v.* Ferguson (1896), they argued that the state failed to provide equal opportunities for comparable law schools in the state. The Black law schools were out of state. The case went all the way to Maryland's Court of Appeals, which upheld the circuit court's decision that Murray be admitted to law school at the University of Maryland, the state's only law school (Washington, 1973). As a result, the law school had to be open to all races.

Sipuel v. Board of Regents

Sipuel *v.* Board of Regents of the University of Oklahoma (1948) was a case in which a female Black sought entrance into a state law school and was denied admittance based on her race. According to Oklahoma statutes, whites and Blacks were prohibited from attending classes together (Saxe, 1964). Ms. Sipuel decided to take her case to the county district court. To begin this three-year battle, Thurgood Marshall represented Ms. Sipuel in the case that she ultimately lost. Not satisfied with that decision, she took her case to the Oklahoma Supreme Court. After an unfavorable ruling from that court, her petition reached the US Supreme Court (Saxe, 1964). The United States Supreme Court decided that an equal opportunity for law school must be provided for all students. Due to this ruling, the University of Oklahoma developed a law school for her in five days at nearby Langston, OK (Hubbell, 1972; Saxe, 1964). Ms. Sipuel knew this was not equivalent to the University of Oklahoma law school. Once again, she took her case to court. After this petition, Ms. Sipuel was allowed admittance to the University of Oklahoma law school. Conditions were not ideal with students of color having to sit in the back of the classroom and not being allowed to eat with their white peers (Hubbell, 1972; Saxe, 1964). However, these conditions continued until 1950.

Brown *v.* Board of Education and Its Implications

The Brown *v.* Board of Education case started as a class action suit involving plaintiffs seeking to appeal state-sponsored segregation in our nation's schools. Linda Brown, the face of the case, wanted to attend a school close to her home (Yell, 2022). That school was a white school that did not admit Black students. As a result of the school's refusal to accept the children, they had to walk through a dangerous railroad switchyard to get to the Black school she was expected to attend (Ogletree, 2004). The Browns believed that the segregated school system violated the 14th Amendment and took their case to court. The court decided that "segregation in

public school" was indeed harmful to Black children. Still, segregation was legal because Black and white schools had similar buildings, transportation, curricula, and teachers. It is the belief of many that if the school systems were segregated, they are in essence not equal (Ogletree, 2004).

In 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court outlawed segregation of schools based on race. It demanded that all schools desegregate (Brown *v.* Board, 1954). Although the schools were expected to desegregate, being allowed to do it with "all deliberate speed" due to Brown *v.* Board II (1955) prolonged the process. School districts across the South were given the legal authority to drag their feet as it relates to desegregation, which they did. Desegregation of schools was still being talked about well beyond the 1980s (Bell, 1983). Brown promised to overcome legal separation based on race and promised to provide equal opportunity for education regardless of racial background (Philipsen, 1994).

Black Educational Spaces Before and After Brown

There was always a connection between Black teachers, Black students, and the Black community. After the Brown decision, Black teachers were treated poorly (Heyward, 2022; Ladson-Billings, 2004; Will, 2019). Although many teachers received the best schooling available in the best Northern schools, most were not allowed to teach in desegregated schools (Will, 2019), which resulted in them being dismissed from the profession altogether. It was believed by white parents that Black teachers were not trustworthy enough to teach their children. The large number of teachers who were dismissed from teaching impacts a continued shortage of Black teachers in the field today (Heyward, 2022). When education became a less viable option for Black teachers, they began to explore other options such as business, medicine, and law. While those opportunities for advancement are notable, Black teachers are imperative to and for Black people. Black teachers were the voice in the schooling of Black children after

desegregation of those schools (Milner and Howard, 2004). When Black principals were placed in desegregated schools, it was primarily to discipline Black male students only (Milner & Howard, 2004). With the displacement of Black teachers and administrators, schools were ultimately closed due to busing students to predominantly white schools. The closing of the schools eventually led to the demise of the Black community spirit (Philipsen, 1994).

Ethics of Care

In a study conducted by Caruthers and Poos, (2015), the concept of the ethics of care and justice was said to be maintained in the school setting of Lincoln High School expressed by graduates from 1955-1985. Over a 30-year span, many of the same thoughts were expressed by the students. It is important to note that many times educational reform focuses on cognitive initiatives far more than effective outcomes. Black teachers instilled responsible behaviors in the students (Coats, 2010). Teachers had extremely high expectations for them. Teachers lived near their students in segregated neighborhoods and often attended the same church. Students stated that they had positive relationships with their teachers. Those relationships are described as "solid" and "very good". They also applauded them for having high academic expectations, and spending time with and engaging them in learning. Principals and other admins were respected as authority figures and revered their position as disciplinarians. Students were reprimanded from a place of concern and care. The administration sought to determine the "why of misbehavior…" they talked to you. There was correction, but it came from a place of care and concern centered on respect (Fairclough, 2004). Respect trickled down in the segregated school from the principal to the teachers and the teachers to the students; it most definitely hailed down from students to the authority figures in the school and their own personal lives. Teachers were

viewed as benefactors and racial cheerleaders helping to prepare students to cope with racism from the larger society.

Community Impact

W.E.B. Du Bois was quoted as saying, “Theoretically, the Negro needs neither segregated nor mixed schools. What he needs is education!” (Du Bois, 1935, p. 328). Black schools were a protective enclave for the educational process. They were places where order prevailed, where teachers commanded respect, and where parents supported teachers (Fairclough, 2004). The Black school was a symbol of hope and community pride. These schools brought communities together (Philipsen, 1994). Students could be the best version of themselves. Black teachers knew how to motivate the students (Coats, 2010). They were teaching the whole child in Black schools, and the teachers genuinely cared about the students (Fairclough, 2004). Black teachers showed up to teach, no matter what. Ultimately, they were also a symbol of political emancipation and social mobility in a white-dominated world (Philipsen, 1994).

Student-Teacher Dynamics

Black teachers were considered the elite of Black society (Coats, 2010), a position that came with the utmost respect from those in the community (Fairclough, 2000). Teachers were held in high regard before school desegregation (Milner and Howard, 2004). Much of that status came because of Black teachers also being their pastors and businesspeople in the community (Franklin, 1990). An advantage of being the pastor as well as the teacher is that there was a platform for them to disseminate information about the goals and concerns of the community, to the community. When the time came to lobby for the Brown case, the pastor/teacher put on his hat of activism and shared the knowledge needed for the community to stay abreast of what was

happening in the world. In essence, the Black teacher served as the community spokesperson while also serving as a political activist. Black teachers also kept the same morals and values from home and were mirrored and enforced at school. The parents expected teachers to do so. Teachers cared about the students because they did not allow them to do what they wanted to do (Philipsen, 1994). Students had to obey and be respectful in the school environment.

After the Brown *v.* Board decision, approximately 1/3 of Black teachers lost their jobs (Heyward, 2022; Milner and Howard, 2004; Will, 2019). Although many Black teachers attended schools known to provide an excellent education, they were not allowed to teach white students unless the teacher fit the visible description desired by white patrons (Ladson-Billings, 2004; Will, 2019). Black teachers were divided up based on their complexion with the lighter-skinned teachers being permitted to teach at the desegregated schools. This was because white people deemed the lighter-skinned Black teachers more trustworthy. Milner and Howard (2004) explained that lighter complexioned Black teachers "were supposedly more closely connected to the white students and teachers," and were consequently perceived as less threatening to white communities (p. 289). Black teachers who were allowed to teach in a segregated school, found themselves teaching whites for one purpose and teaching a different purpose for Black students (Milner and Howard, 2004). According to the findings of Milner and Howard (2004), many in Black communities described the process of school desegregation as iatrogenesis. This medical term describes an intervention thought to remedy an illness that does more harm. The impact was more detrimental than the actual disease.

According to Stanford (1997), successful African American teachers in urban schools possessed characteristics that support "community solidarity, community of learners, focus on the whole child and personal accountability" (p. 108). This sentiment also rang true in the rural

areas where many Black schools existed. Black teachers brought quality education to Black students (Milner & Howard, 2004), demanding the best from their students (Coats, 2010). They helped in social and moral development in addition to academics. They shouldered the responsibility to expose the students to what education had to offer in a world not created for their success (Coats, 2010; Fairclough, 2000). Teachers taught "stick-to-it-ness." They taught the students to work hard and persevere, which ultimately led to success for many of them.

Black teachers lived in Black communities and were viewed as extended members of the families they served (Coats, 2010; Milner and Howard, 2004). This proximity allowed the families to get to know one another and added to the respect that the students had for their teachers. They were neighbors with teachers. When students went to church, they saw their teachers there. They shared the same space in school and space outside of school. Parents knew their children were in safe, capable hands. The teachers had the trust of the community and the parents.

Black students respected their teachers (Coats, 2010; Fairclough, 2004). They sought their teachers' approval; it mattered to them. Black students exhibited a sense of pride in their schools. Their extracurricular activities were important to them. Black students were disciplined in school and were provided their goals for life which included being part of the struggle resulting from the political climate due to desegregation of schools (Philipsen, 1994). If a child stood a chance to make it in a hostile environment in school or life in general, discipline and morals had to be an active part of their existence. Black schools were where Black students found their role models (Philipsen, 1994).

Empirical Research on Desegregation

Empirical studies on school desegregation have made significant contributions to understanding the educational, social, and economic effects of desegregation policies. Researchers have documented outcomes such as improved academic achievement, increased educational attainment, higher earnings, and enhanced interracial interactions among Black students who attended desegregated schools (Johnson, 2011; Wells et al., 2016). While these studies provide valuable insights, several limitations warrant consideration.

First, much of the desegregation literature relies heavily on quantitative methodology that emphasizes measurable outcomes such as test scores, graduation rates, income levels, and occupational attainment (Johnson, 2011; Reber, 2005). Although these indicators are important, they often fail to capture the lived experience of Black students who navigated the transition from segregated to desegregated schools. Quantitative analyses can overlook the emotional, cultural and psychological consequences of desegregation, including the experiences of racism, social isolation and the loss of community identity (Brown, 2016).

Second, many studies focus on urban school districts and large-scale policy outcomes, leaving rural communities and historically Black educational settings underexamined (Fairclough, 2004; Tillman, 2004). The experiences of students from historically Black towns and townships, particularly in states such as Oklahoma, have received limited scholarly attention. Consequently, findings from urban contexts may not fully reflect the unique experiences of students from rural Black communities where schools served as central locations of cultural preservation and community cohesion.

Kusimo (1999) reported that students in rural and small-town communities across the south scored significantly lower than rural students nationally. More broadly, rural schools frequently operated with fewer financial resources and less extensive educational programming

than their wealthier urban counterparts (Alexander, 1990). Rural schools for Black students stood to benefit greatly because of the Brown decision (Kusimo, 1999). Although the high Court decided that racial segregation was indeed harmful, the article was more concerned about the irreversible harm to the minds and hearts of those affected. Desegregation in educational settings resulted in Black bodies being moved around to satisfy the law. There were also community consequences resulting from the closure of schools in the Black Townships (Philipsen, 1994).

In summary, there is a decent amount of scholarly research on schools in rural areas. To enhance the literature, there is a need to look at the experiences of those attending school in Black Townships. Although there are only a few Black Townships that had operating schools during the time frame beginning in 1954 through 1974, the information is important to the entire body of knowledge.

Third, the dominant narrative within desegregation has frequently emphasized the benefits of access to better schools while giving less attention to the unintended consequences of desegregation. Scholars have documented closure of Black schools, the displacement of Black educators, and the erosion of community centered educational environments (Brown, 2016; Fairclough, 2004; Tillman, 2004; Walker, 1996). However, these consequences have been often treated as secondary findings rather than central areas of inquiry.

Another limitation is the absence of participant centered approaches that foreground the voices of those directly affected by desegregation. Critical Race Theory scholars argue that traditional educational research often privileges dominant perspectives while marginalizing the experiential knowledge of people of color (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). As a result, many desegregation studies inadequately address how race, racism, and power shaped students' experiences during and after the desegregation process. Examining the

perspectives of those who attended school in Black Townships during school desegregation efforts could provide a different vantage point on those desegregation efforts.

Finally, much of the literature examines desegregation as a historical policy intervention rather than an ongoing process with lasting implications for identity, community, and educational equity. Longitudinal studies have documented economic and educational benefits associated with desegregation (Johnson, 2011), yet fewer studies explore how individuals make meaning of these experiences across their lifetimes. Narrative and qualitative approaches are particularly well-suited for addressing this gap because they allow participants to construct and interpret the significance of their educational journeys in their own words.

Empirical Research on Desegregation and Student Outcomes

In an analysis in Texas, Hanushek et al. (2009) found that racial segregation was associated with lower achievement growth for Black students, and that school racial composition explained a small but meaningful share of the Black-white achievement gap. Their study suggests that desegregation was not only about physical access to formerly white schools, but also about whether Black students gained access to new educational conditions within schools.

In an investigation conducted by Johnson (2011), life trajectories of children born between 1945 and 1968 were analyzed and followed through 2013 using the Panel of Income dynamics (PSID). The PSID used with various data sources describe the participants' neighborhoods, school quality resources as well as the prevalent policies being enforced at the time the children were growing up. Participants in this study includes 9,156 individuals from 3,702 childhood families, 645 school districts, 448 counties representing 39 states.

Based on the quantitative analyses of the data, it was found that for Blacks, school desegregation significantly increased both educational and occupational attainments, college

quality and adult earnings, reduction in probability for adult incarceration, and improved adult health status. In contrast, there was no effect on whites across each of these outcomes.

Empirical Research on Desegregation and Black Participants' Perspectives

Although numerous studies have examined school desegregation through quantitative measures such as surveys, enrollment patterns and academic outcomes, these approaches can overlook how Black participants understood and interpreted their experiences. Horsford & McKenzie (2008) addressed this limitation through an exploratory qualitative study of eight retired Black superintendents who attended segregated schools as children and later served as educational leaders in desegregated school systems. Grounded in standpoint theory and critical race theory's voice-of-color thesis, the researchers used purposeful and network sampling, conducted individual interviews lasting between one and two and a half hours, and reviewed biographical and autobiographical materials. This design allowed the participants' personal memories and professional observations to challenge dominant accounts that portray desegregation as an uncomplicated educational success.

The findings were organized around what Black communities "fought for," what they "had," and what they ultimately "lost." Participants explained that Black communities pursued desegregation primarily to obtain equal educational resources, opportunities, and freedom of choice, not simply to place Black children beside white children. Although desegregation expanded access to certain resources and social environments, participants associated its implementation with the closure of Black schools, the dismissal and demotion of Black educators, weakened community relationships, damage to Black students' self-concepts and new forms of within school segregation through tracking, special education placement, and disciplinary practices. Horsford and McKenzie therefore distinguished desegregation from

genuine integration, arguing that racial mixing of students did not necessarily produce equitable relationships, institutional inclusion, or equal educational treatment. This study contributes to the literature by centering voices that are often excluded from conventional desegregation research; however, its small, professionally accomplished sample and reliance on retrospective accounts limit the extent to which the findings can represent the experiences of all Black students or communities.

Payne et al. (1978) presented an exploratory qualitative investigation of how students perceived and evaluated school desegregation. Payne serves as the primary researcher, while Cheryl Nowell and Michelle Stolpa were both participants and co-authors. The sample consisted of only two juniors attending Eastmoor High school in Columbus, Ohio: one Black student and one white student. The researchers relied on personal interviews and the students' first-person reflections rather than questionnaires, experimental procedures, or statistical analyses. Thus, the study did not attempt to measure how frequently particular attitudes occurred among students; instead, it compared how two students from different backgrounds interpreted the meaning and value of attending a desegregated school. The student occurred during a significant period in Columbus, as the school district had recently been found to have maintained segregation through school boundaries and was beginning court ordered desegregation through busing.

The findings suggested that the students' attitudes toward desegregation were strongly influenced by the beliefs communicated by their parents. Nowell, the white student, and Stolpa, the Black student, did not evaluate desegregation from identical social positions, even though they attended the same school. Their accounts demonstrated that perceptions of desegregation were shaped by race, family socialization, and personal experiences within the school environment. The study's most significant contribution was the inclusion of students as both

participants and contributors to the published analysis, allowing their voices to remain central rather than reducing their experiences to numerical survey responses. Nevertheless, the study's sample of two students from one high school severely limits its generalizability. Therefore, this article should be understood as an illustrative comparison of two student perspectives rather than evidence that their views represented all Black or white students' experiences with desegregation.

This study addresses an important gap in the literature by examining how school desegregation was experienced by individuals living in historically Black communities. Although much of the existing scholarship has focused on legal mandates, enrollment patterns, and academic outcomes, less attention has been given to how desegregation affected the students, educators, families, and communities whose schools were closed, consolidated and reorganized. Centering the perspectives of residents in Oklahoma's historically Black townships provides a more complete understanding of desegregation as both an educational policy and a lived community experience.

The findings may also inform contemporary educational policy and practice. Schools' closures, consolidations, rezoning, and demographic shifts continue to alter the composition of schools and communities. Understanding the historical consequences of desegregation including displacement, cultural loss, weakened community-school relationships, and disruptions to students' sense of belonging can help policymakers and educational leaders approach future transitions with greater care. Rather than treating changes in student populations as primarily administrative decisions, this study emphasizes the importance of considering historical context, community knowledge, institutional equity, and the social and emotional experiences of students.

Such an understanding is essential to developing policies that are not only efficient but also equitable, culturally responsive and attentive to the communities most directly affected

Chapter III: Theoretical Framework

This chapter outlines the theoretical framework guiding this study, Critical Race Theory (CRT), and explains how it informs the research design, methodology, and analytic approach. Following the discussion of CRT, subsequent sections detail the research question, study design, data sources, and methods of analysis. Throughout this chapter, CRT functions not only as a throughline connecting the literature, methodology, and design, but also as an interpretive lens through which historical and contemporary counternarratives of school desegregation are examined.

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) provides the central theoretical lens for this study. Emerging from legal scholarship in the 1970s and 1980s, CRT was developed by scholars such as Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman, and Richard Delgado in response to the perceived limitations of traditional civil rights approaches to racial justice (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). CRT also developed as a critique of Critical Legal Studies (CLS), which failed to adequately account for the enduring role of race and racism in U.S. law and society. Early CRT scholars, including Kimberle Crenshaw, sought to uncover the ways race operated as a structuring force embedded within legal institutions and social systems (Crenshaw et al., 1989).

CRT begins with the premise that racism is not aberrational or merely the product of individual prejudice (Bell, 1980). Rather, racism is ordinary, systemic and deeply embedded within American legal, political and social institutions. As Harris (1993) argues, racism has directly shaped the U.S. legal system and continues to influence how racial categories, property and privilege are constructed and maintained.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is the lens through which this study will be viewed. A theory offers a set of propositions that explain current situations and predict what will occur under a certain set of conditions. Unlike a perspective, which is a set of interrelated beliefs about the significance of race/racism and how it operates, a theory provides a structured set of propositions that explains social conditions and anticipates how they operate under circumstances (Parker & Lynn, 2002). CRT offers such a framework by asserting that race is socially constructed and strategically deployed to maintain social hierarchies and material advantage for members of the racial majority.

Foundational Tenets of CRT

Several core tenets guide CRT scholarship. First, CRT views race as a social construct, rather than a biological reality, arguing that race is socially created to sustain systems of power and domination. Second, CRT asserts the permanence of racism, maintaining that racism is a normalized and enduring feature of American society rather than a temporary deviation from democratic ideals. Third, CRT emphasizes the centrality of experiential knowledge, recognizing that the lived experiences of people of color as legitimate, appropriate and critical sources of knowledge. Fourth, CRT challenges dominant ideology by critiquing liberalism's emphasis on incrementalism, colorblindness, and neutrality, arguing that these approaches often obscure structural inequality. Finally, CRT highlights the concept of interest convergence, which suggests that advances in racial justice occur primarily when they align with the interests of dominant groups. This concept of interest convergence, introduced by Derrick Bell (1980), posits that significant racial progress for subordinated groups is tolerated only when it aligns with the interests of white Americans. This principle is particularly salient in analyses of school desegregation.

Although CRT originated in legal scholarship, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) extended the framework to educational research. Building on this foundation, Solorzano and Yasso (2001, 2002) identified five interrelated tenets of CRT in education (p. 26):

- the centrality of race and racism and their intersectionality with other forms of subordination
- the challenge to the dominant ideology
- the commitment to social justice
- the centrality of experiential knowledge
- the transdisciplinary perspective

CRT in education foregrounds race while acknowledging intersections with class, gender, language, nationality and other forms of marginalization (Parker & Lynn, 2002). It represents an ongoing intellectual and political struggle to expose and dismantle structural racism in American institutions. CRT has three main goals: (a) to present storytelling and narratives as valid approaches through which to examine race and racism in the law and society; (b) to argue for the eradication of racial subjugation while at the same time recognizing race as a social construct (c) to draw important relationships. Mutsuda (1994) argued that the stories of victims were useful under CRT because these experiences were real and the connections from the past must be understood to see how relationships of power protect the interest of white people over persons of color. These stories are important in providing the reader with a better understanding of race and racial context.

This study is designed to highlight the counternarratives which will aid the researcher in analyzing the dominant narrative of school desegregation. From a Critical Race Theory perspective, segregation was not merely a spatial arrangement but a system of racial domination

that preserved hegemonic power relations and institutionalized disadvantage for people of color (Bell, 1988; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Current race relations in the United States reinforce the CRT tenet that racism is not an abnormal occurrence but rather a normalized and enduring feature of American society embedded within social institutions and everyday interactions (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). This tenet is directly linked to the *permanence of racism* work by Derrick Bell. Finally, interest convergence speaks to the rationale of school desegregation, where CRT would argue that desegregation of schools only happens when it is beneficial for whites (Bell, 1980; Milner, 2008). When incremental change is discussed within elaborate interest convergence in CRT frameworks, desegregation of schools was an incremental step in eliminating racism nationwide, an effort still ongoing. Derrick Bell, one of the founding figures of CRT, introduced the concept of interest convergence, the theory that whites do not allow significant progress for racially subordinate groups to occur unless there is significant benefit to them (Bell, 1980; Milner, 2008).

Counternarratives

Counternarratives are central to both CRT and this study's methodological approach. Within CRT, storytelling is not supplemental to data (Reissman, 2008), rather the lived experiences and narratives of people of color are considered legitimate and essential sources of knowledge (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). The development of counternarratives reflects a long trajectory of marginalized communities using storytelling to contest dominant discourses. While the practice has deep historical roots, it gained formal methodological grounding within Critical Race Theory in the late 20th century. Counternarratives challenge dominant historical accounts by centering the voices of those who have been marginalized or silenced (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). As Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate (1995) argue, voice represents the

articulation of lived realities shaped by oppression. Today counternarratives serve as a critical tool for uncovering suppressed experiences, challenging structural inequities, and recentering the knowledge and expertise of marginalized communities across multiple fields of research (Delgado, 1989; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Experiential knowledge is indispensable because those who have directly encountered racial subordination possess insights that cannot be captured through purely quantitative or archival methods (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

Dominant narratives frequently frame school desegregation as an unequivocal social good and a hallmark achievement of the Civil Rights Movement (Frankenberg & Orfield, 2007; Orfield, 2001). However, scholars have argued that such narratives often obscure the losses experienced by Black students, educators, and the communities following desegregation (Walker, 1996, 2000). Counternarratives illuminate dimensions of desegregation that are often omitted.

In this study, counternarrative serve a multitude of methodological purposes such as,

- Elevating memory, trauma, and community knowledge as legitimate forms of evidence;
- Confronting distortions produced by institutional archives that privilege dominant perspectives;
- Creating space for participants to critique systems of power that structured their schooling experiences;
- Illuminating visible the structural dimensions of racism embedded within desegregation policies;

Thus, counternarratives are not ancillary nor anecdotal illustrations; they constitute the primary data through which the research question is examined.

Applications of CRT to School Desegregation

CRT provides a framework for examining both the gains and losses associated with school desegregation. While desegregation increased access to material resources and expanded formal educational opportunities, CRT interrogates the structural condition under which these changes occurred.

From a CRT perspective, desegregation did not dismantle systemic racism, it simply reconfigured it. Black students often entered institutions structured by white norms, expectations, and power hierarchies. Research suggests that desegregation frequently resulted in the displacement of Black educators, the weakening of culturally affirming environments, and increased exposure to institutional racism, including biased tracking practices and disproportionate discipline (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Morris, 2001; Noguera, 2009).

CRT situates desegregation within the logic of interest convergence. Following Bell's (1980) analysis, school desegregation can be interpreted as advancing when it aligned with broader political and economic interests of white Americans, rather than solely from a moral commitment to racial justice. At the same time, CRT recognizes the agency and resilience of Black students and communities. Scholars such as Solorzano and Yasso (2002) emphasize that marginalized communities are not passive recipients of oppression but active producers of knowledge and resistance. This study therefore attends not only to experiences of alienation and marginalization, but also to expressions of strength, adaptation and resistance within desegregated schooling contexts.

Critical Race Theory provides the conceptual foundation for this study by centering race as a structuring force in American education by legitimizing experiential knowledge as a critical site of analysis. Using counternarratives, this research challenges dominant accounts of school desegregation and interrogates the extent to which desegregation disrupted or reproduced racial hierarchies.

Chapter IV: Methods

In the sections that follow, the research question, design, and analytic procedures are detailed. Together they operationalize CRT not merely as a theoretical abstraction, but as a methodological commitment to uncovering the structural realities embedded within the lived experiences of Black students during desegregation efforts in Oklahoma's Historic Black Townships.

Study Setting: Oklahoma's Educational History

In the early 20th century, Oklahoma was one of the fastest-growing states in the United States. Many Black settlers came to Oklahoma as part of the Great Migration. However, that growth of Oklahoma did little to change the educational system, as the schools remained underfunded and segregated, with Black schools receiving the least amount of funds. However, it would be remiss not to discuss the historical context in which these events occurred. Before statehood and the legislation accompanying it, Oklahoma was a unique space within the borders of the United States for many, interconnected reasons.

The first enslaved Africans were brought to this space as subservient to the Indigenous populations that came from the East Coast of America (Franklin, 1982). Before and after the Emancipation Proclamation, Black students attended schools with both Indigenous and white students in the territory's newly formed school districts (Doolittle, 2018). These integrated schools served all students with little attention paid to their racial backgrounds. Oklahoma received statehood in 1907 and immediately after Black citizens were subjected to the same Jim Crow, segregationist policies that governed the rest of the South (Perry & Hughes, 1956). While this may seem disadvantageous in the long run, it did provide a unique opportunity for Black communities to decide what education would look like for their communities.

At this juncture, Black schools began to come into focus. As a result of segregationist policies and practices, many Black rural townships were established. The establishment of Black rural townships provided an opportunity to create educational systems that reflected their beliefs and values. From this need arose, the first generation of Black educational staff (Anderson, 1988; Levine & Levine, 2014). Like other communities in the South (Fairclough, 2000), this task of educating an entire people was taken up by formerly enslaved individuals who were also instrumental in the founding of Freedmen's schools. Education was serious to these communities as there was a widespread understanding that education would be vital for their maintained freedom. Unlike their rights, which were constantly in flux, education could not be taken away from them (Franklin, 1990). The emphasis placed on education was evident in the reverence bestowed on educators within these communities (Fairclough, 2000). Many of them continued their education and 'ethos of service' to their communities by becoming ministers, businesspeople, and even lawyers (Franklin, 1990).

Oklahoma Black Townships

Black townships came into being because of the mass development of towns made up of Black residents from 1890-1910 (Myers, 2016). There were upwards of thirty Black Townships that existed in Oklahoma before desegregation. This was because Oklahoma, at one point, was to be designated as a "Negro State" (Doolittle, 2018). When that did not become reality, those townships remained in secluded areas of Oklahoma. These townships' continued existence was to enforce racial separation and ensure that Blacks lived separately from the white population. In these Black Townships, the citizens were comprised of families who wanted to live safely without fear of harm coming to them because of negative interactions with white people. In some cases, those negative interactions cost Black people their lives.

Economically, the Black dollar could remain in the community producing a better life for them because they could provide practically everything they needed. There were churches, barber shops, beauty salons, grocery stores, and schools. Schools allowed the students to learn about not only white people but also the successes and accomplishments of people who looked and lived like them. Segregated schools in the Black townships gave them that freedom. It was an opportunity to teach the students without the oversight of the white community, wanting to possibly suppress that information. Because even when the schools were segregated in the rest of the state, there was a strong white influence that dictated what was taught in those schools.

Examining school desegregation in Black Townships allows for exploration of segregation policies on educational opportunities for Black students. This includes understanding the disparities in resources, facilities, and educational quality between the schools in Black Townships and those in predominately white institutions. Black townships are special places for understanding school desegregation compared to other places because firstly, it is understudied. It bears understanding what the people who experienced desegregation went through and how it may have affected the lives they went on to live. Secondly, the students in Black schools experienced a high level of school pride because they belonged there. There was a sense of community resilience and agency. Exploring the experiences of Black communities in Oklahoma's Black Townships during educational desegregation may highlight the resilience and agency of these communities. It can also unveil how they were able to navigate and respond to challenges, possibly demonstrating the strength of the community.

Research Design

This study employs a narrative analysis approach to examine how Black students narrate their experiences with school desegregation efforts in historically Black townships in Oklahoma. Narrative analysis is particularly fitting for this research because it centers the voices of the participants and attends to the ways individuals construct meaning through storytelling. Rather than reducing experiences to discrete categories, this approach preserves the temporal, emotional, and contextual dimensions of participant accounts. Grounded in CRT's commitment to counter storytelling (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002), this design positions participant narratives not merely as recollections of the past but as acts of resistance that challenge the dominant discourses about integration, equity, and opportunity.

The purpose of this narrative analysis is to explore how participants describe desegregation not only as a policy or historical event, but as a lived and remembered experience. Specifically, this analysis examines how individuals structure their stories, the turning points they emphasize, and the identities they construct in relation to desegregation. By focusing on both the content and form of narratives, this section highlights how memory, place, and race intersect in shaping personal and collective understandings of desegregation in historically Black townships.

Data were analyzed for themes related to community life, educational opportunities and challenges, resource access, racial navigation and the lasting impacts of desegregation within the broader context of U.S. schools. The goal of this design is not to determine whether desegregation was wholly beneficial or harmful, but to center the voices of those who experienced it and to complicate simplified historical narratives.

Research Question

This study examines the educational and socioemotional impacts of desegregation from the perspective of Black students who directly experienced desegregation efforts in schools located in Oklahoma's Black Townships during the twenty years following *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954). The guiding research question is: "How do Black students who experienced school desegregation in Oklahoma's Black townships narrate their educational journeys and identities?"

This question was intentionally crafted to uncover how school desegregation policies disrupted, reshaped, expanded, or constrained participants' educational experiences and identity formation. By foregrounding the narration, the study centers how participants interpret and make meaning of their schooling experiences *in their own words.*

Research Landscape

Oklahoma occupies a distinctive place in the history of Black self-determination. Between approximately 1890 and 1910, more than forty historically Black Townships were established in the state (Myers, 2016). These communities were founded largely by formerly enslaved people and their descendants seeking political autonomy, economic opportunity, and safety from racial violence. Many of these towns were in rural or geographically isolated areas, which provided both protection and self-governance.

Within these townships, Black residents developed self-sustaining institutions including churches, businesses, and schools. Economically, the circulation of resources within the community strengthened local stability. Educationally, segregated schools in these townships often functioned as culturally affirming spaces. Students learned academic content while also

encountering representations of Black achievement, leadership as well as intellectual life, content that was frequently minimized or distorted in white controlled institutions.

Although segregation imposed structural inequalities, schooling in Black townships differed in important ways from segregated schools under direct white administrative control. Local Black educators exercised greater curricular control and cultural autonomy. Thus, examining desegregation in these townships requires attention to not only material disparities between Black and white schools, but also the loss of community-controlled institutions and culturally affirming educational spaces.

Understanding this historical landscape is essential to interpreting participants' narratives. Desegregation did not occur in a vacuum; it unfolded within communities that had already established educational, economic, and social infrastructures rooted in collective survival and pride.

Recruitment

After IRB approval (Appendix B) was obtained, the recruitment process began. Recruiting for the study took place in two phases: purposeful and snowball sampling. Initially, a short list of people that appeared to meet the criteria for participation was developed. The list included individuals I knew through my professional community and individuals who were referred to me as potential participants in the study. After contacting all the people on the list, I followed up on referrals I had received. The only criterion was that the participants experienced school desegregation in a *recognized* historical Black Township.

Purposeful sampling uncovered participants who could best inform the study. However, it was almost as if I engaged in both phases at once. While I was speaking to the participants, they

were providing numerous names and contact information of other people that may fit the criteria for participation. I followed up with those people and was able to secure a few more participants.

The last recruitment tool I used was an appearance at the Black Mayors' meeting in early Spring 2025 in one of the remaining Black Townships in Oklahoma. I was allowed a small window of time to introduce myself and my study to the mayors and meeting attendees. After the brief presentation, I stayed around until the meeting was over to answer any questions from attendees. From that meeting, I was able to secure the last three participants for this study.

All participants were provided with informed consent forms prior to participation. They signed the forms and sent them back by email. After all the consent forms were signed and sent back, the participants were scheduled for their interview.

Data Sources

Demographic Information

Participants first completed a demographic questionnaire (Appendix A), which included name, date of birth, gender identity, pronouns, race/ethnicity, highest degree earned, chosen pseudonym (with rationale), and the Black Township school attended. Collecting this information served two purposes: (1) to contextualize participants' narratives, and (2) to document which townships were represented in the study. All identifying information was anonymized. Participants selected their own pseudonyms, and the township names used in reporting were assigned by the researcher to preserve confidentiality while maintaining contextual clarity.

Interviews

This study relied on interviews as the primary source of data due to the absence of other submitted or preserved artifacts related to desegregation experiences in Oklahoma's historically

Black Townships. Rather than viewing this absence as a limitation, the study treated this oral narration as a critical historical source, particularly in this context because experiential knowledge is a credible source.

Black educational experiences have historically been under documented or excluded from official archives. Many institutional records related to historically Black Townships were never created, preserved, or made accessible. As a result, interviews with individuals who directly experienced desegregation served as the most complete and meaningful source for understanding educational journeys and identity formation during this period. Participants reflected their educational and identity formation. Interviews were used to capture first person narratives that might otherwise remain undocumented. Oral narration allowed participants to frame their experiences in their own terms and emphasized aspects of schooling and identity that institutional records often overlook.

The purpose of this study was to elevate marginalized voices; therefore, the most appropriate data collection method was collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews. Interviewing enabled participants to narrate desegregation as they experienced it and to exercise voice in naming their realities (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). The interviews followed a semi-structured protocol, balancing consistency across the participants with the flexibility to pursue emerging insights. Open-ended questions encouraged storytelling, while follow-up prompts provided opportunity for clarification when needed.

After the participants consented, schedules for interviews were arranged. Nine participants engaged in one interview session, with one participant engaged in two sessions. Interviews lasted between 45 minutes to 90 minutes. Participants ranged in age from 66-76;

therefore, the extended timeframe allowed participants to reflect and recall detailed memories with minimal interruption.

The interviews were conducted in participants' preferred format: four via Zoom, five by telephone, and one in person. All interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed. In one instance, a recording malfunction occurred; the participant was contacted immediately and graciously agreed to participate in a second interview. After this incident, additional precautions were taken to ensure recording fidelity.

Table 1.

Study Participants

Name	Age	Black Township
DJ	71	The Phoenix Settlement
Milly	70	The Blues Frontier
Mr. T	73	The Visionary Prairie
Ann	75	The Visionary Prairie
MBJ	73	The Visionary Prairie
Ms. Kay	70	The Legacy Crossroads
Ms. Cheryl	72	The Legacy Crossroads
Pete	66	The Legacy Crossroads
Imani	76	The Visionary Prairie
Zap	71	The Visionary Prairie

Note. All participants and community names are pseudonyms. Ages are the participant's ages at the time of the interview.

As shown in Table 1, the study included ten participants (n=10) who experienced desegregation of their school between 1954 and 1974. This specific time is important because the United States was saturated with significant events, creating a tumultuous environment greatly centered on race. During this time, some of the events that took place were the Korean War (1950-1953), the Vietnam War (1950-1975), Eisenhower's second inauguration in January of 1957, which had him in place to send troops to Central High School in Little Rock Arkansas to enforce desegregation in September of the same year. Other events that may have affected desegregation and how the students experienced it were in 1961, the Freedom Riders, a mixed group of people traveling by bus to various places in the South protesting racially segregated busing. In 1963, Martin Luther King gave his "I Have a Dream" speech, and in the same year, John F. Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas, TX. The Civil Rights Act was signed in 1964 by President Johnson, and later that year the Voting Rights Act was signed into law. This law prohibited discriminatory practices in voting. There were also riots in Watts, CA, where hundreds of people were injured and 35 people were killed. These broader sociopolitical dynamics likely shaped both the immediate experiences of school desegregation and how participants interpret the experiences retrospectively.

Narrative Analysis

As mentioned before, the data obtained from participants was investigated utilizing narrative analysis. Narrative analysis is a qualitative research method that focuses on the stories individuals tell and the ways in which those stories are constructed and communicated (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Rather than fragmenting data into isolated categories, narrative analysis emphasizes the importance of examining experiences as whole accounts, attending to elements such as structure, sequence, language and context. This approach is used to interpret meaning

within qualitative data by exploring how individuals organize events, assign significance to their experiences, and position themselves within their own stories. Ultimately, the purpose of the narrative analysis is to understand how individuals construct meaning through their personal experiences, revealing insight into identity, memory, and the social contexts that shape lived realities (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

Narrative Data Collection

The initial stage of narrative analysis began with the collection of narrative data, consisting of rich, detailed accounts of the participants lived experiences gathered from the in-depth, semi-structured interview. The use of the interview encouraged the participants to share their stories in their own words and in their own way. The goal of this step was to elicit full, coherent narratives and not brief, fragmented responses, allowing participants to describe all aspects of their lived experience. Open-ended questions were asked to create a space where participants felt comfortable sharing their experiences. Collecting narrative data in this way ensured that the resulting accounts were sufficiently detailed and grounded contextually to provide a strong foundation for analysis and interpretation (Creswell & Poth, 2016). All interviews were transcribed using digital transcription tools and manually reviewed for accuracy against the audio recordings.

Engaging the Narrative

After the data was collected, narrative analysis required the researcher to engage with the data intimately. This included reading and notating the collected stories holistically to gain an overall understanding of each participant's narrative (Creswell & Poth, 2016). At this stage, transcripts of the narratives were read multiple times, focusing on the story as a complete account rather than breaking it into smaller parts. Attention was given to how events are

connected, what was emphasized or omitted, and how the story unfolded over time. This process allowed the researcher to become deeply familiar with the data before moving into the next steps of the analysis.

Structuring the Narrative

Once the researcher thoroughly understood the narratives—that is they have no new notation or knowledge gained from reading and notating—narrative analysis necessitates identifying and analyzing the structure of each narrative to understand how the story is organized and conveyed (Creswell & Poth, 2016). At this stage, the researcher examined how participants sequence their experiences, typically looking for key components such as beginning, middle, and end. This sequence is also called orientation, complication, and resolution. In these key components, resided significant events, turning points, and shifts in the storyline give shape to the overall narrative. Attention was also given to how participants introduced characters, described settings, and built tension throughout their accounts. By analyzing structure, the researcher gained insight into how individuals framed their experiences and highlighted what they perceived as most important, contributing to a deeper understanding of how meaning is constructed within the narrative.

Identification of Key Elements

This next stage in narrative analysis involved identifying the key elements within each story, including all story elements, to better understand the components that shaped the narrative (Creswell & Poth, 2016). At this stage, the researcher examined who is involved in the story, where and when the events took place, what challenges and tensions arose, and how those challenges were addressed or resolved. This process helped break down the narrative into its essential parts while maintaining its overall coherence. By focusing on these elements, the

researcher saw more clearly how the participants constructed their experiences, assigned roles and highlighted significant moments, ultimately contributing to a richer interpretation of meaning within the narrative.

Language and Tone

At this stage of the narrative analysis, the researcher examined not only what the participants said about desegregation, but also how they constructed and communicated those experiences through language and tone. Rather than treating the transcripts as simple accounts of events, the researcher engaged in repeated readings of the interview data to identify patterns in word choice, pronoun use, emotional expression, emphasis pauses and shifts in tone. These features offered insight into how participants positioned themselves, their communities, and the institutions involved in desegregation.

Also, particular attention was given to the ways participants described desegregation efforts, including whether they framed the process as opportunity, disruption, displacement, loss, resistance, or a combination of these meanings. For example, participants' use of terms such as "our school," "they sent us," or "we lost" may reveal deeper meanings related to ownership, power, exclusion, and community attachment. By analyzing how participants narrated desegregation, the researcher was able to move beyond a factual summary of events and examine the emotional, cultural, and historical meanings embedded in their stories.

Interpretation

During the interpretation phase of the analysis, the researcher moved beyond describing what participants said and began asking what the narrative revealed. One guiding analytic question for this phrase is: *What does this narrative suggest desegregation meant to the participant and to the broader community?* This step required attention to the layered and

sometimes contradictory meanings embedded in participants' accounts. For example, a participant's narrative may frame desegregation as access to previously unavailable resources, while also naming it as the loss of a community school, a disruption of Black educational traditions, or a shift in communal belonging. The purpose of interpretation is not to determine whether desegregation was simply "good" or "bad." Such binary reading would flatten the complexity of the narrative. Instead, the researcher identified the tensions, contradictions, silences, and layered meanings participants attach to desegregation, which allowed the analysis to reflect the complexity of lived experience.

Contextualization

Narratives are situated within time, place, social relationships, and institutional conditions. According to Clandinin and Connelly's (2000), the narrative inquiry is shaped by three dimensions: temporality, sociality, and place. Researchers must consider when an experience occurred, the personal relationships and broader social forces that influenced it, and the physical or social setting in which it unfolded.

For desegregation in historically Black townships, relevant contextual layers may include the timing and implementation of desegregation policies; the racial, political, and economic conditions surrounding the transition; the relationships among students, families, educators, and community members; the closure or consolidation of Black schools; the displacement of Black teachers and administrators; changes in school culture and community identity; and the physical settings in which participants' experiences unfolded.

Constructing the Narrative

The final stage of narrative analysis involves writing the narrative analysis in a way that brings together the major analytic moves from the previous steps. In this stage, the researcher

begins with a clear claim that identifies what the narrative revealed. This claim is then supported with evidence from the participant's account, followed by close attention to specific words, phrases, tone, or narrative choices that shaped the meaning of the story. The paragraph should move from evidence to interpretation by explaining what the narrative suggests about the participant's experience and how that experience is situated within the broader historical, social, and educational context. Finally, the analysis clarifies how the narrative advanced the larger theme, connected to the theoretical framework, or responded to the research question. In this way, the writing does not simply summarize the participant's story; it demonstrates how the story functions as data and how meaning is constructed through the participant's narration.

Analytical Limitations

The desired participants were from an older population. Remembering specific events was an issue for the participants. It was important to make sure the information given was accurate. I paid close attention to what they said and asked clarifying questions about unclear information. Another limitation was health issues getting in the way of conducting the interviews. During the data collection time period, many upper respiratory diseases were going around. Older participants were mentally, as well as physically, more fragile than others. The health of the participants was a critical consideration in their participation in this study. The goal was to conduct more than one interview; however, it depended on what the participants wanted to contribute to the study.

Analytical Strengths

One of the analytical strengths of my study was its qualitative nature. In earlier studies, much of the data came from secondary sources, not from people who experienced the phenomenon in this setting. This allowed the researcher to ask clarifying questions about the

experience instead of relying on secondary sources. It gave a holistic view of what it was like for the participants as they went through school desegregation. Naysayers on segregation conducted lots of research on segregated schools. However, data came from archival records and limited information from people who experienced segregation. This study allowed a different vantage point on desegregation of schools to be considered. Students in Black Townships had a unique experience that should be unearthed and included in the literature on school desegregation.

Subjectivity Statement

This study was of interest to me for several reasons. As a young child, I would spend many weekends running up and down the streets of Taft, Oklahoma, one of the Black townships in Oklahoma. I had many family members in Taft and the neighboring towns of Redbird (another Black Township) and Haskell. In Taft, there was a store, post office, school, night club, city hall, and many churches run by people who looked like me. At that time, I was not aware of the significance that these memories would have in my adult life. Reflecting those times, life seemed simpler. We had our town; we gathered and had an exciting time with each other, and people were happy. The school, Moton, was there working in tandem with parents and the community for the success of students. Although I lived in Muskogee, I considered Taft my town too. Through this study, I wanted to explore the experiences of school desegregation of the people who experienced it in towns like the one I grew up loving.

Another position I took was as an elementary student. I was born in 1973; therefore, I attended school during the roll out of desegregation efforts. I remember my school being full of different shades of faces, and we all were friends; many of us remain friends today. However, I remember my father telling me that I had to be two times as good as the white kids to get half the accolades. I did not understand it at the time, but I worked hard to get good grades in school. My

behavior was questionable at times, but I did the work. It was only when I got into middle school and high school that I noticed a difference in the way I was treated as opposed to the way the other students were treated. I did not have room for error in school. I was expected to be on my "A" game every day. I was incapable of that and therefore I began to get bitter. I wanted to be a kid; I wanted acceptance for who I was and what I was able to bring to the table.

That did not happen then, and it does not always happen now, 35-plus years later. Even with how I was treated in school and the grocery store with the managers thinking I was going to steal something, I wanted to prove that I was good enough. My father wanted me to attend Langston University after I graduated high school, but I, thinking I was so progressive, said, "The world is not all Black!" I decided not to go. That was one of the most ill-informed decisions I have ever made in and for my life. What was it about the all-Black school that was an immediate turn-off for me? To be transparent, I knew that a part of me was fearful. I had a son in my senior year of high school. I was afraid to leave home with him, and I was afraid to leave home without him. But I was also afraid of what could happen to me if I went to an all-Black university. Would I become one of those Black Panther-type people who hated all other people? I did not know, and I was afraid to find out. I was missing pride in who I was as a Black woman in the world. I had not felt that pride before and it scared me.

Another reason this study was important to me was because since I was this uninformed person in my youth, my lineage has expanded. I have three children and five grandchildren. I want them to know that our history is exciting and something of which we should be proud. I want them to be proud of who they are and what they stand for as positive contributors to this world. It is not easy either.

I have a beautiful ten-year-old granddaughter who was obsessed with Jojo Siwa. She wanted her hair to be long and silky like Jojo's. She acted like her beautiful, ebony brown skin was not worthy of adoration. It took so long to get her to get comfortable with the skin she is in. Unfortunately, it only takes one flippant comment from a classmate thrown her way that would send her reeling back into uncertainty about her representation of beauty.

I chose to be an educator as my life work. I have been in education for 24 years to this point. I have taught in Richardson, TX for one semester, I moved back to Muskogee and taught in a small, Christian school for about three years. As I thought about my future, I decided to go to a public school and teach. My first position as a public-school teacher was in the very same school that I went through from 1st to 6th grade. That was an eye-opener. I was excited to teach, but it was hard work. I came to work early and went home late. I knew I was responsible for the success of my students, and I worked hard not to let them down. I was hard on them. I did not allow them to wallow in self-pity or apathy because I knew there was a life they had to live on their own after they finished elementary school. I thought that my students' parents and I were on the same page, but one day I got my feelings hurt. It was the day that I realized that there was at least one parent who felt as if I was not the teacher they wanted for their child.

I had a little student named David. He was a white young boy whose parents did not have a lot. He dreaded lice check days because he inevitably would be sent home due to an infestation of lice. We would try to keep it a secret, but like so many times before, David would disappear for three or four days and then suddenly reappear with his head shaved. As time went on, I grew fond of David. I started to bring him clothes that my children had outgrown; he would start to stay for after-school programs when I taught. He was starting to establish a relationship with me too. Then David started to standoffish towards me for no reason I could pinpoint. He wouldn't

talk to me; he wouldn't stay for the after-school program (and they gave him a snack every day). I knew something was wrong. So, I stopped him and asked him what the matter was. He told me that his parents called him a ni**** lover. So, at that point, he had a decision to make about me and the relationship we had established. That was the day I realized that I may not have been in the right place for my students. I began to question how many more people felt that same way about me. All I wanted to do was make the world a better place for the children I encountered in my little elementary school. But it appeared that because I was Black, I was not the woman for the job. Was that how teachers not allowed to teach white students after school desegregation felt? It was a horrible feeling that only came to my mind in this way as I began thinking, reading, and writing about the desegregation of schools and its effects on the people who experienced it.

The other position I took as a researcher raised its head while I was taking classes in graduate school, working on my Doctorate. During one of my classes, Qualitative Research, I began to read about desegregation. I read and heard about it, I began to wonder, how did desegregation help me? What does my family have to look forward to because of the desegregation of schools? What happened after the passage of Brown *v.* Board that made my educational experience better? How will it affect my children, grandchildren as well as my great-grandchildren? These questions were the seed that began to form a study in my mind and my work as a researcher. Frankly speaking, I wanted to know what was in it for me and mine. I wanted to know how desegregation benefits not only my lineage but all students who may not be the majority. Through this study, I hoped to understand what people went through during school desegregation efforts and with this information, I will navigate through the rest of my life as well as the lives of my most treasured loved ones.

Chapter V: Counternarratives on Desegregation

This chapter centers around the counternarratives of Black students who experienced school desegregation efforts in historically Black townships in Oklahoma. The construction of the counternarratives uses the methodological guidance of Solorzano and Yasso (2002) and the narrative protocol of Reissman (2008). In the theoretical framework of Critical Race Theory (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), this chapter treats storytelling or narratives as a method. These are (counter) narratives, deliberately positioned to challenge the dominant narrative that school desegregation was universally positive or liberatory. Instead, what emerges is a more complicated truth, one in which Black students gained new access, but lost old anchors, teachers who nurtured them, mascots who represented them and communities that protected them.

Each narrative highlights various facets of the desegregation experience. For some, the transition to desegregated schools offered material improvements, new textbooks, science labs, and expanded course offerings. For others, desegregation was a place of disorientation, forced assimilation, and cultural erasure. Nearly all participants expressed a deep sense of loss; the loss of identity, community pride and cultural belonging that had been cultivated in the all-Black educational spaces of towns like The Phoenix Settlement, The Blues Frontier, The Visionary Prairie and The Legacy Crossroads.

The (counter) narratives shared by elders ranging in ages from 66-76 are not merely recollections; they are acts of resistance, memory and reclamation. Participants' names and specific names of the townships have been replaced with pseudonyms to protect anonymity, but their voices remain unchanged, honest, complex, and rooted in the cultural textures of their lives. Those genuine accounts are notated with *italics* throughout the next chapter.

Mr. T

I was directed to Mr. T as a potential participant in the study by one of his former classmates. I called to arrange a meeting and perhaps a subsequent interview. He willingly used his lunchtime to make sure he was able to contribute to this project. As we got ready to log on, I had trouble with the Zoom link. I immediately got frantic because we only had a small timeframe. I called Mr. T to see how we could remedy this mishap. Luckily, he answered the phone with a calm, composed demeanor and voice. His calm attitude was infectious; therefore, I began to relax. Mr. T suggested that we conduct the interview over the phone. So, we did. After exchanging pleasantries, we jumped right into the interview. Mr. T, at the time of the interview, was 70 years old and is the sibling of another participant in the study, Imani. He was born into a relatively small family, his mother and father, according to our pre-interview conversation. He was raised with one sister.

Mr. T's parents made it clear that he was expected to attend college after graduating from high school. This expectation was consistent with the educational values of their family, as both parents were educators and held education in high regard. Mr. T eventually earned a juris doctorate from a state law school and became a practicing attorney in Louisiana. He experienced desegregation during his high school years and described the transition in largely positive and pragmatic terms. However, his narrative was not without complexity. During the interview, Mr. T was cautious in what he shared and careful how he presented his feelings about desegregation. Because the interview occurred over the telephone, I had difficulty reading some of the vocal and emotional cues that may have been more apparent in person. Still his tone was matter of fact. He did not narrate desegregation with overt anger, nostalgia, or grief. Instead, he approached the topic practically, almost as if he were assessing the situation through a cost-benefit framework.

Segregated schools ***functioned as academically rigorous and culturally affirming spaces***

When I asked Mr. T to describe life in Visionary Prairie, he paused thoughtfully before explaining that it was an all-Black community where his parents worked as educators. He stated that The Visionary Prairie was an all-Black community. It had a high school, initially. My parents were educators… and taught school in that community. He believed that his father may have been a principal, and his mother was an elementary teacher. Although his description did not romanticize the community, it positioned the Black school as a central institution of everyday life. Mr. T repeatedly described Visionary Prairie as "typical," explaining that it was a place where children, adolescents, adults and families engaged in the normal activities of community life.

His use of the word "typical" is analytically important. Rather than describing Visionary Prairie as exceptional, deficient or deprived, Mr. T. presented it as normal. This framing resists deficient narratives about Black segregated communities. For him, Visionary Prairie was not remembered first as a place of lack, but as the ordinary world of his childhood. The school was embedded within that world. Although he did not provide the same level of detail as his sister, Imani, about cultural and educational practices of the family, his narrative still suggests that schooling, family, and community were closely connected. His parents' roles as educators and his eventual educational trajectory reflect the seriousness with which education was treated in the home.

Desegregation produced uneven meanings for Black students

Unlike some participants, he did not describe desegregation primarily through trauma. Instead, he emphasized the limited duration of his experience. He explained that *my experience with desegregation was limited. Keep in mind that I'm going to a desegregated school for just four years, 9th grade, 10th grade, 11th grade, 12th grade, then I'm out of there.* This statement

reveals how time shaped his interpretation. Because he entered the desegregated school during high school and remained there for only four years, he did not understand the experience in the same way as someone who may have entered desegregated schooling earlier in childhood.

Mr. T acknowledged that having Black teachers would have mattered, stating that *having a Black teacher, that would've been great.* However, he did not frame the absence of Black teachers as something that he would necessarily go back and change. His response was cautious and measured: *To say that it was something that I would look back on and change, I don't know.* This uncertainty is important because it reveals tension. Mr. T. recognized what was lost, but he did not interpret that loss as the defining feature of his experience.

His comparison between high school and college further complicates the analysis. He suggested that his experience as a Black student at a large state university may have been more isolating than his high school desegregation experience. He stated that he was more likely to dislike his college experience, where he could be *a lonely Black student in a class of 100 people,* than his high school experience. This comparison suggests that racial isolation did not begin and end with desegregation. For Mr. T., racial differences remained visible across educational spaces, but the emotional weight of that difference varied depending on context, timing, and institutional setting.

Desegregation resulted in the loss of Black educational institutions and weakened Black communities

Although Mr. T. described desegregation as personally beneficial in some ways, he also recognized its negative consequences for the Black community. His explanation was practical and economic. He stated that desegregation *wasn't just a rough thing that happened* suddenly. Instead, he connected the closing of Black schools to declining enrollment, funding and cost. He

explained that the financial support for Black schools in Black townships was likely low, and that students were transferred to nearby districts as schools closed.

This portion of the narrative is significant because it shows that Mr. T did not understand desegregation only as an individual educational opportunity. He also understood that it was a structural shift that affected the community. When asked about the outcome of school closure, he stated, *For the community, I mean, you lose an asset.* He continued by explaining that losing a school was more than a site of instruction. It was a community asset. Its closure signaled population decline, institutional loss, and the weakening of Black communal life.

The tension in Mr. T's narrative is that he could identify both the harm and the benefit of desegregation. He stated, *That's the negative part of that. Now the good part of it is being able to continue your education.* This statement captures the layered meaning of desegregation in his account. For Mr. T, desegregation was not simply a story of racial injury, nor was it simply a story of progress. It was both. It created access to continued education while also contributing to the loss of Black educational institutions that had anchored the community.

Mr. T's narrative therefore adds complexity to the broader analysis of desegregation. His reflections demonstrated that Black participants did not interpret desegregation in uniform ways. His account is shaped by his family values, his limited time in the desegregated school, his experiences in higher education, and his practical understanding of institutional change. While other participants emphasize racial harm, displacement, or psychological injury, Mr. T's narrative reveals how desegregation could be remembered as opportunity, particularly by someone raised in a family where education was treated as central to Black advancement. At the same time, his recognition that the community *lost an asset* prevents his narrative from

becoming a simple celebration of desegregation. His account shows that educational opportunities and communal loss existed together.

Interpretive reflection

Mr. T's framing of desegregation as an *opportunity* initially appeared contradictory to my own assumptions about what it meant for Black students to enter desegregated schools. However, when considered alongside the broader family narrative shared by him and his sister, Imani, his interpretation becomes more understandable. His response was not simply about the school itself; it reflected the way education had been constructed in his home as a central condition for Black survival, advancement and possibility.

During the interview, Mr. T described desegregation as an *opportunity*, which initially confused me because I understood desegregated schools as places where many Black students were unwanted and where their experiences were often made intentionally difficult. He and his sister, Imani, were raised by educators who clearly understood education as essential to the life chances of Black people. The parents bought subscriptions for *Jet* and *Ebony* magazines, even during a time when many families struggled to meet basic needs. These magazines were used as supplemental reading materials in the home. The family traveled every two years, creating experiences and exposure that the participants may not have received otherwise. Their household placed education at the center, even above extracurricular activities.

The tension in Mr. T's language rests on his use of the word *opportunity.* That word carries a tone of possibility rather than resentment, loss, or exclusion. My initial reaction was confusion because I expected him to describe desegregation through the language of harm, hostility, or rejection. Instead, his tone suggested that he saw the experience through the educational values instilled in him before he ever entered the desegregated school. His response

reveals how deeply his family's educational priorities shaped the meaning he assigned to desegregation.

This narrative suggests that Mr. T interpreted desegregation through a familial framework that taught him that education was valuable, necessary, and worth pursuing even under difficult conditions. What I first understood as an almost impossible contradiction became evidence of a larger educational worldview. For Mr. T and his family, education had been treated as a serious responsibility in the home. His parents' decisions to provide reading materials, emphasize academic development, and ensure experiences likely shaped the beliefs that educational access mattered even when that access came through institutions that may not have fully welcomed him.

This interpretation must be situated within the broader context of Black educational history, where Black families often treated education as both protection and possibility. In this family, education was not limited to the classroom. It was practiced through magazines, travel, conversation, parental expectations, and the intentional cultivation of intellectual life. The home functioned as an educational space that prepared Mr. T and his sister to see schooling as consequential. Their parents' commitment to education helped explain why desegregation could be understood not only as racial disruption, but also as access to resources, mobility, and opportunity.

This narrative advances the theme that desegregation carried layered and seemingly sometimes contradictory meanings for Black participants. It is not simply experienced as good or bad, harmful or beneficial. For Mr. T, desegregation appears to have meant opportunity because his family had already taught him to value education as central to Black life. His interpretation shows how family memory, parental values and Black educational commitment shaped the meaning participants assigned to desegregation. This analysis reveals how his family's reverence

for education made it possible for him to understand desegregation as an opening, even within a racially hostile educational context.

Imani

Imani is a 76-year-old woman, the oldest person in the cohort. She was also the sister of Mr. T, making their narratives especially useful for understanding how siblings from the same family remembered segregated schooling and desegregation. Imani was the daughter of one of the teachers in the segregated school. Her parents were respected figures in Visionary Prairie, and education was central to their family identity. Her father was highly regarded by several participants in this study who remembered him as a teacher. Both of Imani's parents were HBCU graduates, and their commitment to education shaped the expectations they held for their children. As Imani explained, *school was our life*! The family was more fortunate than some of the other families in Visionary Prairie.

Although Imani described her family as poor, she also stated that she didn't realize they were poor until she left home. Her reflection suggests that the economic limitation did not define her childhood experience in Visionary Prairie. Compared to some of the other families in the community, Imani's family had access to certain resources and experiences that reinforced learning in the home. They were able to take vacations every two years, and they maintained subscriptions to *Jet, Life* and *Ebony,* which were used to strengthen reading and expose the children to broader cultural and social worlds. These details show that literacy, cultural awareness, and educational preparation were intentionally cultivated in the household.

The church was also central to Imani's upbringing. Her statement, *Thank God for a training church*, reflect the importance of the church as a formative institution in her life. For Imani, the church was not only a religious space but also a site of discipline, preparation, and

community development. Like her brother, Imani was expected to attend college. She described college as a no-brainer because her parents had made the expectation clear and saved money to make college possible for both children to go to college. Her biography therefore reflects the intergenerational value her family placed on education, as well as the broader role of Black families, churches, and schools in preparing children for life beyond Visionary Prairie.

Segregated schools function as academically rigorous and culturally affirming spaces.

Segregated schools functioned as academically rigorous and culturally affirming spaces. Black schools did more that educate students in a narrow academic sense; they provided strong academic instruction while also affirming Black identity, culture and community values. Imani's narrative demonstrates that schooling in Visionary Prairie extended beyond the formal classroom. Her comment, *"Thank God for a training church!"* reveals the central role of the church in shaping students' educational, moral, and communal development. Because the church also served as the school, it became a multipurpose institution where academic learning, spiritual formation, community gathering, and racial preparation overlapped.

For Imani, the church/school functioned as a training ground. This is significant because it shows that education in the segregated community was not limited to reading, writing, and arithmetic. Students were also prepared to understand themselves, value their community, and navigate the racial realities that awaited them beyond Visionary Prairie. This emphasis on the church as a formative educational space is especially important because it was not emphasized in the same way by her brother, Mr. T. While both siblings reflected positively on their upbringing and did not describe desegregation in wholly negative terms, Imani's narrative places greater attention on the church's role in preparing Black children for life during and after desegregation. Her account expands the meaning of schooling by showing how Black educational spaces

operated as sites of academic instruction, cultural affirmation, spiritual training and communal protection.

Segregated schools were under-resourced but functioned as sites of protection and preparation

Imani's narrative frames segregated schooling as *materially under-resourced*, but socially, culturally, and emotionally sustaining. When asked about segregated school and the transition into desegregation, she began by locating the school in its physical and economic context: *We attended school in a one-room school, housed in the rural part of town… the resources were meager, but we didn't feel like we were lacking anything.* Her language immediately establishes a central tension in the narrative. On one hand, she acknowledges material scarcity through words such as *one-room, rural,* and *meager.* On the other hand, she refuses a deficit interpretation of that scarcity. The phrase *we didn't feel like we were lacking anything* suggests that the emotional and communal experience of schooling exceeded the limitations of material resources. For Imani, the segregated school was not remembered primarily as a place of deprivation but as a place where Black children were protected, affirmed and prepared.

The sense of protection was produced collectively by the community. Imani's memory of the "Back-to-School Bash" reveals how Visionary Prairie transformed schooling into a community ritual of care. The fact that the community members sold cucumbers to provide supplies for an annual banquet demonstrates that education was not viewed as the responsibility of the school alone. Instead, the entire township participated in making Black children feel important. This detail is analytically significant because it shows how material lack was met with communal labor. The banquet functioned as more that a school event; it was a public affirmation of Black childhood, Black possibility, and Black educational worth. In Imani's narrative, the

community did not wait for outside institutions to value their children. It created its own practices of recognition.

Imani's narrative also positions the school, family, and church as interconnected sites of preparation. The church, which she previously described as a *training church*, functioned alongside the segregated school as a space where children were disciplined, affirmed, and readied for the racial realities beyond the Black community. This preparation became especially important as desegregation approached. Her account suggests that the adults in Visionary Prairie understood that desegregation would not simply bring access; it would also expose Black children to racial uncertainty, social isolation, and institutional indifference. Therefore, the segregated schools and churches operated as protective training grounds. They prepared children academically, but they also prepared them to endure and navigate anti-Black conditions in newly desegregated spaces. In the township, the Black citizens were a community. They looked out for each other which is a source of protection and in the training grounds of the school (church), there was a sense of urgency to prepare the children for what was to come with desegregation.

Desegregation produced racial uncertainty and institutional abandonment

The transition into desegregation disrupted this protective ecosystem. Imani's statement, *we were left to figure it out on our own*, captures the emotional and institutional abandonment that accompanied desegregation. The use of *we* is important because she does not narrate this as an individual's struggle alone; she frames it as a collective experience. Black students entered desegregated schools without the full communal infrastructure that had previously surrounded them. Although some individual teachers may have attempted to soften the transition, the larger institution did not provide the guidance, protection, or care that Black students had known in the segregated community. In this way, desegregation produced a paradox, Black students may have

gained access to more course offerings and better material resources, but those gains did not automatically produce dignity, belonging, or equity.

Imani's narrative therefore challenges any simple reading of desegregation as uncomplicated progress. Her account does not deny that desegregated schools were under-resourced, nor does it romanticize the injustice of segregation. Rather, it demonstrates that Black communities created meaningful educational worlds within and against racial oppression. The segregated school in Visionary Prairie functioned as a site of protection, preparation, affirmation, and collective responsibility. Desegregation, by contrast, expanded some material possibilities while weakening the Black institutional networks that had sustained students. Through Imani's story, the meaning of desegregation becomes layered: it was not only a movement toward access but also an experience of displacement, uncertainty, and loss.

Interpretive reflection

As discussed earlier, Imani and Mr. T are siblings who were raised in the same household and experienced desegregation within the same community. Yet their narratives demonstrated that proximity to the same historical event does not necessarily produce identical experiences or meanings. Although they shared familial, geographic, and educational contexts, they composed different stories of their upbringing.

What stood out to me most prominently in Imani's narrative was the central position she gave to the church. Early in the interview, she exclaimed, *Thank God for a training church!* Her phrasing communicated more than simple appreciation. The exclamation carried a sense of retrospective gratitude, suggesting that from her present position, she understood the church as foundational to the person she eventually became. The word *training* was particularly significant because it portrayed the church not solely as a place for worship but as an institution that

intentionally prepared children for life. Within Imani's story, the church taught values, cultivated discipline, reinforced educational expectations, and provided a framework through which she learned to understand herself and her responsibilities to others.

Imani's description of the church also illuminated the social dimension of her experience. Her development did not occur through the influence of a single institution or relationship. Her parents invested deeply in both Imani and Mr. T, providing educational resources in the home that extended and reinforced what the children encountered at school, church, and throughout the community. Their home functioned as another important site of learning, where educational expectations are cultivated and supported. At the same time, Imani's narrative situated her parents within a broader network of communal care. Her education was shaped through the interconnected contributions of family members, educators, church leaders, and community members who collectively participated in preparing for their futures. Rather than portraying these influences as separate, Imani's account revealed how the home, church, school, and community worked together as overlapping spaces of education and development.

Place was equally important in Imani's narrative. The church, school, family home and surrounding Black community were not merely backgrounds against which her childhood occurred. They were active spaces for education, care, and identity formation. Although Imani remembered the school as materially meager, she did not narrate material scarcity as evidence that the community was deficient. Instead, she described a community that responded to institutional neglect through collective labor. When the school lacked necessary resources, families and community members worked together to meet those needs. Materials limitations were therefore met with social abundance.

Imani's account suggests that education extended beyond the formal boundaries of school. The church trained children, families reinforced expectations, and community members contributed labor and resources when institutions failed to provide adequately. Through these overlapping places and relationships, education became a communal responsibility rather than an activity assigned exclusively to teachers and schools. The community's labor should not romanticize the inequitable conditions that made such intervention necessary. Nevertheless, Imani's story demonstrated how Black communities created sustaining educational structures amid material constraint.

Ultimately, Imani's narrative portrays education as an interdependent process situated across home, church, school and community Her account complicates any interpretation of desegregation that focuses exclusively on movement from one school building to another. What was at stake was also a broader educational ecosystem composed of relationships, cultural practices, communal obligations, and meaningful places. The story she told suggests that the resources most central to her development were not exclusively material. They included collective knowledge, discipline, care, and labor of a community committed to preparing its children for lives beyond the boundaries imposed upon them.

Ann

Ann was widely known in Visionary Prairie for her wealth of knowledge and her willingness to share it with others. When I first contacted her and explained how I had received her information, I asked if she would be willing to participate in the study. She responded with enthusiasm and agreed immediately. During the interview, Ann shared rich and detailed reflections about her life, schooling, family, and experiences with desegregation. After the interview concluded; however, I realized that the conversation had not been recorded. Because

the information she shared was so valuable to the study, I contacted her again and asked whether she would be willing to repeat the interview. Without hesitation, she agreed. The second interview was equally rich, and Ann again offered thoughtful insight into her experiences and the and the history of her community.

Ann is a 75-year-old wife, mother, and longtime community servant. She was raised in a close-knit family led by parents who were deeply respected in their community. Throughout the interview, Ann spoke with great admiration for her father, who played an instrumental role in her upbringing. He was one of the few people in their community who had a car, and he often used it to transport people wherever they needed to go. Community members knew that they could depend on both Ann's father and mother. Her mother was also regarded as a pillar in the community. Although Ann's mother finished high school and had the opportunity to attend college, she chose not to pursue college after both her parents died within three months of one another when she was 17 years old. Their death of her parents left eight children orphaned, and Ann's mother remained at home to help ensure that her siblings were properly raised.

Ann's father completed eighth grade but did not attend high school. Although neither of her parents had the opportunity to complete the level of formal education they desired, they consistently emphasized the importance of education to Ann and her sisters. Ann explained that her parents wanted their children to have access to opportunities that had not been available to them. For her family, education was understood as a pathway to these opportunities. This emphasis on schooling shaped Ann's own educational journey and the expectations her family held for their children.

She has been married to her husband for approximately 50 years. One particularly meaningful part of her family's educational story is that Ann, her husband, and their son all

earned degrees from the same state university at the same time. Ann completed her master's degree, her husband earned his PhD, and their son completed his bachelor's degree. The achievement was significant enough that a local news station featured a story on the family. Ann is a proud and active member of a Divine Nine sorority, and much of her current community service is connected to the work and sisterhood of that organization.

Ann attended school in her segregated Black township until the eighth grade, when she was expected to transition to the desegregated school. She did not describe having strong negative feelings about desegregation when it first occurred. Instead, she recalled that students were simply informed that their school was closing. Although she did not remember having an immediate emotional response, she understood that the Black community was expected to respond with composure and resilience. Her narrative suggests that desegregation was not presented to the students as a choice; rather, it was something they had to accept and navigate.

As Ann transitioned into the desegregated school, she noticed that her athletic ability shaped how she was treated. She played basketball and ran track for both the segregated and desegregated schools. Because she was a strong athlete, she was treated differently from some of the other Black students. In reflecting on her segregated school experience, the one thing that she regretted about desegregation was that she was unable to graduate as a The Visionary Prairie Lion. They were forced to go into a new school environment without the cultural symbols and relationships that had defined who they were. For her, this transition was profoundly sad because it represented the loss of a collective school identity.

Identity loss and the cost of desegregation

In Ann's narrative, desegregation emerged as both an opportunity and a loss. One of the most significant moments in the interview occurred when Ann stated, *I would have liked to*

graduate a Visionary Prairie Mountain Lion. Although this statement may appear simple, it carries significant analytical weight. The mountain lion was the mascot of the segregated school, and Ann's desire to graduate under that identity reveals how deeply the school was connected to students' sense of belonging, memory, and community. Her comment demonstrates that desegregation did not only move Black students from one building to another; it disrupted the symbols, traditions, and collective identities that had shaped who they understood themselves to be.

Ann's statement also illustrates the emotional cost of losing a school community. The mascot represented more than school spirit. It symbolized continuity, pride, and attachment to a Black educational space that had formed students socially, culturally, and academically. Through Ann's narrative, the loss of the mountain lion's identity becomes a way of understanding the broader cost of desegregation. Students were expected to transition to new schools, new mascots, and new instructional cultures without fully naming what had been taken from them. In this sense, desegregation functioned as a sudden removal from a familiar and affirming educational environment. Even when the move created access to new opportunities, it also left reminders of what had been lost.

This distinction is important because it complicates any simple reading of desegregation as wholly positive. Ann's experience demonstrated that access did not necessarily mean full belonging. Her athletic ability allowed her to navigate the desegregated school with certain advantages, but those advantages also highlight the uneven conditions under which Black students were received. Ann's narrative reveals that some students were granted conditional acceptance when their talents benefited the institution, while others may have remained more vulnerable to exclusion, isolation, or invisibility.

The cost of desegregation was evident in Ann's reflection of Black teachers. She noted that it would have been beneficial for Black teachers to accompany students into the desegregated school. This observation points to another significant loss: the removal of Black educators from the daily lives of Black students. Black teachers had served not only as academic instructors, but also as cultural guides, advocates, disciplinarians, and models of possibility. Their absence in desegregated schools meant that Black students entered new educational spaces without many of the adults who had previously understood and affirmed them.

Ann's narrative therefore reveals that desegregation carried layered consequences. While it may have expanded access to resources and opportunities, it also fractured school identity, displaced Black educators, and required Black students to adapt to institutions that did not always fully receive them. Her desire to *graduate a mountain lion* captures the heart of this tension. It is a statement about memory, identity, and unfinished belonging. Through Ann's story, desegregation is not simply remembered as progress; it is remembered as a complicated transition that came at a cost.

Interpretive reflection

Ann understood desegregation as an experience marked by both opportunity and loss. She did not narrate it as entirely beneficial or wholly damaging. Instead, its meaning shifted according to the particular aspect of the experience she recalled. Desegregation expanded access to courses, competitive athletic programs, and a broader range of colleges and postsecondary opportunities. At the same time, these opportunities came at a considerable cost to the Black township. Black educators lost their positions, the community lost control of an important educational institution, and students were separated from traditions that had connected generation of Black families to the school.

The depth of this loss became especially visible when Ann stated, *I would have liked to graduate a Mountain Lion*. Simplistic to most, but the Mountain Lion was more than a school mascot. It represented history Ann expected to inherit, inhabit and eventually carry forward. Her desire to graduate as a Mountain Lion connected her anticipated future to the experiences of the students and community members who had come before her. Desegregation disrupted that continuity. Ann was not merely transferred to another school; she was required to relinquish an identity she had expected to claim.

Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) temporal dimension of narrative inquiry helps illuminate the significance of Ann's statement. Her narrative moved between the past she remembered, the future she had once imagined, and the meaning she assigned to that loss during the interview. As a child, she may have anticipated continuing a tradition established by previous generations. Looking backward, however, she understood that desegregation had denied her that opportunity. The statement *I would have liked to* express a possibility that could no longer be recovered. It revealed not only nostalgia but also grief for a future that institutional decisions had made impossible.

Ann's words also evoked a sense of familiarity in me as the researcher. I identify as a Muskogee Rougher, and I understand how a school identity can become connected to memory, belonging, and community pride. My own attachment to being a Rougher helped me recognize that Ann's longing to graduate as a Mountain Lion was not trivial. At the same time, my experience is not equivalent to hers. I was able to claim and maintain the school identity that had been made available to me, whereas Ann was compelled to abandon hers. My response therefore became an entry point for understanding her loss rather than a replacement for the historical and racial conditions of her experience.

The spatial dimension of Ann's narrative further demonstrated that the segregated school was not simply a building. It was a place where Black traditions, relationships, and collective identities were created and sustained. When Black students entered the desegregated school, they were expected to adopt the symbols, customs, and traditions of another institution. The traditions they brought with them were not incorporated on equal terms. Instead, they were asked to participate in an already established institutional story and to treat its traditions as though they had always been their own. Ann's narrative therefore suggests that desegregation required Black students to cross not only physical boundaries but also cultural and emotional ones.

Ann also recognized that her experience within the desegregated school was shaped by her athletic ability. As a basketball player, she gained access to opportunities, relationships, and spaces that may not have been equally available to other Black students. Her athletic participation gave her value within the new school environment and may have helped ease aspects of her experience as evidence that desegregation worked equally well for all students. Her access was conditional, at least in part, upon what she could contribute to the school's athletic program.

This aspect of Ann's narrative produced discomfort for me because it reflects a pattern that remains visible in contemporary educational institutions. Black students' athletic abilities are often celebrated and cultivated even when their academic development, cultural identities and broader well-being receive less institutional attention. Ann's narrative raises the possibility that inclusion within the desegregated school is not based solely on a commitment to educational equality. For some students, acceptance may have depended upon whether their abilities benefited the institution. Athletic participation created opportunities for Ann, but it also revealed the uneven conditions under which Black students could gain recognition and belonging.

Through the dimensions of temporality, sociality, and place, Ann's narrative reveals desegregation as a process of simultaneous expansion and displacement. She gained access to resources and opportunities that had previously been restricted, yet she also lost an educational identity rooted in the history of the Black township. Her narrative resists a simple judgment of desegregation as either successful or unsuccessful. Instead, it demonstrates that access can coexist with loss, inclusion can remain conditional, and institutional opportunity can require Black students to surrender meaningful parts of their communal identities.

MBJ

MBJ is Ann's younger sister. She is a 73-year-old widow who currently resides in Visionary Prairie, near her sister. Like Ann, MBJ spoke with deep admiration for their father and the values he instilled in their family. When describing her childhood, she characterized it as *wonderful,* explaining that *everyone in town was like family,* and that her upbringing was *rich in love and support*. Her account positioned Visionary Prairie as more than a geographic location; it was a communal structure of care, accountability, and collective responsibility. MBJ recalled that *everybody knew everybody; nobody did without,* and that she and her sisters were *raised by a village.* These memories suggest that her childhood was shaped by relational closeness, interdependence, and a shared commitment to Black children's growth.

Like her sister, MBJ emphasized that her parents wanted their children to have more opportunities than they had been afforded. Her father was a farmer, a hard worker, and a respected community figure who served on the school board. His presence carried weight in the town, and MBJ remembered that *everyone knew who he was*. This familial foundation shaped how MBJ understood education, discipline, and self-respect. She recalled that if children *got into*

trouble at school, they had to *explain it at home,* illustrating the strong connection between school and family life in the segregated Black community.

MBJ also attended a desegregated high school. Although she did not describe herself as a standout athlete, she was a member of the basketball team, and this affiliation allowed her to participate in school trips and other activities. During the interview, MBJ presented herself as direct, humorous and unwilling to tolerate mistreatment. She explained that when she and her peers encountered injustice at the desegregated school, they protested. They made their concerns known to teachers and principals, while also understanding *how far to go* in their resistance. Her narrative suggests that Black students were not passive recipients of desegregation. Rather, they actively negotiated the conditions of their schooling and challenged unfair treatment when necessary.

Although MBJ was not especially talkative beyond the interview questions, her account corroborated many of Ann's descriptions of Visionary Prairie, segregated schooling, and the social cost of desegregation. One of the most significant moments in the interview occurred when MBJ was asked about the personal and communal outcomes of desegregation. She responded that desegregation *killed the town* but *opened more doors for us*. She further explained, *when you lose your school, you lose your town.* This statement captures the central tension in MBJ's narrative. Desegregation created individual opportunities for Black students, but it also contributed to the institutional and cultural erosion of the Black community. Her narrative also resists a simple interpretation of desegregation as either progress or loss. Instead, MBJ remembered it as both: a pathway to expanded opportunity and a wound to communal identity.

After high school, MBJ received a scholarship to attend college and became a teacher. She taught kindergarten for nearly 40 years. Her decision to teach was shaped in part by our own educational experiences. She explained that she wanted to be a better teacher than some of the teachers she had encountered. MBJ understood teaching as a contribution to the world, particularly through the lives of the students she taught. She described teaching as *filling up an empty bottle,* a metaphor that reveals how she understood education as a process of nourishment, development, as a possibility.

Segregated schools function as academically rigorous and culturally affirming spaces

MBJ's memories of segregated schooling emphasized both academic expectations and cultural affirmation. Her statements *everyone in town was like family, nobody did without*, and *we were raised by a village,* illustrate the communal foundation that surrounded Black children's education. Schooling was not separate from home, church, or community life. Rather, it was embedded within a broader ecology of care and accountability. The expectation that children had to explain school troubles at home reveal the continuity between educators and families. Black children were watched over, corrected, protected and prepared by a collective network of adults. In MBJ's narrative, segregated schooling was not defined only by material deprivation. It was also remembered as a site where Black children were known, valued, and held to high standards.

Segregated schools were under-resourced but functioned as sites of protection and preparation

MBJ also acknowledged the material inequalities that shaped segregated schooling. She recalled that *three grades were in one room* and that students *had to share books.* She further explained that Black students received *the beat-up books that the white schools were finished with.* However, MBJ's narrative does not frame these schools as deficient. Instead, she emphasized the commitment of Black educators, noting that *teachers came out to our house* and

that *education was something we knew we needed to succeed.* The contrast is important. The schools were materially under-sourced, but they were socially and pedagogically rich. Black teachers and families worked within unequal conditions while still preparing students to imagine futures beyond those conditions.

Desegregation exposed racialized gatekeeping mechanisms

MBJ's experience in the desegregated school revealed how racial exclusion persisted even after formal segregation ended. One of the clearest examples occurred when she was denied a scholarship despite being qualified. MBJ recalled that a teacher told her that she did not receive the scholarship because she was Black and because *all Black girls go off to college and get pregnant.* She further explained that the scholarship was given *to a boy with a lower GPA.* This moment demonstrates how racialized and gendered assumptions were used to deny Black students access to recognition and opportunity. MBJ had earned the scholarship, but the decision-making structure positioned her Blackness and gender a liability rather than acknowledging her achievement.

This incident reflects a broader pattern in the participants' narratives: Black students were often expected to work harder while receiving fewer accolades. The familiar lesson that Black children must *work twice as hard to get half the accolades* was not a figment of their imagination, it was a lived reality. However, MBJ's narrative also shows that she did not passively accept these conditions. Her account of student protest reveals a refusal to quietly absorb injustice. She and her peers challenged mistreatment, demanded fairness, and learned how to push against institutional power without placing themselves in unnecessary danger.

The same gatekeeping followed MBJ after college. When she returned to seek a teaching position in the district, she was qualified and had earned strong grades, yet she was initially

denied employment. MBJ believed this was because the district had *met their Black quota.* Her interpretation suggests that desegregated institutions often treated Black educators as symbolic requirements rather than as professionals with expertise. Rather than abandoning teaching. MBJ accepted a position in another district, where she built a nearly 40-year career and earned several noteworthy awards. Her professional success challenges the very deficit assumptions that had been used to exclude her.

Desegregation resulted in the systemic displacement of Black educators and the erosion of Black communities

MBJ's statement that *school desegregation killed the town* is one of the most powerful claims in her narrative. For MBJ, the loss of the Black school was not merely an institutional change; it was a communal rupture. The school served as a center of identity, memory, accountability, and collective pride. When the school was removed, the town lost one of its primary organizing institutions. MBJ's statement, *when you lose your school, you lose your town,* reveals how deeply Black schools were tied to Black community survival.

Her memories of Black teachers further emphasize this point. MBJ recalled that teachers had *high moral standards,* and that *respect was non-negotiable.* These educators did more than deliver instruction. They modeled dignity, discipline, and possibility. Their displacement under desegregation represented more than job loss; it signaled the removal of culturally responsive authority figures who had protected and prepared Black children. MBJ's narrative suggests that desegregation may have opened doors for individual Black students while simultaneously weakening the institutions that has sustained Black communal life.

Material gains did not translate into dignity or equity

MBJ acknowledged that segregation brought some material benefits. She noted that after desegregation, Black students *got our own books.* This mattered because it is marked a shift from receiving discarded materials to having access to resources that had previously been reserved for white students. However, MBJ was clear that material access did not automatically produce equality. She stated that *we were not considered equal* and remembered the warning that *they're going to think you are stupid.* These statements reveal the psychological and social dimensions of desegregation. Black students may have entered better-resourced buildings, but they also entered spaces where their intelligence, worth, and belonging were questioned.

MBJ's account shows that desegregation required Black students to navigate both opportunity and racial hostility. They had to *work harder to get what we deserved,* but they also learned to *hold your head high.* This language reveals the politics of dignity. MBJ and her peers understood that survival in desegregated schools required academic effort, self-possession, and collective resistance. They did not merely seek inclusion. They demanded recognition.

However, after MBJ graduated from high school in the desegregated school, she returned after graduating college to try and retain a teaching position. She had made good grades in college and was qualified to teach, but the gatekeeping structure she experienced in high school was still in place. She was denied a job initially. MBJ surmised it to be because, *they had met their Black quota.* Not giving up on teaching, she took a job in another school district where she earned several noteworthy awards.

Collective resistance and familial solidarity mitigated racial harm

A central feature of MBJ's narrative is the way Black students and families responded to racial harm collectively. MBJ remembered that when students were mistreated, *we protested,* and eventually *we got our officers in place.* This detail demonstrates that Black students resisted

exclusion not only through complaint but through organized action. They challenged inequitable practices and fought for representation within the school structure.

At the same time, MBJ's resistance was grounded in the values she learned from her family and community. Her parents taught her to *stay true to myself,* and her broader community taught her to move through the world with dignity. The familial lessons of hard work, accountability, and self-respect became resources that helped her endure and challenge the racialized conditions of desegregated schooling. In this way, MBJ's narrative reveals that Black students' survival was not produced by desegregation itself. It was produced by the protective labor of Black families, Black educators, and Black communities who prepared students to face institutions that often refused to fully affirm them.

Overall, MBJ's narrative complicated celebratory accounts for desegregation. Her story shows that desegregation expanded individual access while also producing communal loss. It opened doors, but it also displaced Black educators, weakened Black institutions, and exposed Black students to new forms of racial gatekeeping. MBJ's life after desegregation demonstrates resilience and achievement, but her narrative makes clear that her success did not erase the cost. For MBJ, the meaning of desegregation rests in this contradiction: it creates opportunities for Black students to move forward, while leaving behind the schools and communities that had first taught them who they were.

Interpretive reflection

MBJ, Ann's sister, narrated desegregation from a more openly confrontational position. When she encountered injustice, she did not remain silent. She described herself and others as willing to speak out, challenge unfair treatment, and make their dissatisfaction known. Her account therefore revealed not only what happened to her during desegregation but also how she

understood herself as a person who responded to injustice. Within the social dimension of her narrative, resistance became part of her identity and part of the way she negotiated the racialized conditions of the desegregated schools.

The statement that stood out most to me was MBJ's assertion that desegregation *killed the town.* Her use of the word "killed" conveyed a sense of rupture that extended far beyond the closing or restructuring of a school. The statement suggested that the school had functioned as a living center of the Black township and that its loss weakened the relationships, employment structures, traditions, and forms of collective life that had sustained the community. Through the spatial dimension of narrative inquiry, Visionary Prairie emerged not simply as the setting of MBJ's story but as a place whose identity was deeply connected to its Black educational institutions. When those institutions were diminished, the town itself was altered.

MBJ's narrative moved between the community that existed before desegregation, the disruptions that occurred during the transition, and the consequences that remained visible when she reflected on her life. Her statement that desegregation killed the town was a present-day interpretation of a historical process whose effects continued across generations. It connected the loss of Black educators and institutions in the past to the weakened condition of the township in the present. Her narrative therefore portrayed desegregation not as a single event that ended when Black students entered a white school, but as an ongoing process whose consequences continued to shape the community long afterward.

MBJ's own life complicates the story of loss. She graduated from the segregated school, attended college, and eventually returned to Visionary Prairie, where she now serves as an elected official. Her educational and civic achievement demonstrates resilience, determination, and a continued commitment to the community from which she came. Her return is especially

meaningful because it represents a movement back toward the place that shaped her. She did not simply leave Visionary Prairie behind after gaining access to new opportunities. Instead, she returned and assumed responsibility for helping sustain the town that she believed desegregation had damaged.

Yet MBJ's success should not be used to suggest that the consequences of desegregation were ultimately overcome. Her individual achievement did not restore the jobs lost by Black educators, rebuild the institutions that had been weakened, or recover the communal traditions that were disrupted. Desegregation opened educational doors for MBJ, but it also displaced Black professionals, reduced Black institutional authority, and exposed students to new forms of gatekeeping. Her narrative makes clear that increased individual access and collective Black loss existed at the same time.

As I reflect on MBJ's story, I was struck by the tension between her declaration that desegregation killed the town and her decision to return and serve as an elected official. Her return did not contradict her assessment of desegregation's consequences. Instead, it suggested an enduring attachment to Visionary Prairie and a refusal to abandon a place that had experienced significant loss. Her life story therefore became one of both disruption and reclamation. Although she could not reverse the history she described, her leadership represented an effort to remain accountable to the community and to participate in shaping its future.

MBJ's narrative portrays desegregation as a process that expanded individual opportunity while destabilizing Black communal life. Her story resists the assumption that personal success proves institutional progress. MBJ achieved academically, returned home, and became a civic leader, but she continued to name the damage caused by the loss of Black schools and educators. Her narrative demonstrated that resilience does not erase harm, and that achievement can coexist

with grief, resistance, and an enduring awareness of what the community was forced to surrender.

DJ

DJ is a 71-year-old male who attended the Phoenix Settlement school, a small rural school that served students from kindergarten through twelfth grade. His father worked as both the school custodian and bus driver while his mother initially remained at home to care for the family before later accepting a position at the school.

Growing up, DJ's daily routine reflected the responsibilities of life in a farming community. Before leaving for school each morning, he and his siblings completed household and farm chores. After school, they were expected to return home and continue working on the family farm. His parents placed a strong emphasis on discipline, responsibility and hard work, expectations that shaped his work ethic throughout his childhood. Employment opportunities within the community were limited, with farming serving as the primary occupation and the local school representing the largest employer outside of agriculture.

DJ attended an all-Black school throughout his elementary and secondary education and noted that there were no white teachers during his years as a student. Athletics played a significant role in his educational experience. Participation in sports motivated him to maintain good academic standing and reinforced the values of commitment and perseverance instilled by his parents.

One of the most remarkable aspects of DJ's educational history was his exceptional attendance. Throughout his entire K-12 education, he missed only one day of school. On that occasion, he was feeling ill and his mother instructed him to stay home that morning if he wanted

to be well enough to participate in his basketball game later that evening. As a result, that single absence became the only day he missed during his school career.

Unlike many of the other participants in this study, DJ did not experience school desegregation during his K-12 education. His first experience in a desegregated educational setting occurred when he entered college. There, he encountered racial tensions and interactions that he described as unwelcoming. To navigate these challenges, he maintained close relationships with a trusted group of peers whom he relied upon for support and personal safety if conflicts arose. He also recalled instances of grading practices that he perceived as unfair, leading him to question whether racial bias influenced his academic evaluations.

Throughout the interview, DJ appeared hesitant to openly discuss some of his experiences. Despite repeated assurances that his identity would remain confidential, he expressed concern that others might recognize him through his comments. His continued caution, decades after the events occurred, suggested that the experiences had left a lasting impression and underscored the enduring impact of those experiences on his willingness to speak openly about them.

DJ's narrative is constructed around the belief that success was rooted in discipline, family responsibility, and collective accountability. Throughout his interview, he repeatedly returned to stories of work, education, and community, suggesting that these experiences formed the foundation of his identity long before he encountered desegregation. Rather than presenting himself as someone who overcame adversity through individual determination alone, DJ framed his success as the product of a tightly connected Black community that nurtured, monitored and prepared its children for adulthood.

The opening of DJ's narrative establishes Phoenix Settlement as more than a place; it functioned as a protective community where family, school, church and work operated as interconnected institutions. His descriptions of daily chores, farm labor beginning at age eleven, and shared household responsibilities portray childhood as a period of preparation rather than leisure. Every member of the household contributed to the family's success. Likewise, adults throughout the community shared responsibility for raising children, reinforcing the idea that education and character development were collective rather than individual endeavors. This communal structure provided both accountability and security and became the lens through which DJ evaluated later educational experiences.

Segregated schools function as academically rigorous and culturally affirming spaces

DJ consistently positioned the segregated school as a culturally affirming institution rather than a deficient one. Although he acknowledged material shortages, including limited instructional resources, he emphasized the strength of the school community. Black teachers served not only as instructors but also as mentors, disciplinarians, and role models who understood the lived experiences of their students. Their investment extended beyond academic performance to students' personal development. For DJ, the value of segregated schooling was measured less by physical resources and more by the relationships and cultural understanding that existed between educators and students. His repeated assertion that Black teachers were *more nurturing* reflects his belief that educational effectiveness depended upon genuine care and knowledge of students' lives.

Athletics emerged as another organizing element within DJ's narrative. Sports represented more than competition; they became a source of motivation, discipline, and collective pride. His recollection that predominantly white schools *couldn't beat us in sports*

symbolized resistance against assumptions of Black inferiority during the early years of desegregation. Athletic success became one of the few spaces where Black students could publicly demonstrate excellence despite broader experiences of exclusion and discrimination.

Desegregation exposed Black students to persistent racial terror and psychological harm

Unlike several participants whose narratives centered on K-12 desegregation, DJ's transition into desegregated educational setting occurred in college. This transition serves as the central turning point in his story. Entering college required him to leave the protective environment of Phoenix Settlement and navigate institutions where he perceived racial bias as embedded within everyday interactions. His descriptions of unfair grading, limited avenues for appeal, and feelings of not being *well accepted* illustrate how desegregation expanded educational access without eliminating structural inequality. Rather than depicting these incidents as isolated acts of prejudice, DJ described them as expected realities that required adaptation. His statements that one had to *learn to cope, to get around it,* and even *manipulate for your own benefit* reflect the development of survival strategies within racially desegregated environments.

One of the most revealing episodes in DJ's narrative involves the Labor Management Relations course, where he believes a white instructor intentionally denied him credit for a class presentation despite corroboration from white classmates. Narratively, this story functions as more than an isolated classroom incident. It symbolizes the broader erosion of trust that accompanied his transition into predominantly white educational spaces. Even objective evidence failed to secure equitable treatment, reinforcing his perception that academic evaluation was influenced by race rather than merit. This episode stands in sharp contrast to his earlier

descriptions of Black educators, whom he remembered as fair, supportive, and personally invested in student success.

DJ's narrative also illustrates the emotional consequences of desegregation beyond institutional discrimination. His participation in marches and sit-ins demonstrates that he understood his experiences within the broader context of the Civil Rights Movement. Rather than interpreting unfair treatment as personal failure, he recognized it as part of a collective language, *we weren't well accepted, we all felt the same way,* and *the treatment of our people,* positions his story within a shared historical experience rather than an individual account of discrimination. Resistance therefore became both a personal and communal response to injustice.

Segregated schools were under-resourced but functioned as sites of protection and preparation

Throughout the interview, DJ simultaneously acknowledged the opportunities created through desegregation while questioning whether those opportunities translated into genuine equity. He recognized that desegregated institutions offered greater exposure to diverse people, improved facilities, and expanded educational possibilities. However, these material gains did not compensate for the psychological costs of discrimination, cultural isolation, and diminished support. His narrative suggests that educational equality cannot be measured solely through access to buildings, textbooks, or programs; it must also include dignity, belonging, and equitable treatment.

Ultimately, DJ's story challenges dominant narratives that portray desegregation as an uncomplicated educational advancement. Instead, his experiences reveal a paradox in which expanded educational access coincided with increased racial marginalization. His memories of Phoenix Settlement are characterized by community, affirmation, and shared responsibility, whereas his recollections of desegregated higher education emphasize vigilance, adaptation, and

resistance. Through this contrast, DJ constructs a narrative in which segregated schools functioned as academically rigorous and culturally sustaining spaces, while desegregation provided greater material opportunities but simultaneously exposed Black students to persistent racial inequalities. His account demonstrated that access alone did not guarantee justice and that the loss of culturally responsive educational environment carried consequences that extended far beyond the classroom.

Interpretive reflection

Reflecting on DJ's narrative repeatedly brought me back to the way he answered the interview questions. His responses were measured, guarded, and at times, apprehensive. I could not determine whether he was concerned that speaking more candidly would appear unprofessional, whether he feared someone might recognize him through his account or whether some other experience shaped his restraint. Whatever the reason, his hesitation remained significant to me. It raised questions about the conditions under which Black people feel permitted to narrate their lives and the extent to which they may feel compelled to make their stories acceptable to others.

Even after I assured DJ that he could express himself in language that reflected his experiences, he remained cautious. His restraint therefore became part of the narrative rather than simply an obstacle to it. Within Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) social dimension, the way DJ told his story revealed something about the relationship between the participants, me as the researcher and the broader social world in which the story would be interpreted. His apprehension may reflect an awareness that Black testimony is often scrutinized, questioned, or judged according to standards that do not account for the realities being described. I cannot

definitively explain his guardedness, but I can acknowledge that the conditions surrounding the telling of his story may have shaped what he felt able to say.

DJ's narrative about remaining close to others for safety resonated with lessons I received as a young person. I was taught that Black people should travel in groups, remain aware of their surroundings, and protect one another when entering spaces where they might be vulnerable. There was a collective responsibility that extended beyond physical conflict. It meant that no individual should be left to confront danger alone. I was also taught to be cautious around white people: to remain polite but distant because their intentions could not always be trusted. These lessons may sound harsh when removed from their historical and racial context, but they were presented to us as practices of survival.

DJ's narrative was grounded in the relationships that offered safety, care and protection. His need to be surrounded by others was not simply an individual preference. It reflected a collective understanding that there was protection in numbers. Stories of racial violence and suspicious harm involving Black people continue to reactivate these inherited warnings. When such incidents become publicly discussed, Black communities often return to familiar lessons about the risks of isolation and the vulnerability of being the only Black person within the group. DJ's narrative helped me recognize how these beliefs move across generations, not necessarily as uncontested truth, but as protective knowledge formed through earlier experiences of racial danger.

DJ's story also connected the protective practices of his childhood to the challenges he later encountered in college. Before attending college, he had been educated within a Black community where teachers, relatives and community members worked collectively to support, love and protect children. He did not encounter white teachers until he entered higher education.

College therefore represented more than a new academic setting. It marked a movement away from the familiar network of relationships that had sustained him and into an environment characterized by cultural isolation, discrimination, and diminished support.

The spatial shift from Phoenix Settlement to the college campus was especially important. Phoenix Settlement was not merely DJ's hometown; it was a place organized around collective responsibility. Within that community, adults understood themselves as accountable for the development and safety of children. The college campus, by contrast, appears in DJ's narrative as a less protective and less culturally affirming place. His difficulty adjusting cannot be understood only as an individual response to academic demands. It must also be considered in relation to his loss of the communal structures that had previously allowed him to feel known, valued, and supported.

DJ initially entered college intending to become a pharmacist. He later changed his plans after learning how many years of schooling the profession required. He explained that he needed to complete college, return home, and help his family support the next child's education. His decision revealed the relational responsibilities that shaped his educational choices. College was not solely an individual pursuit or a pathway toward personal advancement. His education was connected to the economic and educational progress of his family. His choice to leave the pharmacy track may therefore be understood as an expression of familial obligation and collective advancement.

At the same time, I wondered whether the challenges DJ encountered within the desegregated educational environment also influenced his decision. I cannot conclude that discrimination or isolation caused him to abandon his original goal because that was not the explanation he provided. Nevertheless, the temporal and social context of his story makes the

question difficult to ignore. His decision occurred while he was adjusting to an institution where he experienced less cultural familiarity and support than he had known throughout his childhood. My role as the researcher is not to replace DJ's stated reasoning with my own, but to remain attentive to the tensions and possible meanings surrounding the decision.

DJ's narrative also extended beyond his experiences as a student. He participated in sit-ins, marches, and other civil rights activities intended to challenge racial inequality. These actions revealed that his response to injustice was not limited to private reflection. He placed himself within a collective struggle to expand the rights and opportunities available to Black people. His participation connected his personal experiences of racialized education to broader historical movements for social change.

DJ eventually became a longtime educator, first serving in Phoenix Settlement and later working in a nearby urban school district. His return to education created continuity between the teachers who shaped his childhood and the educator he later sought to become. He attempted to provide students with the same care, encouragement, and protection that he had received in his segregated Black school. His professional life may therefore be understood as a form of narrative continuity: the communal practices that sustained him as a child became practices he carried into his own work with students.

DJ's narrative reveals the enduring influence of Black communal education. His story moves from the protection of Phoenix Settlement, through the isolation and racialized challenges of college, and into a life of activism and educational service. It also demonstrated that a participant's hesitations, silences, and guarded language are part of the story being told. DJ's narrative was not invalidated by his restraint. Rather, his apprehension exposed the complicated conditions under which Black people are often asked to remember, interpret, and publicly

recount experiences shaped by racism. His eventual work as an educator demonstrated how he carried forward the values of collective care, responsibility, and protection that had sustained him throughout his own education.

Ms. Kay

Ms. Kay is a 70-year-old resident of Vanished Haven, one of Oklahoma's historic Black townships. I first met Ms. Kay at the Black Mayors of the Historic Black Townships' meeting held at The Legacy Crossroads, Oklahoma. During this meeting, I was invited to briefly share my research, explain the purpose of the study and describe what I hoped to learn from the experiences of individuals who had lived through school desegregation in historically Black townships.

After the meeting concluded, Ms. Kay approached me and expressed interest in participating in the study. From our first interaction, she carried herself with warmth, confidence, and a clear sense of communal responsibility. Her presence reminded me of the Black women I had known growing up; women who were nurturing, observant, direct, and deeply invested in the well-being of young people and the community around them. She presented herself with a quiet dignity that communicated both care and seriousness. In many ways, she embodied the type of elder whose life experiences carry both historical memory and practical wisdom.

We spoke briefly after the meeting and later scheduled her interview. When we met via Zoom, Ms. Kay immediately began discussing the academic preparation Black students had received before desegregation. One of the first things she emphasized was that Black students were often ahead of the white students academically, particularly in mathematics and reading. However, after transitioning into the desegregated school, Black students were expected to slow down or wait for the white students to catch up. This experience was frustrating for Ms. Kay and

her peers because, although they possessed strong academic skills, their abilities were rarely recognized or rewarded in the desegregated school setting.

Throughout the interview, Ms. Kay acknowledged she encountered both supportive and unsupportive teachers. However, she spoke with appreciation for the counselors and administrators who transitioned with the Black students into the desegregated school. Their presence offered her a sense of familiarity and stability during a period of significant educational and communal disruption. Although Ms. Kay would have preferred to attend a school in her own community, she also recognized that desegregation brought certain advantages, including access to additional classes, resources, and broader experiences. At the same time, she was clear that the promises attached to desegregation were not fully realized. She remembered being told that the new school arrangement would be better, that the students would learn more, and they would have greater opportunities. Yet her narrative complicates that claim. For Ms. Kay, desegregation provided access, but it also provided loss.

After graduating from high school, Ms. Kay attended college to become an educator. She taught for 30 years before returning to Vanished Haven in retirement. Her life story reflects both continuity and return. She left the community to pursue education and professional work, yet she ultimately returned to the town that shaped her earliest understandings of schooling, community, and Black educational possibility.

Segregated Black schools were remembered as academically rigorous, culturally affirming, and protective spaces.

Ms. Kay's narrative positions the segregated Black school not as an inferior educational space, but as an academically rigorous, culturally affirming, and protective institution. Her recollections directly challenge dominant narratives that frame desegregation as a simple

movement from educational deprivation to educational opportunity. Instead, Ms. Kay's story reveals a more complex reality: Black students gained access to certain material resources through desegregation, but they also lost a community-based institution that had affirmed their intelligences, protected their dignity, and cultivated their academic development.

A central theme in Ms. Kay's narrative is that the segregated Black school provided strong academic participation. She recalled that *we had two classes in the same room...we did our assignments, and we went out to play.* On the surface, this memory may appear to describe limited resources or overcrowded schooling conditions. However, Ms. Kay does not narrate this as a story of deficiency. Instead, she presents it as evidence of structure, discipline, and academic responsibility. Students completed their assignments, understood classroom expectations, and moved through their school day with a sense of order. Her memory suggests that, despite material limitations, the Black school functioned as a serious academic environment where students were expected to learn and perform.

This point becomes even clearer when Ms. Kay stated: *we were ahead of them, especially in math,* and later repeated: *we were ahead of them in math.* The repetition matters. Her insistence on Black students' academic achievement directly counters the assumption that desegregation placed Black into superior academic environments. In Ms. Kay's account, Black students did not arrive at the desegregated school academically behind; rather, they arrived prepared, capable, and in some cases more advanced than their white peers. Her statement, *we learned to read at our school,* further emphasizes that foundation literacy was already being cultivated in the Black school before desegregation. The phrase *our school* is especially important because it communicates ownership, belonging and collective pride. The school was not merely a building; it was an extension of the community.

Ms. Kay's narrative also reveals the frustration Black students experienced when their academic preparation was ignored or minimized. She described having to wait for white students to catch up, particularly in mathematics. This memory is significant because it reverses common desegregation assumptions. Rather than Black students positioned as the beneficiaries of white institutional superiority, Ms. Kay describes Black students as academically capable children forced to slow their learning within a school system that refused to recognize their readiness. Desegregation, in this sense, did not simply expand opportunity; it also imposed new forms of limitation.

Desegregation expanded access to material resources but exposed Black students to humiliation, exclusion and psychological harm

The second major theme in Ms. Kay's narrative is the contradiction between material access and racialized harm. She acknowledged that desegregation broadened her horizons and provided access to resources that were not available at the segregated Black school. However, she also remembered the emotional and psychological costs of entering a hostile educational environment. The quote, *they called us bad names…we sat in the back,* captures the everyday racial humiliation Black students endure. The phrase, *bad names* soften the language while still communicating the violence of racial insult. Her memory of sitting *in the back* is also spatially significant. It shows how racism was organized physically within the school environment. Black students were not simply desegregated into the school; they were placed, managed, and reminded of their subordinate status.

This racialized positioning extended beyond the classroom. Ms. Kay recalled that Black students *had to go to the back door to eat.* This detail is especially powerful because it reveals how segregationist practices persisted inside supposedly desegregated spaces. The school may

have been officially desegregated, but the social practices within it continued to mark Black students as outsiders. The back door becomes symbolic of the false promise of desegregation: Black students were allowed into the institution, but were not fully welcomed into its social, academic or civic life.

Ms. Kay's statement, *we had to work harder but never got recognition,* further exposes the racialized inequity of the desegregated school. Her critique is not that the Black students lacked ability; her critique is that their ability was systematically overlooked. This theme appears again in her recollections that *they gave the scholarships to the white students,* and *they didn't want us to add up our grades.* These examples suggest that recognition was not distributed according to merit. Instead, academic awards, scholarships, and measures of achievement were filtered through racialized gatekeeping practices. Black students could excel, but the institution retained control over whether that excellence would be acknowledged.

The quote *they didn't want us to add up our grades* is particularly revealing. Grade calculation is not simply a technical act; in this narrative, it becomes an act of withheld knowledge and institutional control. If students could calculate their own grades or determine their academic standing, they could challenge unfair decisions about awards, rankings, and scholarships. By discouraging or preventing Black students from accessing that information, the school preserved racialized inequality under the appearance of neutral academic procedure. This is where Ms. Kay's narrative becomes especially important: she shows that desegregation did not eliminate anti-Black educational practices; it often recognized them through policies, recognition systems and everyday school routines.

Ms. Kay's comment that the *worst typewriter went to the Black students* offers another concrete example of racialized resource distribution. Even within a school that supposedly

offered better materials, Black students did not always receive equal access to those materials. This quote complicated the assumption that desegregation automatically meant educational improvement. The presence of newer resources did not guarantee equitable use of those resources. Black students entered schools with more materials, but they still encountered systems that reserved the best of those materials for white students.

At the same time, Ms. Kay's narrative is not one-dimensional. She does not describe desegregation as entirely negative. Her statement, *it broadened my horizons, but it killed the community,* captures the central tension of her story. The phrase *broadened my horizons* acknowledges that desegregation expanded her exposure, possibilities, and educational world. However, the phrase *killed the community* names the devastating communal cost. This is the heart of the narrative. Desegregation may have opened certain doors for individual students, but it also contributed to the closure or weakening of Black institutions that had served as cultural, academic, and social anchors.

The word *killed* is especially significant. Ms. Kay does not say desegregation "changed" the community, "hurt" the community, or "affected" the community. She says it *killed* the community. That language communicates death, rupture, and irreversibility. Her wording suggests that the loss of the Black school was not merely an institutional transition; it was a communal wound. The school had been one of the central places where Black children were educated, protected, disciplined, affirmed and prepared for life. When that school was lost, the community lost more than a building. It lost a site of collective identity and intergenerational continuity.

Ms. Kay's statement, *they lied and said it would be better,* further deepens this critique. The word "lied" indicates that she experienced the promises of desegregation as deceptive or

incomplete. She had been told that segregation would bring better schooling, better learning, and better opportunity. Yet her lived experience revealed a more complicated truth. The desegregated school offered access, but it also exposed Black students to racism, exclusion, humiliation and institutional neglect. For Ms. Kay, the promise of "better" was not fully false, but it was certainly not fully honest. It failed to account for what Black students and Black communities would be required to surrender.

Another important dimension of Ms. Kay's narrative is the role of peer solidarity and collective resistance. She recalled, *we stuck together, if one fights, we all fight.* This statement reveals how Black students developed protective strategies to survive hostile school environments. Their unity functioned as a form of resistance, but also as a form of care. In a school where adults and institutional systems did not always protect them, Black students protected one another. The phrase *we stuck together* emphasizes collective survival. It suggests that students understood themselves as part of a shared racial and communal struggle, not merely as individual students trying to succeed in isolation.

This peer solidarity also complicates how discipline and resistance should be understood. From the perspective of school authorities, Black students' collective defense of one another may have been interpreted as defiance. However, within Ms. Kay's narrative, it appears to be a necessary response to mistreatment. Their togetherness allowed them to endure an environment that was not designed for their full belonging. In this way, resistance was not simply oppositional behavior; it was a survival practice.

Ms. Kay's phrase, *they can't take our brain power,* serves as one of the most powerful statements in the interview. It reflects a refusal to accept the school's attempt to diminish Black intelligence. Even when Black students were denied recognition, given inferior materials,

excluded from scholarships, or forces into humiliating spaces, Ms. Kay understood their intellect as something the institution could not fully control. “Brain power” becomes a form of internal possession and resistance. The school could control awards, seating, doors, typewriters, and scholarships, but it could not take away what Black students knew, how they thought, or what they had already learned in their community school.

Ultimately, Ms. Kay’s demonstrates that desegregation was not a simple story of progress. It was a layered and contradictory process that expanded access while producing harm, opened new possibilities while destroying community institutions, and promised equality while reproducing anti-Black exclusion. Her story shows that the segregated Black school was remembered as a place of academic rigor, cultural affirmation, and communal protection. In contrast, the desegregated school was remembered as a place of increased resources but also racial humiliation, institutional gatekeeping, and psychological injury.

Ms. Kay’s narrative advances the broader finding that Black communities did not simply lose inferior schools through desegregation; they lost institutions that had cultivated Black educational life under deeply unequal conditions. Her account makes clear that the cost of desegregation cannot be measured only by access to textbooks, classes, or facilities. It must also be measured by the loss of community, the denial of recognition, the burden of racial hostility, and the emotional labor Black children were forced to carry in schools that claimed to be better for them.

In Ms. Kay’s story, desegregation broadened horizons, but it also narrowed belonging. It gave Black students access to new spaces while reminding them that those spaces were never built with their full humanity in mind. Her narrative refuses an easy conclusion: Desegregation was neither wholly liberatory nor wholly destructive. It was both an opening and a wound. For

Ms. Kay, the tragedy is that Black children were asked to pay for expanded opportunity with the loss of the very institutions that had already taught them how powerful they were.

Interpretive reflection

Ms. Kay began her narrative, making it clear that the students in the segregated Black school were receiving a strong education. She emphasized that they had been taught to read and complete mathematics, and progress academically before entering the desegregated school. Her insistence on this point challenged the assumption that Black schools were educationally deficient, and that desegregation automatically moved Black into superior learning environments. According to Ms. Kay, many Black students entered the desegregated school academically ahead of their white classmates and were then required to wait for those students to catch up before instruction could continue. What had been presented as educational advancement instead interrupted their academic progress.

Through the temporal dimension of narrative inquiry, Ms. Kay's account connected what she had already learned in the segregated school to what occurred after desegregation. She did not enter the new school as an academically unprepared child who needed to be rescued by a better institution. She entered with knowledge, skills and educational momentum that had been developed by Black teachers and sustained within her community. Desegregation disrupted that progression. The educational future that had been promised to Black students did not always correspond with their daily experiences in the classroom.

Ms. Kay indicated that she would have preferred to remain in the school located within her own community. Because she was desegregated during elementary or middle school, she had little control over the institutional decisions that reshaped her education. Her preference to remain in the Black school should not be interpreted as a rejection of educational opportunity.

Rather, it reflected the value she assigned to an educational place where she had been challenged, supported, and allowed to progress. The segregated school was not merely a building in Vanished Haven. It was a place where Black children were taught within relationships that recognized their abilities and were invested in their development.

The desegregated school did not consistently provide that same recognition. Ms. Kay remembered that Black students were expected to work harder but were not always acknowledged for their achievement. Their labor was demanded while their academic capabilities were overlooked or minimized. Through the social dimension of her narrative, unequal recognition revealed the racialized relationships that structured the desegregated classroom. Black children were not simply entering a new building; they were entering an environment in which teachers and institutional practices could interpret their work differently from that of white students.

This portion of Ms. Kay 's narrative resonated with a lesson that was repeatedly communicated to me as a child: I would have to work twice as hard to receive half as much recognition. That message was presented as preparation for navigating a society in which Black achievement would not necessarily be evaluated fairly. Ms. Kay's account gave historical and experiential weight to that warning. Her story illustrated how Black students could demonstrate academic ability, exercise discipline and meet the increased expectation while still being denied the recognition their efforts deserved.

Within this context, the words of Ms. Kay's mother became especially significant: *They can't take your brain power*. Her mother's statement acknowledged both vulnerability and possession. Institutions could take the community's school, displace Black educators, and contribute to the decline of the township, but the knowledge children had developed remained

theirs. The phrase *brain power* positioned education as an internal resource that could not easily be confiscated, even when the institutions that had nurtured it were dismantled.

Her mother's words represented an intergenerational strategy of protection. She could not prevent every form of racial discrimination Ms. Kay would encounter, but she could help her daughter understand that institutional treatment did not determine her intellectual worth. The statement resisted the possibility that Ms. Kay might internalize the diminished recognition she received in the desegregated school. It reminded her that her abilities existed regardless of whether White teachers or institutions chose to acknowledge them.

Place remained central to the meaning of this narrative. The closure or removal of the Black school affected more than the education of individual students. It weakened Vanished Haven by taking away an institution that had employed Black professionals, supported children and contributed to the community's collective identity. Ms. Kay's statement suggested that although the physical and institutional landscape of the township could be altered, the intellectual foundation created there continued through the people who had been educated within it.

Ms. Kay's life after desegregation demonstrated this continuity. She graduated from the desegregated school, completed college, and worked as an educator for 30 years. In retirement, she returned to Vanished Haven. Her movement from the Black township, through desegregated schooling, and higher education, into a long teaching career, and finally back to her community connected the different places and periods of her life. Her return suggested that Vanished Haven remained central to her identity even after its institutions had been diminished.

Ms. Kay's accomplishments demonstrated persistence, but they cannot erase the inequities she described. Her success did not prove that desegregation operated as an uncomplicated educational benefit. She succeeded while confronting interrupted learning,

unequal expectations, and diminished recognition. Her narrative reveals that the knowledge cultivated in Black schools endured even when the schools did not. The institutions could be taken, but the intellectual capabilities, educational values and commitments developed within them continued to shape the lives and work of the people they had served.

Ms. Cheryl

Ms. Cheryl is a 72-year-old woman whose presence was immediately memorable. I became acquainted with her somewhat unexpectedly while interviewing her sister, Ms. Kay. During the interview, Ms. Cheryl came over to visit and listened as I asked Ms. Kay questions about her school experiences and memories of desegregation. After the interview concluded, Ms. Cheryl began offering her own reflections. I asked if she would be interested in participating in the study, and she agreed. After completing the necessary paperwork, she became a participant.

Ms. Cheryl carried herself with no-nonsense confidence and a deep sense of conviction. She reminded me of the kind of Black elder whose warmth is inseparable from her directness, someone who may nurture you, correct you, and tell you the truth without apology. She had strong beliefs about desegregation and its long-term consequences for Black students and Black communities. Unlike some participants who described desegregation as a complicated mixture of loss and opportunity, Ms. Cheryl was much more definitive in her interpretation. She believed desegregation contributed significantly to the academic struggles Black students face today, particularly in the areas of literacy, school accountability, and community support.

Ms. Cheryl was born in 1954 and graduated in 1971 from Vanished Haven, a desegregated school. She began her education in the segregated schools of Legacy Crossroads and later attended Mingo Hollow before transitioning to Vanished Haven. Her highest level of education is an associate degree. Although she did not speak extensively about her parents'

formal schooling, she described her mother as someone who understood education as essential to survival and self-determination. Her mother taught her children that *you have to be able to read and write, add and subtract so people can't steal your money.* This statement shaped Ms. Cheryl's understanding of education as more than academic achievement. For her family, literacy and numeracy were forms of protection.

Ms. Cheryl also recalled her mother's insistence that the children attend school, respect teachers, and honor the learning environment. Her mother would tell them *do what the teacher says! Knowledge is power!* These lessons reflected the seriousness with which schooling was regarded in Ms. Cheryl's home. Education was not treated casually. It was understood as a necessary tool for survival, independence, and dignity.

At the same time, Ms. Cheryl remembered feeling that the desegregation school treated students differently depending on their family structure. She noted that students without fathers in the home were treated differently by school officials. This caused her to feel unaccepted in the school environment because she did not have a father living in the home. Her reflection suggests that exclusion in the desegregated school was not only racial, but also shaped by classed, gendered, and family-based assumptions about respectability, stability, and belonging.

Ms. Cheryl's narrative was especially passionate when she discussed the closing of the Black elementary school. She believed the community's inability to fight to keep the school open had long-term consequences for Black children. In her view, the loss of the school harmed later generations because the desegregated school did not adequately teach Black children to read. She argued that desegregation created generational learning gaps and weakened the community's ability to hold schools accountable for Black children's education. Ms. Cheryl stated that she did not know the Black community could have fought to keep the school open. Had she known, she

said she would have spoken up. For her, saving the community school would have meant saving more than a building. It would have meant preserving a community institution responsible for educating, protecting, and affirming Black children.

Desegregation, Educational loss, and the generational consequences of school closure

Ms. Cheryl narrative offers one of the most forceful critiques of desegregation in this study. While some participants understood desegregation as both beneficial and harmful, Ms. Cheryl framed it primarily as a rupture that damaged Black educational progress and weakened community accountability. Her story reduces the promise of desegregation to a hard truth: access to white schools did not guarantee educational justice for Black children. In her view, the loss of Black schools created academic, social and communal consequences that extended beyond the students who experienced desegregation directly.

Three major themes emerge from Ms. Cheryl's narrative: first, segregated Black schools functioned as academically rigorous and culturally affirming spaces; second, desegregation expanded access to resources while restricting Black educational opportunity through institutional racism; and third, the closure of Black schools produced long-term community and generational harm. Familial solidarity and collective resistance are also present in her narrative, but they operate less as separate themes and more as protective mechanisms within these broader experiences.

Segregated Black schools as academically rigorous and culturally affirming spaces

A central claim in Ms. Cheryl's narrative is that Black schools taught Black children well. She did not describe segregated schooling through the language of deficiency. Instead, she remembered Black educational spaces as places where reading, writing, mathematics, discipline, and respect were taken seriously. Her mother's words *You have to be able to read, and write,*

add and subtract so people can't steal your money, capture the practical and political meaning of education in her home and community. Literacy and numeracy were not abstract school skills. They were tools of protection.

This quote is significant because it frames education as a defense against exploitation. Ms. Cheryl's mother was not simply telling her children to do well in school for the sake of grades. She was teaching them that academic knowledge could protect them from being cheated, manipulated, or economically harmed. In this way, reading, writing, adding, and subtracting were connected to Black survival. Education was a shield.

Ms. Cheryl's recollection also demonstrates how Black families reinforced the work of Black schools. Her mother's command, *do what the teacher says! Knowledge is power!* reflects a broader communal understanding that teachers were respected authority figures and that schooling was a serious communal responsibility. The phrase *Knowledge is power!* is especially important because it reveals the ideological foundation of Ms. Cheryl's upbringing. Knowledge was not just information; it was agency. It was the ability to move through the world with awareness, independence, and protection.

Within Ms. Cheryl's narrative, the segregated school and the Black home worked together. Her mother expected the children to respect the teacher, and the school was understood as an institution worthy of that respect. This relationship between home and school is important because it shows that Black educational success was not produced by the school alone. It was sustained through a network of family expectations, teacher authority, community accountability, and shared belief in the value of learning.

For Ms. Cheryl, this is precisely what was lost when Black schools were closed. The issue was not only that students were moved to a different building. The deeper issue was that

Black children were separated from a community-based educational structure that had taught them, watched over them, corrected them, and expected them to achieve. Her narrative suggests that Black school was academically rigorous because it was culturally connected to the community it served.

Desegregation as access without educational justice

Ms. Cheryl's narrative also challenges the assumption that desegregation automatically improved schooling for Black students. While desegregation may have provided access to newer textbooks, libraries, science labs and extracurricular opportunities, Ms. Cheryl's story suggests that access did not equal justice. Black students could enter the desegregated school, but they did not necessarily receive equitable treatment, recognition or instruction.

This distinction matters. Desegregation often gets narrated as a story of Black students gaining access to better schools. Ms. Cheryl's narrative complicated that story by asking a more difficult question: better for whom? From her perspective, the desegregated school may have had more resources, but it did not necessarily have a stronger commitment to Black children's learning. In particular, she believed the white school failed to teach Black children to read. Her concern about reading was not minor. Literacy was the foundation of educational possibilities. If children could not read, then other academic outcomes would be compromised.

Ms. Cheryl's critique also points to the ways institutional racism can operate even after formal segregation ends. Black students may have been physically present in desegregated schools, but presence did not guarantee belonging. They could be excluded through biased grading, differential treatment, denial of awards, restricted access to opportunities, and unequal distribution of resources. These forms of racism were not always as visible as Jim Crow signs,

but they were still powerful. In some ways, they were more difficult to challenge because they could be hidden behind school policies, teacher discretion and claims of neutrality.

Her memory that school officials treated children differently if there was no father in the home adds another layer to this analysis. Ms. Cheryl not only experience school as a racially unequal space, but she also experienced it as a place where assumptions about family structure shaped how students were perceived and treated. Because she didn't have a father in the home, she felt less accepted. This reveals how schools can reproduce harm through respectability judgments, not only through explicit racial discrimination. Students are read through assumptions about their families, and those assumptions can affect whether they are treated as worthy of investment.

In Ms. Cheryl's narrative, desegregation did not simply place Black students into better educational environments. Instead, it placed them into institutions where their intelligence, family backgrounds, and educational needs could be misunderstood or devalued. This is the contradiction at the center of her story. The school may have been formally desegregated, but the educational experience remained unequal.

School closure, community loss, and generational harm

The most powerful part of Ms. Cheryl's narrative is her belief that the closure of Black schools produced long-term harm for Black children and Black communities. She was clear that losing the Black elementary school hurt the community. In her view, the school was not just an educational site. It was a community institution responsible for ensuring that Black children learned, especially that they learned how to read.

Ms. Cheryl believed that if the Black community had been able to keep the school open, later generations may have been better served. Her statement that she did not know the

community could have fought to preserve the school is especially important. It reveals a sense of regret, but also a sense of political awakening. She understood the closure of the school as something that happened to the community, but she also wondered what might have been possible if they had known they could resist.

This is where Ms. Cheryl's narrative becomes both historical and generational. She was not only reflecting on what happened to her. She was thinking about what happened to the children who came after her. In her view, desegregation created generational gaps in learning because it disrupted the structures that had previously supported Black children's education. Her statement reflecting the closing of the Black school, *it hurt them because they cannot read*, speaks to how much of a disruption it was to them and their lives. The Black school provided more than instruction. It provided accountability. Teachers knew families. Families respected teachers. Community members understood the school as their own. When the school closed, that structure was weakened.

Ms. Cheryl's concern about children not being able to read should be understood within this broader context. She was not simply making a complaint about individual students or individual teachers. She was making an argument about institutional failure. For her, the decline in literacy among Black children was connected to the loss of Black controlled or Black centered schooling spaces. Once Black children were absorbed into desegregated schools, the community lost some of its direct power to demand that children be taught well.

Her narrative therefore reframes school closure as a form of educational dispossession. Black communities did not merely lose buildings; they lost institutions that carried memory, authority, accountability, and cultural knowledge. The Black school was a place where children were known. It was a place where learning was connected to survival. It was a place where

families and teachers shared expectations. Losing that institution meant losing a structure that had helped sustain Black educational life.

Ms. Cheryl's interpretation is firm, and the firmness itself matters. She was not unsure of her position. She believed desegregation harmed Black students, and she stood on that belief. Her certainty should not be dismissed as nostalgia. Rather, it should be read as a form of historical testimony. She was naming what she believed had been obscured in dominant narratives of desegregation: that Black communities paid a tremendous price for access to schools that did not always value, protect, or adequately educate Black children.

Ultimately, Ms. Cheryl's narrative pushed this study to confront the long-term consequences of desegregation beyond the moment of school transition. Her story suggests that the closure of Black schools disrupted more than educational placement. It disrupted community authority, weakened intergenerational accountability, and contributed to ongoing concerns about Black children's literacy and academic development. Desegregation promised better opportunities, but Ms. Cheryl's narrative insists that those opportunities came at a cost that Black communities are still paying.

For Ms. Cheryl, the central tragedy is not simply that Black students entered white schools and experienced racism. The deeper tragedy is that Black communities' lost schools that had already been doing the work of educating Black children. Her narrative makes plain that desegregation without justice is not liberation. Access without accountability is not equity. And a school with more resources is not automatically a better school if it does not teach, affirm, and protect Black children.

Interpretive reflection

Ms. Cheryl's narrative immediately captured my attention because it returned to me to the questions I began asking early in my doctoral program: Was school desegregation truly designed in the best interest of Black students, and how should its success be evaluated? In many of my graduate courses, *Brown v. Board of Education* was presented primarily as a landmark victory that granted Black children access to schools previously reserved for white students. Yet the stories I heard from older Black people complicated the celebratory account. When they described their segregated schools, they often spoke with pride about their teachers, educational accomplishments, and the communities that supported them. The difference between these institutional narratives and lived memories led me to question which experiences had been centered in conventional histories of desegregation.

Ms. Cheryl's account sharpened this tension. According to her, teaching and learning were not absent from the segregated Black school. Black children were being educated despite unequal facilities, limited funding, and secondhand materials received from white schools. Within her narrative, the central problem was not that Black schools lacked educational commitment or intellectual rigor. Instead, the problem was that these schools were denied equitable resources while being judged against institutions that had been materially privileged by segregation.

Ms. Cheryl's story connected the educational strength she remembered before desegregation to the academic outcomes she observed afterward. She did not describe desegregation as a single historical event whose effects ended when Black and white students entered the same buildings. She understood it as a turning point that continued to shape the education of Black children across generations. From her perspective, the dismantling of Black

schools interrupted an established tradition of teaching, accountability, and communal investment. The effects were not confined to the students who experienced the initial transition; she believed they remained visible in the educational experiences of their children and grandchildren.

Ms. Cheryl was adamant that desegregation contributed to Black student underachievement. She believed that some teachers in desegregated schools refused or failed to teach Black children to read adequately and that this educational neglect produced lasting consequences. Her interpretation was forceful because she did not view contemporary disparities as accidental or disconnected from the past. Instead, she narrated them as part of an enduring historical relationship between institutional desegregation and the withdrawal of meaningful educational care from Black students.

The social dimension of Ms. Cheryl's narrative revealed that education depended upon more than students sharing a classroom. Her account directed attention to the relationships between students and teachers, the expectations educators held for Black children, and the degree to which school accepted responsibility for their learning. Merely placing Black students beside white students did not guarantee equitable instruction, recognition or care. Ms. Cheryl's story challenged the assumption that racial proximity automatically produced educational equality. Desegregation of bodies within a building was not the same as the creation of relationships in which Black students were valued and taught well.

Her narrative also returned me to questions I have long carried: How was sitting next to a white student supposed to transform education for Black children? This question does not dismiss the importance of challenging legally mandated segregation or expanding access to resources. Rather, it asks whether desegregation was too often defined through physical

placement instead of the quality of education Black students received. If Black students entered formerly white schools but lost Black teachers, culturally affirming relationships, and communities that held educators accountable for their success, then access to a different building could not, by itself, be considered educational progress.

Place was therefore central to Ms. Cheryl's understanding of desegregation. The segregated Black school was not simply an inferior facility from which students needed to be removed. It was a communal institution where Black educators taught children despite material inequity and where families understood themselves as participants in the educational process. When these schools were closed or weakened, Black communities lost more than buildings. They lost educators, institutional authority, traditions, and places where Black children's intellectual development was understood as a collective responsibility.

As an educator, I continue to observe disparities between Black and white students, despite decades of formal desegregation. These disparities make it difficult for me to accept uncritically the argument that desegregation fulfilled its promise simply because Black students entered white schools. Ms. Cheryl's narrative does not, by itself, establish a single cause for contemporary patterns of achievement. However, it requires serious consideration of whether the destruction of Black educational institutions and the displacement of Black teachers contributed to conditions in which Black students became physically included but educationally underserved.

Ms. Cheryl's account also caused me to wonder whether the demonstrated success of Black students under unequal conditions was perceived as a threat to the racial order. Black schools had fewer resources, yet many still produced academically successful students through the labor of committed educators and communities. I cannot conclude from Ms. Cheryl's narrative that white institutions intentionally dismantled Black schools because they feared that

success. Such a claim would require evidence beyond this interview. Nevertheless, her story raises an important question about why desegregation so often required Black institutions to close while white institutions, traditions, personnel, and systems of authority remained largely intact. The burden of transformation was placed disproportionately upon Black communities.

The title of this dissertation reflects this unresolved tension. Ms. Cheryl's narrative complicated any universal declaration that desegregation was inherently good. It requires consideration of who gained access, who maintained institutional power, who lost employment, whose traditions survived, and which students were genuinely supported after the transition. Her story suggests that the benefits and costs of desegregation were not distributed equally.

I have often believed that schools are designed, through their structures, priorities, and practices to produce the outcomes they repeatedly generate. From this perspective, persistent racial disparities cannot be explained solely as unfortunate failures within an otherwise equitable system. They may also reveal what institutions consistently prioritize, tolerate, and reproduce. Ms. Cheryl's narrative does not permit me to view Black student underachievement as disconnected from history. Instead, it invites an examination of how the dismantling of Black schools, the displacement of Black educators, and the failure to reproduce relationships of communal care may have shaped the educational conditions that followed.

Ms. Cheryl's narrative presents desegregation as more than the movement of students across racial boundaries. It was a reorganization of educational power. Although Black children entered schools with greater material resources, many lost access to Black educators and institutions that had been deeply invested in their learning. Her account challenges the equation of access with justice and raises the more difficult question at the center of this study: If desegregation disrupted educational structures that were successfully teaching Black children

without ensuring that the new institutions would value and educate them equitable, then for whom was it truly good?

Pete

Pete was one of the most compelling participants in this study, not only because of what he remembered, but because of the energy with which he narrated those memories. At 66 years old, Pete was the youngest participant in the study. He described himself as one of 14 children in his family, and spoke proudly about his father, whom he said played lead guitar for James Brown's band until the day he died. I did not independently verify this claim; however, its importance in Pete's narrative rests less in its factual verification and more in what it revealed about pride, cultural memory, and the way Pete situated his family within a broader Black cultural history.

Pete attended desegregated schools during his early elementary years, and his transition was neither smooth nor simple. Unlike participants who experienced desegregation as adolescents, Pete encountered it as a young child. His memories of that period were shaped by confusion, racial hostility, and the abrupt removal of the protective structures that had surrounded him in the Black school. When Pete learned about the purpose of this study, he was eager to share his story. He was forthcoming about what he described as the good, the bad, and the ugly of desegregation in the Legacy Crossroads.

I first met Pete at the Black Mayors' meeting. He appeared to have come directly from work and sat quietly by himself, though it quickly became clear that he knew many people in the room. He listened closely throughout the meeting. When something did not sit right with him, he entered the conversation directly and pressed for clarity. The moment reflected much of what I

later came to understand about Pete: he was observant, passionate, and unwilling to let matters concerning Black townships or Black communities be discussed without accountability.

Although Pete came from a large family, he did not speak extensively about having a family of his own. He had led many lives professionally and was, at the time of the interview, a business owner. When we met, he gave me his business card. His investment in Oklahoma's Black townships was unmistakable. After the Black Mayors' meeting ended, Pete stood in the parking lot with his son and me, telling us about the school in The Legacy Crossroads. The remains of the school stood near the edge of the roundabout by the parking lot. Inside what remained of the structure was a small potbellied stove, which Pete explained had once been used to keep the students warm. Pete would have continued talking for as long as we were willing to listen. He had more than memories; he had testimony.

Pete's narrative complicates any easy interpretation of school desegregation as straightforward progress. For Pete, desegregation was not simply the movement of Black children into white schools. It was an unequal exchange. Black students gained access to better building, indoor plumbing, heat, and newer books, but those material gains came with racial surveillance, humiliation, exclusion, and fear. His story suggests that desegregation may have changed the physical conditions of schooling while leaving the deeper racial conditions of schooling intact. In other words, Pete's narrative shows that access without dignity was not equity.

Segregated schools as sites of protection, preparation and cultural accountability

A central theme in Pete's narrative is that segregated Black schools, though materially under-resourced, functioned as culturally affirming spaces of protection and preparation. Pete did not romanticize the physical conditions of the Black school. He recalled plainly *we had an*

outhouse and coal stoves. This description captures the material deprivation Black students endured. The Black school lacked the physical resources available in White schools, yet Pete's account makes clear that the school provided something the desegregated school did not: care, belonging, and preparation for life in an anti-Black world.

Pete summarized the role of Black educators when he stated, *Black teachers meant well, they were teaching us how to live in the world.* This quote is central to understanding how Pete interpreted the meaning of segregated schooling. Black teachers were not only teaching reading, writing, and arithmetic; they were preparing Black children to survive the racial world beyond the classroom. Their instruction was academic, social, and protective. In Pete's narrative, Black teachers functioned as cultural guides who understood both the vulnerability and the promise of Black children.

The contrast Pete creates is important. The Black school had outhouses and coal stoves, but it also had teachers who knew the children, cared for them and understood the racial realities they would face. The desegregated school may have offered better facilities, but it did not offer the same sense of protection. Pete's story therefore challenges the assumption that better buildings automatically produced better schooling. His narrative suggests the education must be measured not only by resources, but also by dignity, safety, and cultural accountability.

Desegregation as material access without dignity

Pete's narrative also emphasizes that desegregation exposed Black children to persistent racial terror and psychological harm. His memories of desegregation were not framed simply around moving from one school building to another. Instead, he described a daily experience of racial hostility, surveillance and fear. His statement, *I lived in fear, constant fear*, reveals the emotional and psychological cost of desegregation. For Pete, desegregation did not simply mean

entering a better resourced school. It meant entering a school environment where Black children were made to feel vulnerable, unwanted and unsafe.

This quote deepens the analysis because it shows that racial harm was not occasional or isolated. The repetition in *constant fear* suggests an ongoing condition rather than a single event. Pete's fear was not abstract. It was connected to racial slurs, possible violence, disciplinary injustice, and humiliation by teachers. His narrative therefore positions desegregation as an experience or exposure. Black children were exposed to better books, better plumbing, and better facilities, but they were also exposed to White hostility and institutional disregard.

Pete's account reveals the contradiction at the center of desegregation. Black students gained access to material resources, but that access did not translate into dignity or equity. The physical conditions of schooling improved, but the emotional conditions became more dangerous. Pete's narrative makes clear that access alone is not justice. A school can be better equipped and still be racially harmful. A child can sit inside a desegregated classroom and still experience that classroom as a site of racial terror.

The displacement of Black educators and destruction of community

Pete's narrative further connects desegregation to the systemic displacement of Black educators and the erosion of Black community institutions. When he stated, *Black teachers lost jobs,* he named one of the most damaging consequences of desegregation. The loss of Black teachers was not incidental. It represented the removal of Black professional authority from the community. These educators had served not only as classroom teachers, but also as mentors, disciplinarians, cultural guides, and community leaders.

For Pete, the displacement of Black educators was directly tied to the larger decline of The Legacy Crossroads. His statement, *the closure destroyed the community*, is one of the

clearest expressions of his interpretation of desegregation's long-term impact. The school was not simply a building where children received instruction. It was a community institution that organized relationships, expectations, pride, and accountability. When the school closed, the community lost one of its central gathering places and one of its most important mechanisms for sustaining Black educational life.

This theme is especially important because Pete's narrative shifts the analysis from individual experience to collective consequence. Desegregation did not only affect Black students who entered White schools. It affected Black teachers who lost employment. Black families who lost a trusted institution, and Black communities that lost control over the education of their children. In Pete's account, the closure of the Black school produced generational harm. It weakened community cohesion, diminished collective accountability, and contributed to long-term educational and social decline.

Although Pete described fear, loss, and community destruction, he also stated, *I wouldn't change anything.* This statement should not be read as a denial of harm. Rather, it reflects the complexity of Pete's narrative. Pete does not present his life as a simple tragedy. He acknowledges the pain of desegregation while also recognizing that those experiences shaped who he became. His statement suggests a kind of hard-earned acceptance, not approval of injustice himself.

This is where Pete's narrative becomes especially layered. He can say, *I lived in fear, constant fear,* and still say, *I wouldn't change anything.* These statements are not contradictions. Together, they show how Black memory often holds pain and pride at the same time. Pete's story is not simply about what was taken from him. It is also about what he survived, what he remembers, and what he continues to protect through testimony.

Overall, Pete's narrative reveals desegregation as a complicated and uneven process. It brought Black students into better-resourced schools, but it also subjected them to racial terror, displaced Black educators, and weakened Black community institutions. His story makes clear that educational progress cannot be measured by accessed alone. The deeper question is whether Black children were safe, affirmed, and treated with dignity. In Pete's narrative, the answer is clear: desegregation opened the doors of white schools, but it also closed the doors of Black institutions that had taught children how to live in the world.

Interpretive reflection

Pete's narrative remained with me because of the urgency with which he wanted his experiences to be heard. Even before the formal interview had begun, he stood with me in the circular driveway and recounted memories of attending the segregated Black school in Legacy Crossroads. The driveway became more that the physical location of our conversation; it became a narrative place in which Pete connected his childhood experiences, his present commitments, and his concerns for the future of the township. His willingness to speak suggested that his story could not be contained within the boundaries of the interview itself. He appeared to understand the act of telling as a responsibility, an opportunity to preserve experiences that might otherwise be forgotten or misunderstood.

When Pete described the segregated Black school, he remembered the teachers as people who did everything within their power to prepare Black children to survive in a racially hostile world. His account positioned the school as more than a site of academic instruction. It was also a protective and affirming environment in which Black educators attempted to equip students with the knowledge, discipline, and emotional strength necessary to navigate life beyond the township. These memories stood in sharp contrast to Pete's experiences after desegregation. He

explained that he *lived in fear*, *constant fear* after transferring to the White school. The repetition of the word *fear* communicated more than temporary discomfort. It described an enduring emotional condition that shaped how we moved through the school and interpreted the people around him.

Pete's fear was reinforced through racialized name-calling from both White students and teachers. The participation of teachers is particularly significant because the very people entrusted with his care and education contributed to the hostile environment he was expected to endure. The transition to the desegregated school therefore represented not simply a change in buildings but a movement from a space of protection into one characterized by exposure, humiliation, and uncertainty. Temporally, Pete narrative moved between the security he associated with the Black school and the fear that accompanied his entrance into the White institution. His account complicates celebratory narratives of desegregation by showing that physical access to White schools did not necessarily produce safety, dignity, or belonging for Black children.

One experience made the intensity of Pete's fear especially visible. After repeatedly being antagonized by a White student, Pete eventually *slapped the mess out of him.* Although the act might initially be interpreted as resistance, Pete's immediate response was fear rather than triumph. He believed that striking the White boy had placed his life in danger. When he later saw the boy and his father approaching his family's home, he shrank in fear anticipating what they might do to him. I found this portion of his narrative difficult to hear. As a researcher, I struggled to imagine a child living with the belief that defending himself against racial harassment could result in his death. Pete's response revealed how racial violence operated not only through actual physical harm but also through the constant possibility in retaliation. His fear was shaped by a

broader social world in which Black resistance to white aggression could carry consequences far greater than the original offense.

Pete's narrative, however, was not solely a story of childhood vulnerability. His continued devotion to Legacy Crossroads demonstrated how his experiences had shaped his adult commitments. Although he no longer lived in the township, he remained determined to protect its residents, land, and future. During the community meeting where I first encountered him, a group of Black developers from Texas proposed bringing a call center to the township. They emphasized the potential financial benefits, but Pete questioned why they had bypassed other communities and selected a historically Black township for the project. He also pressed them on how the proposed development might affect the land and water supply. When their answers proved inadequate, the discussion became contentious.

Pete's response at the meeting reflected the same protective orientation he attributed to the Black teachers of his childhood. Just as those educators sought to prepare and defend Black children, Pete positioned himself as someone responsible for defending the community from possible exploitation. His distrust was grounded in the historical reality that Black communities have repeatedly lost schools, businesses, land, political influence and other communal resources. From Pete's perspective, the promise of economic development could not be separated from the history of what had already been taken from Legacy Crossroads. The proposal therefore represented more than a business opportunity; it raised questions about who would benefit, who would assume the risks and what the township might be required to sacrifice.

As I observed the exchange, I was disturbed that Black representatives appeared to be willing to enter the remains of a historically Black community and promote a project without providing satisfactory answers about its environmental and communal consequences. The

moment reminded me of historical accounts in which outsiders entered communities presenting themselves as allies while pursuing their own economic interests. Although that comparison emerged from my own emotional response and must be held carefully, it helped me recognize the depth of my concern that Blackness alone did not guarantee accountability to a Black community. Shared racial identity could not substitute for transparency, trust, or a demonstrated commitment to the township's well-being.

Pete, however, *was not having it*. His confrontation with the developers demonstrated that the fear present in his childhood narrative did not define the entirety of his life. Across time, the frightened Black child who once believed that defending himself might cost him his life had become an adult willing to publicly challenge people he believed might harm his community. His story therefore moved between vulnerability and resistance, fear and protection, displacement and commitment. The segregated school, the White school, his childhood home, the circular driveway, and the township meeting functioned as interconnected narrative places through which Pete made meaning of his life.

Through Pete's narrative, I came to understand desegregation not as a single historical event but as an experience whose consequences continued to shape his relationships, responsibilities and sense of place. His memories of fear remained connected to his present-day vigilance. The institutions that failed to protect him as a child appeared to deepen his determination to protect Legacy Crossroads as an adult. Pete's story illustrated how personal experiences of racial harm can become interwoven with a broader commitment to communal survival. His narrative asks us to consider not only what Black communities were promised through desegregation and economic development, but also what they were required to risk, surrender, or defend.

Milly

Milly is a 70-year-old Black woman from the township of the Blues Frontier. She describes herself as a *mixed-up pot* of Black, Native, and White ancestry; however, her narrative makes clear that she is primarily seen and treated as Black. Although she acknowledges her mixed racial background, she identifies most strongly with Blackness, particularly when reflecting on her experiences with schooling, segregation and desegregation.

Milly is one of four children and was the only sibling to continue her education beyond high school. Her parents had limited formal education, and their labor shaped how she came to understand schooling. Her father was a farmer, and her mother did not work outside the home. Watching how hard they worked to provide for the family helped Milly imagine a different future for herself. Her statement, *I've got to do something different,* reflects the motivation that pushed her toward an education as a path of mobility and self-determination. Milly eventually earned two master's degrees in education, one is in school administration, and another in educational technology.

When Milly described her early schooling, she spoke with warmth and affection. She remembered the Black elementary school as a family-like environment where teachers cared for students beyond academics. According to Milly, the teachers were sweet, but they were also *rough,* meaning their care involved both nurture and discipline. Most importantly, she remembered feeling *protected* by them. This protection became central to how she understood the difference between her segregated Black school and the desegregated school she later attended.

After desegregation, Milly's schooling experience changed socially, emotionally, and academically. Although the desegregated school offered more resources and opportunities, Milly

described the climate as less caring and more racially uneven. Teachers were more distant, White students appeared to be favored, and Black students had to work harder to receive recognition. Milly was a strong student, but she felt she had to work *two times harder* to be acknowledged.

Despite these challenges, Milly persisted. She became the second Black cheerleader at the desegregated school, and participated as an officer in FHA, English club, and other organizations she chose to pursue. Her involvement represented both personal achievement and racial breakthrough. However, her success also exposed the limits of desegregation. Milly gained access to spaces that had once been closed to Black students, but access did not automatically produce belonging. Her story demonstrates how Black students could be included in desegregated schools while still being made to prove that they deserve to be there.

Milly's narrative reveals desegregation as a complicated and uneven experience. Her story does not present desegregation as desirable, nor does it suggest that Black schools had equal material resources. Instead, her narrative shows that segregated Black schools provided forms of protection, care and belonging that were not easily replaced by desegregated institutions. For Milly, desegregation created access to better resources and broader opportunities, but it also introduced racial distance, unequal treatment and the burden of having to prove herself in predominantly White spaces.

Black schooling as protection, care and belonging

The first theme in Milly's narrative is Black schooling as protection, care, and belonging. Milly remembered her Black elementary school as a family-like environment where teachers served as more than classroom instructors. They functioned as protectors, disciplinarians, and extended caregivers. Her description of teachers as both *sweet* and *rough* suggests a form of care that was nurturing but also demanding. These teachers held students accountable because they

understood the stakes of Black education. Milly's statement that teachers *protected us* is especially important because it positions the Black school as a shield against a broader racial world that is unsafe and unequal. In this sense, the Black school was not simply a place of instruction; it was a communal institution that helped Black children feel seen, cared for and defended.

Desegregation as access without belonging

The second theme is desegregation as access without belonging. Milly acknowledged that desegregation brought access to more resources, including better books, materials, activities and institutional opportunities. However, this material gain came with emotional and cultural loss. In the desegregated school, Milly encountered teachers who were more standoffish and a school climate in which White students appeared to receive more favorable treatment. This shift from protection to distance shaped how she experienced desegregation. In the Black school, Milly was surrounded by adults who knew her, cared for her, and claimed responsibility for her well-being. In the desegregated school, she had to determine whom she could trust. That difference reveals one of the central tensions in her story: desegregation opened doors, but it did not guarantee welcome.

Racialized labor of achievement

The third theme is the racialized labor of Black achievement. Milly's statement, that she had to *work twice as hard* captures the additional burden placed on Black students in desegregated schools. Her academic and extracurricular success was not simply a matter of individual effort; it was achieved under conditions of racial scrutiny. Milly had to prove her ability in a setting where Black students were not automatically assumed to belong. Her role as the second cheerleader is an important example. On one level, it represented progress and

visibility. On another level, it placed Milly in a position where her presence challenged racial boundaries. Her participation in cheerleading, FHA, English club and other organizations showed determination but it also revealed that Black students often had to fight for access to ordinary experiences.

Community survival and institutional loss

The fourth theme is community survival and institutional loss. Milly's memories extend beyond the school building and into the broader Black community. Her recollection of walking long distances to the school bus while neighbors watched over children demonstrated the collective care that sustained Black life in Blues Frontier. Community members protected one another because they understood the vulnerabilities Black children faced. At the same time, Milly's narrative suggests fear and silence were also part of survival. The community did not always speak openly against injustice, not because they accepted it, but because they understood the risks of challenging white authority. Silence in this context, functioned as a survival strategy.

Milly also identified the closure of the Black school as a significant loss for the community. The school was not merely an educational site; it was a cultural, economic, and social anchor. Its closure weakened the community by removing a key institution that had supported Black identity, employment and collective life. Through Milly's narrative, desegregation must therefore be understood not only as a student experience, but also as a community event. The movement of Black children into White schools changed the educational landscape, but it also disrupted the institutional foundation of Black towns.

Taken together, Milly's story demonstrates the paradox of desegregation. She gained access to better-resourced schools and new opportunities, but she lost the protective environment of Black schooling. She achieved success, but that success required additional labor. She entered

previously restricted spaces, but she was still made to navigate racial boundaries. Her narrative makes clear that desegregation did not end racial inequality; it reorganized how Black students experienced it. Milly's life and educational journey show that Black students did not simply desegregate into neutral institutions. They entered schools where race still shaped recognition, opportunity, safety, and belonging.

Interpretive reflection

Milly entered the study through an acquaintance of my sister. After learning about the research, she contacted me and volunteered to participate. We initially met at a restaurant so that I explain the purpose of the study and what participation would involve. Milly was immediately willing to share her experiences, and we might have begun the interview that day had the restaurant had not been too loud to support a thoughtful conversation. Instead, we scheduled the interview for later that week at her office in Blues Frontier. I was particularly excited to visit the community because, although I had heard about its annual festival, I had never been there. My arrival in Blues Frontier therefore shaped my encounter with Milly's narrative. I entered the interview carrying both scholarly questions about desegregation and a personal curiosity about the place she continued to call home.

Temporally, Milly's narrative connected the labor of her parents, her experiences in segregated and desegregated schools and her later educational and civic accomplishments. As she reflected on her childhood, she emphasized how hard her parents worked to provide for the family. Witnessing their labor contributed to her decision that she would pursue a different path. She understood education as a means through which she could expand the possibilities available to her. Her desire to *do something different* did not appear to emerge from embarrassment or rejection of her family. Instead, it reflected an awareness that her parents' sacrifices had created

an opportunity for her to imagine a life beyond the economic and occupational circumstances she observed around her. Her educational ambitions were therefore rooted in familial labor rather than separated from it.

Milly spoke with pride about the desegregated school she attended. She described the school as a family with teachers that were *nice, but rough,* suggesting a form of care that was inseparable from discipline, rigor and high expectations. Although the school operated with limited material resources, Milly did not describe it as educationally deficient. Instead, she portrayed it as a place where she received the intellectual and emotional foundation that made her success possible. Her teachers taught beyond the limitations imposed upon the school, preparing students to navigate a world that did not necessarily expect them to succeed. Milly's account challenges narratives that position segregated Black schools only through deprivation. Although the material inequalities were real, her memories emphasized the strength of Black educators, the rigor of their instruction and their commitment to student preparation.

The movement from the segregated Black school to the desegregated school represented an important shift in both place and social relationships. Milly did not describe entering the desegregated school as an academically unprepared student who needed to be rescued by access to white educational institutions. On the contrary, she believed that the foundation established by her Black teachers enabled her to excel. That preparation positioned her for advanced courses, allowed her to assist her classmates, and supported her participation in extracurricular activities. She became the school's second Black cheerleader, joined the English club, and served as an officer in FHA. These accomplishments demonstrated her ability to move successfully through the desegregated institution.

Milly's account also reveals the continuity between education, identity, and community leadership. She eventually earned two master's degrees and became the mayor of Blues Frontier. Her narrative did not center escape from the community as the ultimate measure of success. Although education provided access to expanded opportunities, her story ultimately returned to the place that shaped her. Her leadership as mayor can therefore be interpreted as an extension of the educational values instilled by her family and her Black teachers. Education provided a way forward, but that movement did not require abandoning Blues Frontier. Instead, she used her education to occupy a position of responsibility within the community.

I was struck by the confidence with which Milly embraced her Black identity. Although she is of mixed racial heritage, she identified strongly with her Blackness and appeared willing to confront the consequence that accompanied being recognized as a Black woman. I must be careful not to reduce her racial identity to a simple choice between competing backgrounds. However, her narrative suggested that Blackness was the identity through which she understood her educational experiences, her treatment within desegregated spaces, and her responsibilities to the community. Her willingness to claim that identity was not merely symbolic. It reflected as understanding that the accomplishments she described did not remove her from racialized realities.

Milly's story moves backward toward her parents' sacrifices and her early schooling, forward toward her educational and civic achievements, inward toward her ambitions and racial self-understanding, and outward toward the schools and community structures that shaped her life. Blues Frontier functioned as more than a physical setting of the interview. It was the place from which Milly's aspirations emerged and the community to which her accomplishments ultimately returned. Her narrative illustrates that the value of the segregated Black education

cannot be measured solely through buildings, funding or access to white institutions. For Milly, the segregated school provided the foundation, the desegregated school became a space in which the preparation was tested, and education became a means of both personal achievement and community service.

Zap

Zap was another participant from Visionary Prairie. She is a 71-year-old who grew up in her family home with one older sister and one younger brother. Educational was central to her upbringing, not only within her immediate family, but across her extended family. Zap described her family as *deeply invested in making sure the younger generations understood that education was not optional;* it was the pathway to stability, purpose, and meaningful contribution. During family visits, the adults would gather the children, have them sit on the couch and rehearse the importance of education, hard work, respect, and responsibility. These conversations were not casual reminders. They were deliberate lessons about what education could make possible in their lives.

Zap eventually fulfilled the expectations placed before her. She earned a master's degree in school counseling from a state university and built a career in education. She worked as a teacher for many years before retiring as a school counselor. Her life reflects the very values her family emphasized: educational attainment, service, professional responsibility, and a commitment to helping others move forward.

Zap's narrative offers a distinct interpretation of desegregation in Visionary Prairie. Unlike participants who described desegregation primarily through loss, fear, or racial trauma, Zap remembered the transition as relatively smooth. Her story does not deny that racial difference or structural change existed. Rather, she narrates desegregation through the language

of continuity, care and educational opportunity. For Zap, the foundation laid by her family and early schooling shaped how she interpreted the move into a desegregated educational setting. Her narrative suggests that because education had already been framed as a family mandate, desegregation became less of an identity rupture and more of an extension of an already established educational journey.

Education as a family mandate

The first major theme in Zap's narrative is education as a family mandate. She stated, *my total family's target was getting an education even in my lower grades.* The phrase, "total family" is important because it positions education as a collective project rather than an individual ambition. Zap was not describing one parent or one teacher encouraging her. She was describing an entire family system organized around educational achievement.

The family emphasis extended beyond academics. Zap explained that *my family told and taught us to work,* and she connected this lesson to respect, responsibility, and character. Phrases such as *respect the way you want to receive,* and *always respect your elders* show that education was tied to moral formation. In her family, being educated was not simply about earning degrees or getting a job. It was about becoming disciplined, respectful, useful, and prepared to contribute meaningfully to the community. Her repetition of *books, books* further illustrate the intensity of this expectation. When she said, *parents only stressed education. Books, books! The other stuff I did not get,* presented education as the primary priority of childhood. This phrase suggests that other activities may have existed, but they were secondary. In Zap's family, books came first. That emphasis shaped how she understood herself and how she moved through school.

Academic rigor as preparation and protection

The second theme is academic rigor as preparation and protection. Zap remembered early schooling as demanding and academically focused. She recalled *multiplication was what they stressed,* and immediately added, *if you were called on, you must know the answer.* She also noted *they wanted you to read on levels.* These memories portray schooling as structured, disciplined, and rigorous. Students were expected to know, respond, and perform.

Zap's description challenges any assumption that Black segregated schools were academically weak simply because they were materially under-resourced. In her narrative, the adults around her created high expectations even when resources were limited. Academic rigor became a form of preparation. It trained students to be ready, alert and capable.

This theme continued after desegregation. Zap explained that some teachers, *took me to another level* and *gave me harder material than others.* These statements suggest that Zap experienced teachers as people who recognized her ability and pushed her further. However, this part of her narrative deserves careful interpretation. Being given *harder material* may reflect opportunity, but it may also reflect pressure placed on Black students to prove themselves in newly desegregated spaces. Zap does not frame it negatively, but the language of difficulty remains present. She remembered the works as *a little harder*, and she acknowledged that *sports were more competitive there.* The transition was smooth, but it was not effortless.

Desegregation as continuity rather than crisis

The most distinctive theme in Zap's interview is desegregation a continuity rather than crisis. She stated, *I didn't see it changed,* and later clarified, *I knew it was there, but I didn't see it.* This language is significant. Zap described desegregation as *like transferring from one family to another family, ultimately the same family.* She concluded, *I was in good hands.* This language

reframes desegregation from forced displacement into a kind of relational transfer. The phrase *good hands* communicates safety, trust and care. For Zap, school remained a place where adults could guide and protect her.

She also said that *school was the same place, just different colors.* This quote captures the core of her narrative. Desegregation changed the racial composition of the school, but in Zap's memory, it did not fundamentally alter the purpose of school. School remained a place for learning, discipline, growth, and opportunity. Her account complicated the broader narrative of desegregation by showing that not all participants experienced the transition as traumatic in the same way. For Zap, the transition was noticeable but not destabilizing.

At the same time, her account should not be read as proof that desegregation was universally smooth or equitable. Her experience may reflect her strong family preparation, her academic confidence, and her ability to navigate institutional change. In other words, Zap's story reveals one possible story of desegregation, not the whole story of desegregation.

Material gains, community uncertainty, and collective responsibility

Although Zap framed desegregation as a positive transition for students, she also acknowledged community-level uncertainty. She stated that *we believe it was a good transition for the kids,* but also admitted, *I don't think parents were on board with the children leaving Visionary Prairie.* This distinction matters. Zap separates what may have benefited students from what may have troubled parents and the larger community. For the children, desegregation may have created access. For parents, it may have represented the loss of local control, tradition and trust.

Zap identified one significant outcome of desegregation as *probably better education or better material to work with.* Her phrasing is careful. The word *probably* and the clarification or

better material to work with suggest that she was not claiming the education itself was necessarily superior. Instead, she recognized that segregated schools may have provided better resources, materials and technologies. She added, *new technologies were brought to us. We used them and became better.* This statement frames desegregation as a resource gain rather than a cultural or intellectual rescue. Zap does not suggest that Black students became capable because of desegregation. Rather, she suggests they were already capable and became better equipped when given access to more tools.

Still her mention of *population decline* and the *inability to produce more students* signals the broader costs of desegregation for Visionary Prairie. Even when desegregation created educational access, it also contributed to institutional and demographic decline in the Black community. Zap does not dwell on this loss in the same way other participants might, but it is present beneath the surface of her narrative.

Her final reflections return to responsibility and uplift. She stated, *everyone is equal, anyone can do what they want to, just put your mind to it,* and emphasized the importance of encouraging young people *to be a good role model so they can go out and do better for us.* These statements reflect an individual responsibility framework. Zap's language suggests that achievement comes through mindset, effort, and role modeling. At the same time, this belief must be read alongside her own story: her success was not produced by individual will alone. It was cultivated by family expectations, rigorous schooling, community reinforcement, and access to educational resources. Her narrative therefore holds a productive tension. She emphasizes personal responsibility, but her life story demonstrates the power of collective support.

Zap's narrative presents desegregation as a largely positive and non-crisis experience shaped by strong family preparation, academic rigor, and community of care. Her story

complicated a singular interpretation of desegregation as either liberation or loss. For Zap, desegregation brought access to better materials, new technologies, and broader competition, while still carrying consequences for Visionary Prairie as a community.

The central meaning of Zap's narrative is the education functioned as both inheritance and responsibility. Her family gave her a framework for understanding education before desegregation occurred. Because of that foundation, she entered desegregated schooling with a strong sense of purpose and preparation. Her story reveals that desegregation did not create her educational ambition; it provided a different institutional setting in which that ambition could continue.

Zap's account matters because it complicates the story of desegregation by showing that not all participants experienced it as loss or trauma. Her experience was not defined by fear or rupture. It was defined by continuity, expectation and opportunity. However, her narrative also shows that individual success stories can coexist with community-level loss. Zap may have been *in good hands,* but Visionary Prairie still faced the consequences of losing students, population, and possibly some of the institutional life that had sustained the community. Her narrative therefore adds complexity to the study by showing that desegregation could be remembered as beneficial for some students while still carrying costs for the Black community that raised them.

Interpretive reflection

Zap's narrative demonstrated how education was constructed across her family's history as a collective responsibility rather than an individual choice. Education was not presented to the younger generation as optional or dependent upon the type of school they attended. Whether Zap was learning in the segregated Black school or later in the desegregated school, her family expected her to remain focused, work diligently, and take full advantage of the educational

opportunities available to her. Within Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, this familial commitment reflects continuity across time. The location of Zap's schooling changed, but the educational values established within her family remained consistent.

Temporally, Zap did not describe desegregation as the beginning of her educational journey. Instead, the desegregated school became an extension of a journey that had already been shaped by her family and strengthened within the segregated Black school. The academic foundation she received before desegregation prepared her to build upon her knowledge after the transition. Her account complicates narratives that position desegregation as the moment when Black children first gained meaningful or rigorous education. In Zap's experience, rigor, preparation, and educational aspiration were already present. Desegregation changed the institutional setting in which she learned, but it did not create her commitment to education.

Respect was another central value within Zap's family. She recalled being taught to *respect the way you want to receive*. When I first encountered this statement, I interpreted it as incomplete. However, as I continued to consider its meaning, I understood it as a relational ethic: the respect one desires from others must first be demonstrated toward them. In this sense, respect was not passive or conditional. It required the individual to model the treatment they expected to receive. This teaching may also have shaped how Zap navigated the desegregated school. Rather than approaching the transition through resentment, she entered the new environment with expectations about how she should conduct herself and how relationships should be maintained.

Zap's family's insistence that education remain central resonated with my own beliefs as an educator. I, too, believe that academic learning should remain the primary purpose of schooling. Although extracurricular activities can contribute meaningfully to students'

development, I am concerned that athletics sometimes become more central than the education students are ostensibly in school to receive. Zap's narrative reminded me of the importance of the term "student athlete," particularly in the order in which those identities are named. Her family did not reject activities outside the classroom, but they made it clear that nothing should replace or diminish the importance of education.

At the same time, my agreement with Zap's family requires reflexive consideration. My own experiences and beliefs about schooling influence how I interpret their emphasis on academic achievement. Through narrative inquiry, my response to Zap's account is not separate from the interpretation but is part of the relational space in which meaning is constructed. Her story affirmed values that I already hold, but it also encouraged me to consider how educational priorities are shaped by families, communities, and historical circumstances rather than by schools alone.

Place also shaped Zap's educational experience. The segregated Black school was not merely a backdrop to her childhood. It was place where she developed the knowledge, discipline, and academic confidence that supported her later transition. Her account suggests that segregated Black schools could be academically rigorous while also providing activities and relationships that enhanced the broader school experience. This interpretation challenges deficit-oriented portrayals of segregated Black education. Although these schools operated within racially unequal systems and often possessed fewer material resources Zap's experience indicates that they could still function as academically demanding and culturally supportive educational spaces.

After entering the desegregated school, Zap recalled receiving work that was more difficult than the work assigned to some of her classmates. She interpreted this difference

positively, believing that her teachers recognized her abilities and wanted to challenge her. Her interpretation is important and should not be displaced by my own assumptions. However, her experience also raises questions about the racialized expectations placed upon Black students in newly desegregated schools. It is possible that the additional work reflected recognition of her academic potential. It is also that Black students were sometimes expected to continually demonstrate their competence and prove that they belonged within formerly White educational spaces. The narrative does not provide enough evidence to determine the teachers' intentions with certainty. What is clear is Zap interpreted the challenge as an opportunity rather than as punishment or exclusion.

Zap's response demonstrates that people could experience desegregation without locating themselves entirely within a narrative of either progress or harm. She viewed the transition as inevitable and expressed little resentment about attending the desegregated school. Her account therefore resists flattening the history of desegregation into a single emotional or experiential register. Zap's relatively positive interpretation does not negate the fear, displacement, or cultural loss described by other participants. Instead, it reveals that desegregation was experienced differently depending upon family preparation, individual positioning, relationships with educators, and the places in which the transition occurred.

Zap's family appears to have provided a durable narrative framework through which she interpreted educational change. Because education had already been established as her primary focus, she was able to understand the desegregated school as another place in which she could continue pursuing the expectations her family had set for her. Her positive outlook should not be reduced to individual optimism alone. It was supported by years of familial instruction, academic participations and intergenerational affirmation. Her eventual completion of an advanced degree

and her career as a teacher and school counselor represent continuity between her childhood teachings and her adult life.

Ultimately, Zap's narrative illustrates how family values can provide stability amid institutional change. Segregation and desegregation altered the places where she was educated, but they did not displace the educational narrative her family had constructed around her. Across time, relationships, and educational settings, Zap carried forward the belief that education was both an obligation and a means of doing something meaningful with her life.

Conclusion

This chapter presented the narratives of the participants and interpreted each story within the context of the research question and theoretical framework. While individual narratives were preserved to honor the uniqueness of participants' experiences cross narrative patterns also became evident. Several commonalities emerged regarding desegregation efforts in historically Black townships including loss of cultural identity and community institutions, legacy of strong Black educational communities, emotional and social challenges of desegregation and the recognition of expanded opportunities. These narratives illustrate not only individual lived experiences, but also the broader meanings participants assigned to those experiences. Collectively, the interpretations provide the foundation for the study's findings. Chapter 6 synthesizes these narrative interpretations, presents overarching findings that emerged across participants and discusses their implications in relation to the existing literature and the study's theoretical framework.

Chapter VI: Discussion

The primary aim of this study was to examine how Black students narrated their experience with school desegregation efforts within Oklahoma's historically Black townships. To address this aim, the discussion begins with an analysis of the counternarratives. This analysis is then contextualized within the broader body of existing research and then juxtaposed to the counternarratives offered by the participants. The subsequent section explores the implications of the findings for contemporary educational spaces. The chapter concludes with discussion of the study's limitations and recommendations for future research.

Again, the research question for this study asked: "How do Black students who experienced school desegregation in Oklahoma's Black townships narrate their educational journeys and identities?" The findings indicate that Black students from historic Black townships narrate school desegregation as a complex, contradictory experience shaped by pride in their communities, structural inequality, and emotional challenges tied to desegregation efforts. Their narratives reflect both loss and opportunity, grounded in the unique history of all Black towns and segregation schooling systems.

There are four superordinate themes that encompassed the qualitative content of the narratives which will be discussed. The themes include a) loss of cultural identity and community institutions; b) the legacy of strong Black educational communities; c) emotional and social challenges tied to desegregation, while at the same time; d) the recognition of expanded opportunities.

Loss of Cultural Identity and Community Institutions

In the theme loss of cultural identity and community institutions, the subthemes were: a) the closure of Black schools that served as cultural hubs: b) the displacement of Black educators

and administrators; and c) the weakening of community-centered education systems. Some of the initial findings suggest that prior to school desegregation Black schools were community hubs in which much of the community business was handled. Church meetings were held there; homecoming festivals, and even civil rights meetings took place at the school. It was the community center for the town. One of the participants recalled an annual back-to-school celebration that took place at the school. The school was more than an academic site; it was the center of community life. It was a place where families, churches and educators collaborated. Parents and community members often contributed resources to ensure their children's education (Morris et al., 2022). While the Black township was segregated, the townspeople did their best to keep the town functioning financially and culturally.

After desegregation of schools, the community as they knew it began to experience changes that would prove to be detrimental to all they had accomplished. With students being bused to schools outside of the community, Black schools were disproportionately shut down, dismantling the community's central institution. One of the participants said during the interview, *when you lose your school, you lose your town*. With the shutdown of the Black schools in these historically Black townships, that is exactly what happened; a phenomenon documented in the work of Morris and colleagues (2022). In their study, they linked the disproportionate closing of Black schools over time to an overall social destabilization that kills Black communities.

Legacy of Strong Black Educational Communities

Although school desegregation was framed as a policy advancement intended to expand educational opportunity for Black students in the United States, scholarship consistently documents the unintended consequences that accompanied its implementation. One of the most

significant of these was the widespread decline in the presence of Black educators in public schools following desegregation in the 1950s and 1960s (Ethridge, 1979; Karpinski, 2006). The closure of Black schools and the restructuring of school systems generated widespread concern among Black educators regarding job security (Fairclough, 2000). In many cases, these concerns materialized, particularly across the South, where Black teachers and administrators were disproportionately displaced.

Rather than being integrated into newly desegregated schools in equitable ways, many Black educators were pushed out of professional roles and into lower-paying, non-professional labor, regardless of their training, credentials, or years of experience (Aldridge, 2015; Foster, 1997; Loder-Jackson, 2015). In some instances, Black educators were dismissed from their positions altogether. Even when retained, their employment was often highly conditional. Research indicates that lighter-skinned Black teachers were more likely to be retained in desegregated schools, as they were perceived by white administrators as more socially acceptable and less disruptive to the racial hierarchy of school environments (Milner & Howard, 2004). In contrast, darker-skinned Black educators were frequently excluded based on racist assumptions regarding intellectual ability and professional competence (Milner & Howard, 2004).

Prior to desegregation, Black teachers served as critical intermediaries between schools and the broader Black community. As role models, they reinforced the belief that academic achievement and professional success were attainable within a racially oppressive society (Riley, 1998). Their pedagogical approaches, expectations, and lived experiences were deeply embedded in the cultural contexts of their students, contributing to enhanced academic and social outcomes for Black children (McCray et al., 2002). Within Black communities, educators held positions of

high respect and moral authority, and schools often functioned as extensions of community life rather than isolated institutional spaces.

Following desegregation and the resulting decline in Black teaching staff, many educators exited the profession entirely, contributing to a sustained decline in Black teacher representation that has not been fully recovered in subsequent decades, including into the 21st century. This persistent underrepresentation reflects a broader structural pattern of educational inequity and institutional erasure. The removal of Black educators from schools also meant the removal of culturally congruent mentors and advocates who understood students lived experiences and community contexts.

In addition to the loss of teachers, Black educational leadership was also significantly diminished. Black principals were rarely selected to lead desegregated schools, and in limited cases where Black administrators were appointed, they were often demoted to subordinate roles (Juergensen, 2026) with the less authority. Their roles were usually filled with less qualified white personnel (Clarida, 2026). With this came a vast loss of pedagogical and professional knowledge (Juergensen, 2026). This constrained access to leadership positions further reinforced hierarchical racial dynamics within schools and contributed to strained relationships between Black students and school administrators.

The cumulative effect of these changes extended beyond staffing patterns to broader student outcomes. The absence of Black educators and administrators reduced the availability of culturally responsive role models for Black students. Research further indicates that these structural shifts are associated with ongoing disparities in disciplinary practices, including the disproportionate punishment of Black students, overrepresentation in special education referrals, and underrepresentation in advanced academic coursework.

Taken together, these findings suggest that while desegregation altered the formal structure of schooling, it simultaneously disrupted long-standing Black educational ecosystems that had provided academic support, cultural affirmation, and community-based forms of leadership. The legacy of strong Black educational communities, therefore, reflects both the strength of pre-desegregation schooling structures and the enduring consequences of their dismantling.

Emotional and Social Challenges of Desegregation

In this theme are three subthemes that were uncovered in the narratives. There were feelings of isolation in predominately White institutions, experiences of racism, exclusion or lowered expectations, and loss of community cohesion when Black schools closed. Desegregation, however, undermined community-centered education through a shift in community and culture. Black students in new white spaces were subjected to censored and sanitized curriculum. By censoring and sanitizing, it presented events that took place against people, in this case, Black people, as events that made those oppressed people better. For example, history lessons were skewed in how Black people were treated. Slavery was presented as something good for Black people, because they learned "skills". Africans were presented as property that possessed no intellectual capability, when in fact they were highly intelligent. They were leaders of nations, agrarians able to plant and cultivate their food. They were not blank slates in need of the masters' intellect. Those truths were erased from the curriculum when the students moved to the desegregated school. With the confusion of the truths from the segregated school and the desegregated school, it created tension that students were left to reconcile. The censorship and sanitization of curriculum would have been mediated with the Afrocentric curriculum (Asante, 1987). In Afrocentric education students studied concepts, history, and the

world in general from an African centered perspective. It was in direct tension with European perspectives.

When the students were moved out of the local school district, the local control the Black community possessed was now transferred to the new white school district. Concerns about what the schools were teaching were largely disregarded by those in control. Parents had no say in what was taught and speaking against it could be dangerous. It was the erosion of local control that made the desegregated school able to operate the way they always had.

Recognition of Expanded Opportunities

The final theme that emerged from participants' narratives is the recognition of expanded educational opportunities following desegregation, with three subthemes: (1) access to better-funded schools and material resources, (2) exposure to broader academic and career pathways, and (3) increased visibility in desegregated educational spaces.

While most participants framed desegregation as a process marked by struggle and inequity, a notable interpretive divergence emerged in the narratives of two siblings, Mr. T and Imani. In contrast to other participants, Mr. T explicitly described desegregation as "the opportunity." This interpretation initially disrupted my analytic assumptions, as I had come to understand desegregation primarily through narratives of exclusion, displacement, and racial hostility. This reaction was informed both by intergenerational memory and by the broader interview data, which emphasized the challenges Black students and communities faced in newly desegregated settings. Within this interpretive framework, desegregation appeared less as opportunity and more as a contested space in which access was often accompanied by racialized resistance.

However, further analysis suggests that the siblings' framing of desegregation as opportunity is rooted in specific forms of cultural and experiential capital embedded in their household environment. Two salient features distinguish their narratives from those of other participants: (1) the family engaged in regular biannual travel experiences, and (2) the household maintained monthly subscriptions to *Ebony* and *Jet Magazine*. While these factors may initially appear peripheral, they functioned as significant sites of informal education and cultural exposure.

From an experiential learning perspective, Stone and Patrick (2013) argue that travel serves as a form of embodied, out-of-class learning that produces substantial educational gains. Such experiences foster not only academic enrichment but also intercultural awareness, adaptability, and broader interpretive frameworks for understanding social environments. In the case of Mr. T and Imani, recurring travel experiences likely expanded their perception of educational and social possibility, contributing to their more expansive interpretation of desegregation as opportunity rather than sole disruption.

Equally significant is the role of print culture within the home. The regular presence of *Jet* and *Ebony* positioned the household within what scholars describe as a Black public sphere**,** a communicative and cultural space in which Black life, achievement, and political struggle are centered rather than marginalized. These publications provided both immediate news coverage and sustained visual narratives of Black social mobility, political life, and cultural production. Within this interpretive environment, desegregation could be understood not only as a site of racial tension but also as a potential extension of already visible Black aspirations and achievements.

The parents' intentional investment in travel and Black print media suggests a form of culturally grounded educational socialization that expanded the siblings' interpretive horizons. These resources functioned as mechanisms of informal schooling, shaping how Mr. T and Imani understood opportunity, mobility, and institutional access. Consequently, their narratives diverge from other participants not because they experienced desegregation as free of difficulty, but because their prior exposure to broader geographic and cultural contexts and to affirming representations of Black life, produced a more expansive framework through which desegregation could be interpreted.

Taken together, these findings suggest that interpretations of desegregation as "opportunity" are not uniform but are shaped by differentiated access to experiential learning and Black cultural media within the home. The contrast between participants underscores the importance of examining how informal educational environments mediate the ways individuals later make sense of structural change.

Study Limitations

Overall, this study suggests that analyses of desegregation and Black education must move beyond institutional accounts of policy change to consider the everyday cultural, familial, and media environments that shape how educational transitions are experienced and interpreted. In doing so, it expands understandings of educational opportunities to include the informal, cultural, and experiential resources that inform how individuals come to define what opportunity itself means.

One limitation of this study that warrants acknowledgment is the potential for narrative recall bias. It has been 71 years since the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, and many participants are advanced in age. As such, it is reasonable to consider that the accuracy and

completeness of long-term memory may be affected by the passage of time. Memory recall of historical events is inherently reconstructive, and some degree of distortion or selective remembering would not be unexpected.

However, throughout the interview process, there were no apparent inconsistencies between participants' responses and the interview questions posed. Participants were able to engage meaningfully with the prompts and provide coherent, contextually grounded narratives of their experiences. Additionally, their accounts demonstrated a high degree of convergence across participants from the same geographic areas, with shared themes and overlapping details emerging across interviews. This pattern of corroboration strengthens the credibility of the narratives.

While acknowledging the limitations inherent in retrospective oral history, the consistency of accounts across participants suggests a substantial degree of reliability in the data. Taken together, the narratives are therefore considered to be highly credible representations of participants lived experiences of desegregation, while still being interpreted within the broader methodological understanding that memory is shaped by time, context, and reflection.

Study Implications

This study has several important implications for scholarship on school desegregation, Black educational experiences, and the role of informal learning environments in shaping educational meaning-making. First, the findings complicate dominant historical narratives that frame desegregation primarily as either unequivocal progress or unidirectional loss. Instead, participants' narratives demonstrate that desegregation was experienced and interpreted in multiple, and sometimes contradictory, ways. While most participants emphasized disruption, exclusion, and racialized inequities in desegregated schooling, a smaller subset of narratives

highlighted expanded opportunity, increased exposure, and perceived educational mobility. This variation underscores the need for more nuanced historiographical approaches that account for heterogeneity within Black experiences of desegregation.

Second, this study highlights the significance of informal educational environments in shaping how individuals interpret structural educational change. The narratives of Mr. T and Zap suggest that experiences outside formal schooling—such as family travel and engagement with Black print media—played a critical role in shaping their educational worldviews. These findings extend existing scholarship on the home literacy environment by demonstrating that literacy-rich contexts are not limited to books or academic materials but also include culturally specific media and experiential learning opportunities that shape interpretive frameworks over time.

In this regard, the presence of *Jet magazine* and *Ebony magazine* within participants' homes is particularly significant. These publications functioned as components of a broader Black public sphere in which Black life, achievement, and political struggle were documented and circulated outside of mainstream, white-controlled media institutions. Within such environments, children were exposed not only to representations of Black success and resilience but also to ongoing narratives of racial struggle and collective advancement. This suggests that Black media served as a form of informal civic and cultural education that shaped how participants understood social change, including desegregation.

Third, the study contributes to scholarship on educational opportunity and inequality by demonstrating that "opportunity" is not an objective condition uniformly experienced, but rather a socially and culturally mediated interpretation. For some participants, desegregation represented access to materially better-resourced schools and broader institutional pathways. For

others, it represented a more ambiguous or even harmful transition marked by loss of community and cultural displacement. For the siblings who framed desegregation as opportunity, that interpretation was closely tied to prior exposure to mobility, travel, and Black cultural affirmation, suggesting that perceptions of opportunity are shaped by pre-existing interpretive resources available within the home.

Finally, this study has methodological implications for oral history and qualitative research on educational change. The contrasting narratives presented by participants demonstrate the importance of attending not only to what individuals experienced, but also to the interpretive frameworks through which those experiences are understood and narrated decades later. Memory, family context, and cultural exposure all shape how historical processes such as desegregation are remembered and given meaning. This is a salient point to consider, especially in a time where digital records of events can be changed, altered or even corrupted.

Overall, this study suggests that analyses of desegregation and Black education must move beyond institutional accounts of policy change to consider the everyday cultural, familial, and media environments that shape how educational transitions are experienced and interpreted. In doing so, it expands understandings of educational opportunity to include the informal, cultural, and experiential resources that inform how individuals come to define what opportunity itself means.

As this study ends, I cannot help but return to the vignette that opened it. In many ways the Frederick Bombers provided the blueprint for what desegregation could have been. When the decision was made to desegregate the football team, the coach decided that there would be one team. Everyone who wanted to play would play on that team. Some refused, but there was no alternative team created to preserve the racial order that had existed before. Those who chose not

to participate simply did not play. More importantly, desegregation did not mean placing Black players on the roster while reserving opportunity, recognition, and playing time for their white teammates. They were expected to practice together, play together, struggle together and win together. They became one team. That distinction matters.

The Bombers encountered problems when they traveled to other towns, but they did not allow outsiders to determine what they would become to one another. Their success did not require Black players to surrender who they were in exchange for admission into a space that remained fundamentally unchanged. Instead, the team chose to change and evolve. They learned one another, depended on one another, and built relationships that extended far beyond the football field. Ultimately, they went on to win a state championship, and some of the relationships created during that tumultuous period endured for the rest of their lives. Perhaps there is something instructive in that story.

Desegregation might have looked very different if schools and communities had approached it with the same understanding: that bringing people together requires more that allowing Black children to enter formerly white spaces. It requires creating something new together. It requires insisting that access cannot come at the cost of dignity, history, culture, leadership or belonging. It requires understanding that Black students should not have had to enter desegregated schools while Black teachers disappeared, Black traditions were abandoned, Black institutions were closed, and Black communities were expected to absorb the consequences. Desegregation should not have meant that one group was invited into another group's world while the institutions, knowledge, people and practices that had sustained them were treated as expendable.

The participants in this study make that contradiction impossible to ignore. Desegregation brought opportunities that some participants valued: expanded courses, athletics, resources, relationships, and access to spaces that segregation could not afford. Those opportunities existed alongside profound losses. Participants remembered the displacement of Black educators, the disappearance of traditions, the weakening of community institutions, racial hostility, uncertainty, fear, and the loss of spaces in which Black children had been known, protected, challenged, and expected to succeed. Their stories complicate and simple declaration that desegregation was either a success or failure. Instead, they require us to ask what was gained, what was lost, who was asked to bear the cost, and whose definition of progress ultimately mattered. This is the tension in which we should reflect on desegregation of educational spaces.

That brings me back to the question at the center of this study: "Good for Whom?"

For the Frederick Bombers, the answer appears much clearer. It was good for all of them because becoming one team required everyone to become something different. No group was asked to simply disappear into the other. Their collective success depended upon their willingness to recognize that if they were going to move forward, they would have to move forward together.

The promise of *Brown v. Board of Education* held the possibility of something similarly transformative. Desegregation could have been more than the dismantling of legally separate schools, it could have become an opportunity to imagine a new educational system, one that retained the strength, knowledge, leadership, care, and cultural affirmation of Black educational communities while dismantling the racial barriers that denied Black children equal access to resources and opportunity. Instead, too often, Black communities were asked to exchange what

they had built for access to what they had previously been denied. The doors opened, but not everything Black communities carried with them was permitted to cross the threshold.

And perhaps that is the unfinished work of desegregation.

The lesson of the Frederick Bombers is not simply that Black and white children can occupy the same spaces. We already know that proximity alone does not produce equity, belonging or justice. Their story demonstrates what becomes possible when people understand that joining together requires shared responsibility, shared sacrifice, and shared transformation. They became a team not because difference disappeared, but because difference did not determine whose humanity, talent or opportunity mattered.

Had that same principle guided desegregation more broadly, perhaps the stories contained in this dissertation study would be different. Perhaps Black communities would not have been forced to choose between access and belonging, resources and dignity, opportunity and cultural continuity. Perhaps the question, "Good for Whom?" would not remain necessary.

The participants in this study cannot tell us what might have happened. They can only tell us what did. Their memories remind us that educational progress cannot be measured solely by whether doors were opened. We must ask what happened to the people, institutions, histories, and communities standing on the other side of those doors. Their stories challenge us to imagine educational change differently; not as the incorporation of marginalized people into systems that remain fundamentally unchanged, but as a creation of something new in which everyone has a meaningful stake.

The Frederick Bombers became champions because they chose to become one team. Perhaps the promise of desegregation was that we might have learned to do the same.

Avenues for Future Research

This study is situated within Oklahoma's historically Black townships, an educational context that remains significantly understudied in the literature on desegregation and Black schooling. During the recruitment process, however, several potential participants expressed interest in the study but indicated that they had attended all-Black schools located in integrated cities and towns rather than within designated Black townships. This suggests an important avenue for further inquiry.

Future research would benefit from examining the experiences of Black students who attended all-Black schools situated within racially mixed or integrated municipalities. Such a comparative approach would allow scholars to explore how educational experiences and interpretations of schooling differed across geographic and institutional contexts during the same historical period. It would be valuable to investigate the extent to which the narratives of individuals educated in urban or town-based segregated schools align with or diverge from those who attended schools in Oklahoma's historically Black townships.

Additionally, there are numerous all-Black schools that operated during the relevant historical period whose alumni have not been extensively included in contemporary scholarship. Expanding the participant pool to include these institutions would deepen understanding of how school setting, community structure, and geographic location shaped educational experiences during segregation and the transition to desegregation.

Such comparative work would not only broaden the empirical base of this research but also contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how Black educational experiences were shaped by place, institutional structure, and access to community resources.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Overarching Research Question:
How do Black students who experienced desegregation in Oklahoma's Black townships narrate their educational journeys and identities?

Demographic & Background

- Do you mind sharing your birthday and age?
- What name would you like me to use when referring to you in this study?
- What is your preferred gender identity?
- What is your race/ethnicity?
- What is your socioeconomic status?
- Can you describe your experiences growing up in [Black Township]?
- What stands out the most about the community and its significance to you?
- How did the community in [Black Township] support or influence your educational journey?

Personal and Family Background

- Can you tell me about your family dynamics and how they influenced your education?
- How did your family's attitudes and actions toward education shape your school experiences?

Schooling Experiences

- Can you describe a typical day at your school before desegregation? How did that change after desegregation?
- What were the biggest challenges and opportunities you faced during your schooling in the desegregated environment?
- Can you share specific examples of interactions with teachers or administrators that had a significant impact on you?

Academic and Extracurricular Activities

- How did participation in extracurricular activities influence your school experience? Were there noticeable differences before and after desegregation?
- Can you discuss any specific extracurricular events or achievements that were particularly meaningful to you?

Teacher and Administrator Relationships

- Can you provide examples of how your relationships with teachers changed after desegregation?
- Were there any teachers or administrators who were particularly supportive or unsupportive during the transition? How did they affect your school experience?

Desegregation Impact

- How did the educational opportunities and resources compare between the segregated and desegregated schools you attended?

- What were your initial thoughts and feelings about desegregation, and how did they evolve over time?

Community and Transportation:

- How did the logistics of getting to school (e.g., distance, transportation) change with desegregation? How did these changes affect your daily routine and academic performance?
- How did the wider community respond to desegregation, and what impact did that have on your schooling experience?

Reflective and Closing Questions:

- Looking back, what do you think were the most significant outcomes of desegregation for you personally and for your community?
- If you could change anything about your educational experience during desegregation, what would it be and why?
- Are there any other experiences or reflections on your schooling during desegregation that you would like to share?

Appendix B



Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects

Approval of Initial Submission – Exempt from IRB Review – AP01 Date: January 08, 2025

IRB#: 18005

Principal Investigator: Anayai M Cooper

Approval Date: 01/07/2025

Exempt Category: 2

Study Title: "Good for whom?": Black experiences with Desegregation in Rural Black Townships

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), I have reviewed the above-referenced research study and determined that it meets the criteria for exemption from IRB review. To view the documents approved for this submission, open this study from the *My Studies* option, go to *Submission History*, go to *Completed Submissions* tab and then click the *Details* icon.

As principal investigator of this research study, you are responsible to:

- Conduct the research study in a manner consistent with the requirements of the IRB and federal regulations 45 CFR 46.
- Request approval from the IRB prior to implementing any/all modifications as changes could affect the exempt status determination.
- Maintain accurate and complete study records for evaluation by the HRPP Quality Improvement Program and, if applicable, inspection by regulatory agencies and/or the study sponsor. Notify the IRB at the completion of the project.

If you have questions about this notification or using iRIS, contact the IRB @ 405-325-8110 or irb@ou.edu.

Cordially,

Aimee Franklin, Ph.D.
Chair, Institutional Review Board