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Standing on the Promises: The Experiences of Black Women  
Administrators in Historically Black Institutions  
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## Abstract

Earning a college degree was not easily attainable for Black women during the civil rights movement. As the civil rights movement became a full-scale struggle, like many other Blacks, the Black women administrators in this study confronted and disrupted institutions thought to be responsible for their oppression. This study examines southern leadership discourses of Black women administrators who came from a tradition of protest transmitted across generations by older relatives, black educational institutions, churches, and protest organizations (Morris, 1984). What can an examination of university-level Black women administrators inform with respect to the struggles, challenges, and successes they experience?

Only the Black Woman can say “when and where I enter,  
in the quiet, undisputed dignity of my womanhood, without  
violence and without suing or special patronage, then and  
there the whole . . . race enters with me (Giddings, 1984).

-Anna Julia Cooper, 1892

Earning a college degree was not easily attainable for Black women during the civil rights movement. The struggle for social justice was met with White resistance, denial, and hatred. Black people and their allies persisted because social justice was at the heart of the economic, social, and political convictions that drove the women’s and black rights movements of the sixties and seventies (Giddings, 1984) . As the civil rights movement became a full-scale struggle, like many other Blacks, the Black women administrators in this study confronted and disrupted institutions thought to be responsible for their oppression.

After the Brown v. Board of Education ruling to end segregation, Blacks found themselves in new places where they were formerly denied entry. In these new settings, they experienced bias, discrimination, sexism, and racism as a result of gaining entry in historically white institutions. Despite the injustices, women of color forged ahead to integrate public schools, and pursue higher education and professional careers.

Findings from research on Black women administrators in one southeastern state are presented in this

analysis. The study examines southern leadership discourses of Black women administrators who came from a tradition of protest [that has been] transmitted across generations by older relatives, black educational institutions, churches, and protest organizations (Morris, 1984). What can an examination of university-level Black women administrators inform with respect to the struggles, challenges and successes they experience?

## Background

The participants' narratives represent some of the complexities of Black American identities and institutions in the 21st century. Collins (1998) maintains that dialogue among Black women that are attentive to both heterogeneity among them and shared concerns arise from a common social location such as historically Black institutions. Similarly, churches, families, and community organizations provide Black women with the support to invoke dialogue as a dimension their epistemologies.

A brief discussion of historically Black institutions illuminates the role these institutions play in the academic preparation of Black students. Since their inceptions dating back to 1854 (Garibaldi, 1984), the purpose of historically Black institutions was to provide educational access to freed slaves, serve the Black community, develop leaders, maintain historic traditions and values, and instill racial pride (Sims, 1994). Historically Black institutions continue to serve as educational citadels and cultural repositories for the Black community, as well as centers for social and political development.

## Purpose of Study and Methodology

The purpose of this study was to examine the southern leadership discourse and practices of Black women administrators in historically black institutions. The focus of the study was to create a space for Black women administrators to talk about their roles as educators, agency, and administrators. The qualitative method used is narrative research approach (Casey, 1995-96, 1993; Riessman, 1993). The participants' life stories describe the diversity of their experiences providing an opportunity to hear voices rarely heard within the public domain (Benjamin, 1997; Fonow & Cook, 1991; Gilligan, 1982, Gluck & Patai, 1992; Reinharz, 1992).

Participants were randomly selected after a search on how many historically Black institutions were located in one southeastern state. Nineteen participants were interviewed for the study over the course of four months; however, the data collected for use in this study were first obtained by Jean-Marie (2002) in her dissertation research. Thematic issues explored in the study include identity; the impact of racism and sexism reflected and reinforced in historically black and white institutions; communal values; spiritual/religious, economic, and political discourses in historically Black institutions.

For the purpose of this discussion, the focus is on six participants whose leadership practices seek to advance social justice (Jean-Marie, 2004). To ensure anonymity, pseudonyms are used to identify participants to minimize disclosure of specific information about individual lives. The participants are Dean Frazier, Drs. Giddens, Owens, Royster, Johnson, and President Murphy. All of them except Dr. Royster have taught in public schools prior to their transition to higher education, and her work experiences are from the corporate world. President Murphy's, Dean Frazier's, and Drs. Johnson's educational experiences were at both historically Black and White institutions; Drs. Giddens and Royster attended only historically Black institutions to pursue their studies. Dr. Owens obtained her degrees from historically White institutions. The administrators presently serve in the capacity of vice president and associate vice chancellor of academic affairs, dean of school education, university president, faculty professor (and former department chair), and vice chancellor of student affairs.

## Discussion

## On Becoming a Social Justice Advocate: Experiences of Personal Struggles

Because every text has a context (Casey, 1993), the historical background of the women administrators' narratives is essential to understanding their self-definitions. Born and raised during the periods of segregation and integration, the women administrators experienced the social and political upheavals of that era. For some, "separate but equal" policy and norms applied while others experienced, during the early years of integration, the resistance of Whites.

Despite the resistance of some southern states, Blacks began to integrate White public schools. Dr. Royster, vice chancellor of student affairs, also recalls the transitional years of integration:

I was in eighth grade in 1963 when they [school system] integrated the school system in Hampton, Virginia. So when they [her parents] said to me when I was 14, "Yes, you have a choice about whether you should go to the all Black high school or whether you go help continue to integrate this White high school"; it was really no choice. It was something you had to do.

My father said, "Well you have to." He said, "We didn't go through all this just because." So I didn't go reluctantly; it made sense to do it. That's what the struggle was all about. (Dr. Royster, personal communication)

This sense of urgency sets in motion Dr. Royster's commitment to social justice, a cause many Blacks advocated in the civil rights movements. Blacks were involved in civil rights efforts "through demonstrations, marches and acts of civil disobedience" (Willie, Garibaldi, & Reed, 1991) to improve the conditions of its people. Their efforts to revolutionize American institutions, laws, and policies often came with personal sacrifices and suffering.

While in their late teens and early twenties, the participants also confront other prejudices during the transitional years of integration. They include for examples being tracked because of their color and called "nigger" on a White college campus. One particular account of prejudice is that of Dr. Giddens, professor of biology & former administrator:

I'll never forget one professor on the first day of class. He told me in front of the class that I didn't exist as far as he was concerned. I was a waste of his time. I was never to raise my hand in class or come to his office for help because I was taking up the space that a boy should occupy. All I was going to do is get married and have babies. So, I stayed in his class and true to his form, he never called my name on the roll or was available to me for any kind of assistance at any time. (Dr. Giddens, personal communication)

Despite the prejudices, Dr. Giddens determined she was going to succeed in college. She sums, "People predicted that I would never last which I should probably thank them for it. It made me determined that I would last until I decided to go and not when they decided for me to go." These experiences, explains Dr. Royster "help make you tough. All were a part of God's plan for me".

The discrimination experienced by the women administrators persisted in their pursuit of terminal degrees and professional careers. For some, they encountered racists and sexists demarcations within historically Black and White institutions. Dr. Johnson illuminates her college experiences:

The experience there at Harvard University really toughened me. I had the misfortune of getting an advisor who was very sexist and racist. I remember one day being in the laboratory and this man said to me, "Why don't you go back to Georgetown to get your degree? . . . Then one day he took me in the office and said, "I think you need to take a master's." I asked him, "Are you

saying these things to me because I am a woman and Black. He replied, “You are quite justified in your opinion.” (Dr. Johnson, personal communication)

After that incident, Dr. Johnson concluded that Harvard University was not the best environment to continue her graduate studies. With the hope of having a positive experience, she enrolled at another historically White institution; however, she soon realized that the climate of the department was also racist:

Towards the completion of my doctoral degree, my mentor, an Asian professor decided that I was not going to finish. I really went through some changes with him. I said, “God is there some reason that I keep running into these experiences?” I really went through some major changes, but I never gave up.

But in December of 1988, I shall never forget it; the man was telling me what I was indicating as the extract analysis was inaccurate. He said, “I’ve got a Colored girl.” I said, “Excuse me! This is 1988.” I said, “Colored!” You mean to tell me, I’ve been going through all of this because of my color. So, I left the lab. For about four months, I never went back to the laboratory.

Dr. Owens, associate vice chancellor of academic affairs draws attention to gender discrimination at her institution:

I think there are times when assignments are given and resources are allocated, I don’t get as many resources as my male counterparts. It is as if you can always do more with less. But I don’t try to look at it that way. I try to figure out how I am going to get it done and move on. I can complain. I can make it known and then I have to move on. (Dr. Owens, personal communication)

According to Moses (1997), “Black women, including faculty and administrators on historically Black campuses, experience and must deal with not only the effects of racism but also those of sexism. Racism and sexism may be so fused in a given situation that it is difficult to tell which is which (p. 25)”. After being asked to teach botany at Norfolk State University, Dr. Johnson did not think she would face discrimination at a historically Black institution. She sums:

It was the Harvard, the Georgetown experience all over again. But this time, it was a Black environment; it was because I was a woman. When I went there, they really needed me. They negotiated with me and at the time the governor had put a freeze on hiring so they had to put me on a temporary contract which I would get every semester. When my chair asked for a copy of the contract, I had no idea that he didn’t know what I made. He and the dean got together and cut my salary in half. I refused to sign it. (Dr. Johnson, personal communication)

Pay inequities were not the only problem of sexism toward Black women in historically Black and White institutions. Dr. Johnson’s probing into the sexist climate of the department led to other findings of inequities (e.g. women were typically paid less, the wife of a married couple in the same dept. made less than her husband, none of the divisions in the science dept. had a woman chair, etc.). Committed to social justice, Dr. Johnson brought her concerns to the vice president of faculty affair but these issues were ignored. In protest, she declined taking a contract the following year.

Glazer-Ramo (2001) asserts that as “more women earn professional degrees for entry into traditionally male professions, women faculty [and administrators] experience isolation, exclusion from informal networks, and systemic discrimination in higher education (p. 145)”. Dr. Johnson’s recollection of the sexism at her former institution speaks to Glazer-Ramo’s (2001) analysis on the challenges women face in their

profession. Given the challenges the women administrators encounter in their educational and professional experiences, with the exception of President Murphy, they rely on their religious/spiritual beliefs to transcend their struggles. It is to their religious/spiritual beliefs the discussion draws attention.

### Faith Affirming Stance: The Significance of their Spiritual/Religious Beliefs

The women administrators' determination to hold steadfast to their commitment to social justice despite the prejudices and discrimination is analogous to the gospel hymn of R. K. Carter (1849), Standing on the Promises. Deeply committed to their religious beliefs, this verse symbolizes the women administrators' faith:

Standing on the promises that cannot fail,  
When the howling storms of doubt assail,  
By the living Word of God I shall prevail,  
Standing on the promises of God.

In some instances, the women administrators view their negative schooling and professional experiences as part of their purpose. They conclude that these experiences have a greater meaning beyond the present circumstances. For example, Dr. Johnson recalls a difficult moment at a former university:

I asked myself, "Why am I going through these changes?" But, God did not want me to leave that university. He had me there for a reason. Why do I have to stay in this wilderness so long? Oh, I was going through. The children of Israel stayed in the wilderness for forty-years. Am I going to be here for forty years? I shall never forget it. And that is when it was revealed to me why I was there. (Dr. Johnson, personal communication)

The close connection the women administrators assert they have with God helps them draw strength in times of adversities. They do not separate their work from their religious understanding; instead their belief in God guides their actions.

The participants' emphasis in the narratives on their religious/spiritual beliefs can be analyzed through Williams' (1993) deconstruction of Hagar's life, a slave figure in the Bible, to address the "wilderness experience of Black women." The wilderness experience for Hagar occurs in an isolated and lonesome desert. Pregnant, Hagar flees from Sarai to the wilderness. On two occasions, she encounters God in the desert as revelation that Hagar is not alone. Obeying God's command, Hagar returns to Sarai's house in submission to her. God later directs Hagar on how to receive the promise and provisions He has for her and her child (Sanders, 1995).

Williams (1993) interprets the wilderness experience to mean, "standing utterly alone in the midst of trouble with only God's support to rely upon (p. 108)". Hagar's predicament strengthens her faith in God. The same can be said often occurs for many Black women who manifest their faith in troubled times. As Williams (1993) constructs a Christian theology from the point of view of Black women, she realizes the striking similarities between Hagar's story and the story of Black women.

In her quest to analyze God's response to the Black community's situations of pain and bondage, she asks: "What was God's response to Hagar's predicament? Were her pain and God's response to it congruent with Black women's predicament and their understanding of God's response to Black women's suffering (Williams, 1993, p. 4)?" Hagar's narrative reveals "the faith, hope, and struggle with which an African slave woman worked through issues of survival, surrogacy, motherhood, rape, homelessness, and economic and sexual oppression (p. 33)", all of which Black women bear evidence of throughout American history. Williams (1993) argues that the "Black community has taken Hagar's story unto itself because it has

“spoken” to generation after generation of black women because her story has been validated as true by suffering Black people (p. 33).”

The story of Hagar also depicts resistance, affirmation, and empowerment of Black women in biblical perspective:

The Bible has been a significant source of spiritual, ethical, and political empowerment for black women who have used social service clubs, educational institutions, and advocacy organizations as bases for social activism. It has supplied the chief rationale for their resistance to human suffering and oppression, mandated their moral teachings and practice, resourced their affirmations of racial, cultural, and sexual identity. (Sanders, 1995, p. 126)

According to Williams (1993), “Black women often use their religion to cope with and transform the negative character of social processes in the African American and Anglo-American community (p. 33)”. Dean Frazier espouses the nature of her spiritual life. Raised in the Methodist church, her father a minister, she speaks at length about her spiritual existence as an indispensable aspect of her personal and professional life:

My spiritual connection gives me some stability. Every day of my life I think about what that is. And recently I thought for example with my parents, there is a spiritual piece to them that moved me to the point where I am now even though they’re deceased. (Dean Frazier, personal communication)

These profound moments of reflection also guide her work with students. Providing a quality education is not the only focus for Dean Frazier, but in addition, “We need to help young people understand that you ought to be accountable to someone as a spiritual person.” That is the stability she has and wants to provide for her students. She views this mission as necessary for the extension and preservation of the black community.

Dr. Royster also talks extensively about her religious faith:

I have a positive attitude about life. And I think that’s because I know God is on the throne. He is going to take care of me and do for me what I can’t do for myself. He is my rear guard so He is watching my back all along. That gives me the strength to press on even when I’m not sure that I can or that I want to do so. I know that’s helped all of my professional life. (Dr. Royster, personal communication)

Dr. Royster states that her religious views were influenced by her godly grandfather who always talked about God when she was a teenager and during most of her adult life. Her grandfather would read the Bible to her and tell her that “God can give her a new heart of flesh instead of a heart of stone.” In 1976, she remembers asking God to give her a new heart. Her grandfather’s teaching leads to her conversion in a time of crisis. Since Dr. Royster’s conversion, she has found refuge in God:

That’s what grounds me. I know I’m somebody in Him [God]. I can stand tall even if my knees are weak. Even if my leg is shaking and my hands are sweating I can still stand. I can hold my head tall. I can stand direct as a Black woman and not be concerned that I am a Black woman, but that I am a human being. I can do what I have to do. I want my young people to know that same thing. I want my staff to know the same thing. That they can do it and that I am there for them. (Dr. Royster, personal communication)

For many Black women administrators, their faith is the focal point of their personal and professional lives. Everything they do is interpreted and defined from their spiritual connection to God. Their religious

relationships exist on two dimensions. The first is the personal relationship with God these women openly shared in telling their life stories. For them, this relationship is the source of their strength to help them “negotiate” the world. Throughout their life experiences, they rely on that spiritual connection to overcome the injustices they have encountered.

The second dimension involves social relations developed through their church. The women administrators have strong ties to their churches either through their own ministry or active involvement in their church community, and they bring these values into their work environment. Articulating and interpreting the complexities of their lives and search for meanings through biblical teachings are a way to break away from oppressive ideologies and systems that attempt to define their reality.

### Embracing Family and Communal Value of Racial Uplift

While the Black women administrators relied on their faith to overcome the prejudices, they also embrace the family and communal value of racial uplift.

The expectations of families and members of the Black community for young men and women to further their education weigh on the participants’ shoulders because the plight of the Black community depended on their success. Dr. Johnson sums her college experience: “I felt like I was carrying the weight of my race on my back. I constantly felt that I had to do well because if I didn’t, I would be letting my people down” (Dr. Johnson, personal communication). Similarly, Dr. Owens shares how she was the first female and the youngest to receive a Ph.D. in her town “which was not important to me, but it was to my parents” (Dr. Owens, personal communication). These examples of Black women being first in their families to attain a higher level of education and represent the black community demonstrate how these women administrators have been involved in altering the economical, intellectual, and social capital of the Black race.

As a Black woman of Haitian ancestry, I am inspired by the participants’ commitment to social justice and resilience to thrive in the face of adversities. I am reminded of our forefathers and mothers who were vigilant in the struggle for justice. They believed the cause was as equally important for them and generations to come. Just as Frances Harper (1866) declares in her speech, “We are all Bound Up Together”: “Born of a race whose inheritances has been outraged and wrong, most of my life had been spent in battling those wrongs” and Sojourner Truth’s famous “Ain’t I a Woman?” speech given at the Women’s Rights Convention Center, so too do the Black women administrators continue the fight for social justice. How they fulfill that commitment is through their leadership practices.

### Critical Leadership Practices to Elevate the Students and Community We Serve

As the Black women administrators reflect on their lived experiences and address how their experiences shape their professional work, they articulate their commitment to provide quality education to students and examine institutional practices to improve upon them and the social conditions of the Black community. Foster’s (1986) critical model of leadership offer the lens to analyze the participants’ leadership practices and how they realize their commitment.

Foster (1986) proposes that an “administrator’s work involves the establishment of community and culture within an [institution] and the development of an [institution’s] self reflective ability to analyze its purpose and goals” (p. 10). The leadership Foster (1986; 1989) advocates is one that promotes democratic processes and calls for political activism for social justice. As a result, this practice of leading is critical, transformative, educative, and ethical. These elements bear further analysis to tease out the important work involved in a critical model of leadership.

### Critical and Transformative Leadership

Critical leadership is an ongoing analysis of what occurs in an [institution] with a commitment by those involved to engage in critical reflection and reevaluation of current practices (Foster, 1989). Evidence of how the participants engage in critical reflection centers on their discussions about the diverse needs of students who attend historically black institutions, the lack of resources, and other institutional challenges that impact students' success. In their leadership practices, the women administrators emphasize how they draw from past experiences to change practices that deter the success of students and progressivism in the Black community. Recognizing that many college students come from impoverished homes and lack strong educational backgrounds, Dean Frazier asserts:

We felt it was our responsibility to bring these students in and help them with language and basic academic skills. Equally important, we must help them understand the culture and how the culture was changing. (Dean Frazier, personal communication)

Similar to Dean Frazier, the women administrators' ongoing criticality of leadership practices creates visions of possibilities. In being critical, then, "leadership is oriented not just toward the development of more perfect [institutional] structures, but toward a re-conceptualization of life practices where common ideals for freedom and democracy stand important (Foster, 1986, p. 52)".

A second component of Foster's leadership model is transformative leadership. Transformative leadership is about social change with a belief that transformation is a process that occurs over time. The transformation is not only in structures but also with leaders and participants. The aim is to cultivate a willingness to examine one's life, ideas, and causes to develop a critical framework for leadership.

The civil rights movement was transformative: gaining equal rights for people of color and women, securing equal opportunity for employment, and providing access to education. When the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Brown v. Board of Education* that segregation in public schools was illegal, Blacks were confronted with the decision to integrate public schools. For many, it was not a matter to deliberate; it had to be done, thus the beginning of their commitment to advance social justice. The Black women administrators in this study were among those who integrated public schools and higher education. Over the course of their professional careers, they confronted other issues of inequity. Presently, as administrators in historically Black institutions, they continue their efforts because they recognize that their students are the hope and future of the Black community. Therefore, the preservation of the black community rests on them. They resolve to impart the knowledge, wisdom, and critical stance that will enable their students to be agents of social change.

### Educative and Ethical Leadership

Also important to Foster's critical model of leadership is educative and ethical leadership. According to Foster (1986), an educative leader "presents both an analysis and a vision, and devotes time to examine [institutional] history, purpose, and responsibilities (p. 186)". Engaging in discourse involves working as a community and being willing to listen and reciprocate leadership responsibilities. Through discourse, diverse viewpoints from all members are heard; the institution, as a result moves in a direction of shared vision and practices.

Finally, ethical leadership involves moral relationships and is intended to elevate people to new levels of morality (Foster, 1989), including maintenance of democratic values within a community. The role of a leader is to create other leaders. Participants can assume leadership roles, and leaders can become followers when the situation calls for communal exchange. Dr. Owens reflects on how she guides staff members to examine institutional issues and practices:

A whole lot of discussion will turn around and once it is turned around nobody remembers how

they got where they are. I've had people observe me and they'd say that it is very smooth the way you do it. You redirect them. They don't know that they have changed directions; they think it is their idea. (Dr. Owens, personal communication)

Dr. Owens brings staff members together to solve student and university related issues. Staff members are challenged to consider new perspectives and examine the implications of each likely decision. Through this process of engagement, they form an educational community so that everyone involved "creates the conditions for learning and form a common ground (Lambert, 1995, p. 29)" about the task(s) at hand.

In accepting the responsibility to lead at their universities, the women administrators attach to that responsibility reflective inquiry and discourse on how to transform practices that hinder students from equitable access to education. They articulate an ethic of care and support of students; they embody a collective mission borne out their advocacy for social justice, thus to not let the past be repeated.

The mission of the women administrator is to provide students with the tools to succeed academically, emotionally, and socially in society. There appears to be a strong correlation between the participants lived experiences, growing up in the segregated south during Jim Crow, and their belief in education as liberation that is endemic. They are concerned about the lack of preparation and the academic achievement of many Black students in public schools and universities. The participants' critique of the problems associated with the culture of schools is seen as one of the reasons Black students are underachieving. According to Dean Frazier:

My students at this university are students I know that most other universities would not touch. It is not because they don't have the ability, because they do. But, you have to reach inside and pull that ability out. Other institutions have such high standards, and they just don't want to bother with that student. That's the kind of student we have here. We have all kinds of students. We also have students that have had all kinds of experiences, and I believe that there is an opportunity to give credit for a lot of experiences. (Dean Frazier, personal communication)

Similarly, Dr. Giddens asserts:

It has always been a struggle to develop students. Because of the students we serve and the environment – lack of resources, equipment and working with faculty members who don't care, it is a struggle. Sometimes, the students don't have initiative and drive. It has been a struggle to truly educate them. It has been a struggle for me to remain at [institution], knowing the potential that I have, but I stay for the students. I could go to some other place but, I truly love the students here. (Dr. Giddens, personal communication)

In whatever conditions students matriculate to historically Black institutions, students can expect to find individuals from administration, faculty, and staff committed to their success. Many historically Black institutions recognize their students' deficiency and provide the resources need to help students achieve. According to Dean Frazier:

Many students are first generations coming to college. They need somebody to help polish them a little bit, refine them some. That's the role I think I've played in my first twenty years as a professional in higher education. I think that's the role you play at an HBCU. While you might not see the compensation early as years pass on, but when students come back, they talk about that.

Bring them into that village called [institution] University and work with them. But we must also prepare them to do as the eagle does the little eaglets, make you secure and warm in that

environment, but at some time let them know you have to go back into the larger culture and prepare you for that larger culture by giving you good skills and then giving you a piece of confidence that says, you can go out, you can survive. (Dean Frazier, personal communication)

In their present roles at historically Black institutions, the women administrators commit themselves to taking marginalized students to a level of academic and personal success. The imprint they want to leave on students is that they become academically competent in their professions, intellectually informed about social issues, culturally knowledgeable and socially attentive to their own community as well as to the larger society.

One way of exploring how the women administrators enhance education in economically disadvantaged areas is to look back at their historical positions as teachers, activists, and leaders. When communities were segregated by race, these women took on the responsibility of ensuring that Black children had the tools they needed to be successful in a world that would deny them equal access and quality of life.

While teaching in the south early in her career, President Murphy contested what was occurring to Black students at her school:

It was the first year [city] had mass bussing, and I taught in an elementary school. It was set way up on the hill in the middle of an all white neighborhood and they bussed kids from [street] down below to the poorest section of [city] that you have. They bussed these kids up to what was at the time one of the more affluent communities in [city]. It was a more unlikely match you could have made.

Those kids just endured a horrendous and horrific year; and I was the youngest teacher on staff by 23 years, and I was the only one of four African Americans on that staff. It was at that point watching what was happening to those kids, I realized what happens to people who look like me but hadn't grown up charmed and didn't have an advocate to address how bad off they really are. (President Murphy, personal communication)

This experience served as a consciousness-raising for President Murphy. From a privileged family, it was the first time she witnessed the struggles of disadvantaged children in the Black community. As a result, she felt compelled to advocate for the children and be the lonesome voice, risking her job to challenge the daily inequities she saw.

Exhausted by her failed attempts to change the conditions of these children's experiences and the lack of support from colleagues and administration, several years later President Murphy resigned from her elementary school. President Murphy became more committed to advocacy, speaking and taking action against social injustices and inequities in higher education.

Transitioning to higher education gave President Murphy the opportunity to be more involved in policy decisions that impact students' educational experience. Under the leadership of her mentor who was president of a historically Black institution, President Murphy learned about the university system and was appointed to positions that gave her the opportunity to be involved in multi-faceted projects and decision-making policies. Her years of experiences resulted in appointment as university president at a historically Black institution. As president, President Murphy establishes a clear vision for what she wants to accomplish:

Well, I think this school has the potential to be not just a leader among HBCUs but actually to be a leader among small colleges and universities across the country. We are going to prove that by staying close to the mission that if you provide access to education for kids, SAT scores

mean absolutely nothing.

It is potential that makes a difference. That is the real predictor of how well kids are going to succeed.

Next year, we're going to start what we're calling a pilot program where we are going to admit about 150 of our freshmen class. They will be kids who may not have good SAT scores or have all the credentials, but somebody in that community whether it is in the school or the church says, 'This is a kid to take a chance on. Trust me. Take a chance on this kid.' We are going to admit this kid and introduce them to a curriculum that is outside of the box. (President Murphy, personal communication)

Garnering the support of the local community, schools, and churches, she continues the advocacy campaign she started in her early years of teaching. Only this time, she has the support to implement educational programs to prepare disadvantaged students "who nobody else thinks they ought to take a chance on, except some momma, some daddy, some preacher, some teacher or some faculty member. We're going to educate them" (President Murphy, personal communication). In her present role, President Murphy takes the lead in guiding her university and constituents to a level where social inequities are addressed and access to education for students is a priority. President Murphy's leadership involves putting together a team of people of different strengths:

I've got to make sure I've got people working that do enjoy it and who are good at it. I can pretty much put a team together. . . I am continuously encouraging others to think outside of the box. I think that I'm a leader that validates people's strengths and competencies. (President Murphy, personal communication)

Her expectations are based on high standards and quality because anything less compromises the opportunities her university students seek.

In contrast to President Murphy, Dr. Royster's advocacy for social justice began at the age of fourteen as previously discussed. Advocacy continued into Dr. Royster's professional life in the business sector and into her career in higher education. Keenly aware of the challenges her university students face, she discusses the kinds of students at her institution:

These young people have tremendous potential; but they don't have the same resources available to them, not now and certainly not in the last 18 years and probably not the next 18 years. And they come with some unique, I don't even call them handicaps, but they haven't had the same opportunities in the educational system. They are African Americans predominantly; so I want them to come into our institution. I want to take these "diamonds in the rough" and I want them to "shine" with brilliance when they leave. I want them to have confidence that they can do it. (Dr. Royster, personal communication)

To move in a direction that will permit Dr. Royster to accomplish this undertaking, she does not rely on her solitary efforts; instead, she becomes involved in student affairs, challenges her staff, and partners with other constituents to move the university forward for the purpose and the benefits of students. She practices this by getting members of her university, from top to bottom, to focus on excellence:

My job is to make sure that the playing field is level so that we have justice and equity. My job is to promote excellence and to demand it.

Whether it's in the classroom or in the Vice Chancellor's job or the Chancellor's job or the house keeper's job, everybody's got to be about excellence. If we are all about excellence then

we'll all succeed. We'll get more money, we'll get more students. And I believe in taking care of people at the bottom. I believe in social justice. So I don't want to neglect anybody in the community.

We can't make it without the grounds keepers. We can't make it without the house keepers. The people in the cafeteria are just as important as the Chancellor because they're the ones that are cooking that food. And they are the ones that are delivering the food. And if they don't do that with the right applause, and smile, then our young people aren't so pleased with it. (Dr. Royster, personal communication)

Everyone has a piece of the puzzle to fill; it is the collective efforts of many that will contribute to the development of students. If everyone is not committed to those efforts the university and the [Black] community will suffer an economic loss. Therefore, affirming everyone in their work promotes a value system that says everybody is important. As stated by Dr. Royster (personal communication), "As we move up in this pyramid and go down, we're all in it together." Everybody serves a function in this business, even the cooks.

Drawing from her experience in the business sector, Dr. Royster approaches her leadership with an economic mindset:

I'm interested in building confidence in young people. I want young people and myself to understand the business aspects of what we do. The business is education. You have to understand the competitive forces out there in the environment. If I want to grow my enrollment, I've got to be competitive. To be competitive, I've got to have first class products. I have to deliver services in a first class way. (Dr. Royster, personal communication)

To deliver the goods, she places value in collaborating with colleagues, staff and students. They are driven by success and as she claims, "You have to be about excellence day in and out as partners in this whole enterprise" (Dr. Royster, personal communication).

President Murphy and Dr. Royster reveal they have had to stand alone in pursuit of social justice during critical moments when other individuals did not stand with them. They are risk takers and subsequently call forth other individuals to continue what they have started. They act in defiance against conditions abhorrent to their principles.

In sum, when school systems provide inferior equipment and inadequate facilities, these Black women administrators step in to make up the difference. They use their creativity and knowledge of the world, through the formal and informal education processes, to show adolescents in their institutions that they can be successful, educated, and respected. Their students do not only learn the standard curriculum of school, but they are taught community ethics, racial pride, and how to protect themselves from the brutality that awaits them in a White dominated world.

### Communal Relations: The Role of Dominant Institutions in the Black Community

Like historically Black institutions situated in the heart of Black communities, Black churches too serve an integral role. Historically Black institutions and churches symbolize hope, aspiration, and refuge for the Black community. Black churches have been pivotal in revolutionary movements in the social and economic development of Blacks. The women administrators whose foundations are strongly tied to their religious traditions express concerns about the declining presence of the Black church in the lives of Black people. Here, Dean Frazier expresses the importance of the Black church when she was growing up:

What I suspect that I had coming out of the Black church that children don't have now was an

opportunity for speaking, making presentations, and learning how to present ideas and activities that we probably don't have at this time. (Dean Frazier, personal communication)

The opportunity to pass on the “culture”, “traditions”, “heritage”, “legacy”, and “intellectual capital” of the Black race is threatened because of the disconnection between the Black church and community. Church is likely to be the only institution where masses of African Americans from different socioeconomic backgrounds assemble, and it is an opening for discourses to occur concerning the problems and needs of the Black community. Also, the church serves another purpose for children to find images of successful model who are a representation of them. With the diminished presence of the Black church, the women administrators believe that historically Black institutions must fill the role of the Black church.

In historically Black institutions, the Black community is extended so that successful African Americans can give back to ‘whence’ they have come. Dean Frazier emphasizes the need to reach out to members of the Black community:

We have to go back into the communities and work with others and try to make a difference in what they do. I think again the keys to whether or not you are successful means someone has to mentor you. Youngsters need models and mentors to help them be successful. They need to see that person who looks like them being successful. (Dean Frazier, personal communication)

Mullings (1997) agrees that throughout their history, “Black women have been involved not only in work outside the home but also in transformative work (p. 55)”, individual, and collective action to improve social conditions.

Black women administrators whose belief and commitment to a quality education is more than a motto; it is realized in the experiences they provide for every student who attends their university. Their interest in each student's success begins with developing an authentic relationship between administrator and student. Recognizing that they are in a position to make a difference, the administrators are guided by a vision for young African Americans to develop their talents and gifts to become contributors to their community and society. The success of one child is seen as an advancement of the community.

This analysis reveals how Black women administrators as social justice advocates explore the circumstances of students who enroll at their institutions. Concerned with change and creating opportunities for all students, they critically assess the limits society imposes on certain groups and the paths to removing those limits (Foster, 1986), paramount to their practices of leadership. As a result, sacrifices are routinely made for the sake of developing better circumstances for students.

## Summary and Conclusions

This collective group of women exemplifies how they survived the struggles of integration, triumphed over barriers in educational settings, and are committed to advocating social justice. Looking back on their life's journey, they share the significance of their religious and spiritual faith and identify the present struggles of students, the community, and church.

One message the women administrators convey to members within and outside academia is that they, as administrators are not to be discounted in the collective project of working towards social change. For many of them, historically Black institutions are where they are supposed to be and can have the most impact on students, administrative decisions, and educational reforms.

Although many of their struggles go unrecorded, only when these stories are told can individuals within and outside the Black community understand the sacrifices of Black women who fought against injustices and continue to pave the way for generations to follow in their lead. Understanding their purpose, they stand

firm on the promise to lead historically Black institutions to a level of excellence despite the challenges of students and institutional practices and policies.

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