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Living Legacies: A Historical Analysis of the Atlanta Nine Who Desegregated Atlanta Public Schools

Tanya Crawford

ACCEPTANCE

This dissertation, Living Legacies: A Historical Analysis of the Atlanta Nine Who Desegregated Atlanta Public Schools, by Tanya Crawford, was prepared under the direction of the candidate's Dissertation Advisory Committee. It is accepted by the committee members in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree, Doctor of Philosophy, in the College of Education and Human Development, Georgia State University.

The Dissertation Advisory Committee and the student's Department Chairperson, as representatives of the faculty, certify that this dissertation has met all standards of excellence and scholarship as determined by the faculty.

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Living Legacies: A Historical Analysis of the Atlanta Nine Who Desegregated Atlanta Public Schools

by

Tanya T. Crawford

Under the Direction of Dr. Chara Haeussler Bohan

ABSTRACT

Six years after *Brown v. Board of Education*, Atlanta reluctantly complied with the order to desegregate its school system rather than risk having schools closed due to noncompliance. Out of 132 students, nine black high school seniors desegregated four of Atlanta's all-white high schools. The purpose of this study is to explore and document the missing voices of Atlanta's 1961 school desegregation movement and provide an analysis of the students' experiences. Using historical research, five of the nine students engaged in oral history interviews where they described their feelings about the desegregation process. W. E. B. DuBois's double consciousness theory and Tara Yosso's community cultural wealth theory serve as lenses for understanding and explaining the experiences of the Atlanta students who were the first to desegregate the public schools in "the city too busy to hate."

The Atlanta Nine and the Desegregation of Atlanta's Public Schools

by

Tanya T. Crawford

A Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for the

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DEDICATION

"There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside of you."

Maya Angelou

I dedicate this dissertation to the five trailblazers who trusted me with their stories: Ms. Madelyn Nix, Mrs. Mary Francis, Mrs. Martha Holmes, Ms. Rosalyn Walton Lees, and Mr. Thomas Welch. I hope I have done justice to the trust you placed in me. For 55 years you opted to remain quietly in the shadows. I was blessed beyond measure when you-hesitantly stepped out of the shadows and braved the spotlight to share your memories with me. You welcomed me into your world and helped me make sense of Atlanta's desegregation era and I am forever grateful. Your stories will inspire and challenge a new generation of students who will finally know who you are. On behalf of those students, thank you. I also pay homage to the four Atlanta 9 students that I did not get to meet: Ms. Willie Jean Black, Ms. Donita Gaines, Mr. Lawrence Jefferson, and Mr. Arthur Simmons.

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"He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion." Philippians 1:6

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analysis of their experiences. You challenged me to see beyond what was in front of me and to look for the story behind the events. I am a better teacher and a better researcher as a result.

Dr. Feinberg, thank you for encouraging me to continue the fight when I wanted to throw in the towel and for being such a calming sprit. You have a phenomenal way of wrapping your critique in love and gentleness. Your attention to detail throughout this project and the ability to identify ideas I had not considered, strengthened this dissertation.

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Lastly, in memory of the people whose lives strengthened me and helped make me the person I am today, and who I wish were here to share this time with me. Thank you!

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1 INTRODUCTION

"I want to take this opportunity to congratulate Governor Vandiver of Georgia, Mayor Hartsfield of Atlanta, Chief of Police Jenkins, Superintendent of Schools Letson and all of the parents, students and citizens of Atlanta, Ga., for the responsible, law-abiding manner in which four high schools were desegregated today. This was the result of vigorous effort for months by the officials of Atlanta and by groups of citizens throughout the community. Their efforts have borne fruit in the orderly manner in which desegregation was carried out--with dignity and without incident. Too often in the past, such steps in other cities have been marred by violence and disrespect for the law."[1]

John F. Kennedy, President of the United States of America, 1961

On August 20, 2011, on the 50th anniversary of Brown v Board of Education, the city of Atlanta commemorated the nine African American students who integrated the Atlanta Public Schools (hereafter referred to as APS) in 1961. Three of the nine alumni students emerged from the shadows of obscurity to humbly accept recognition for their role in the integration of the APS. City leaders highlighted the bravery of the nine students, declaring they were the heroes that helped ensure the freedom that young people enjoy today. Three African American boys and six African American girls were chosen to integrate four all-White schools. They were escorted to school by police officers for the first few weeks of school and in some cases for the first few months to ensure their safety. The students did not receive the publicity of Little Rock, Arkansas's nine students who integrated Central High School in 1957, nor did they garner the

[1] John F. Kennedy: "The President's News Conference," August 30, 1961. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/.

headlines made by Charlayne Hunter-Gault and Hamilton Holmes seven months earlier when they integrated the University of Georgia.[2]

Everything about the desegregation of the Atlanta Public Schools (APS) was carefully planned and executed to ensure a peaceful transition and to guarantee the city of Atlanta would not earn the violent reputation given to other southern cities[3] when those cities desegregated. Months leading up to the first day, the nine Black students received training on how to handle hostile incidents that might arise at their new schools. The emotional turmoil and pressure to succeed was stressful and affected their young lives, which was not unusual for Black students who participated in school desegregation.[4]

Historical Context: Political, Economic, and Social Factors

The historical context of the 1960s is significant for understanding and interpreting the experiences of the Atlanta 9 students. The interpretation of events varies based on the conditions under which they occur. Without the proper context, researchers analyzing historical events are only able to see a piece of what actually occurred. The historical context includes political, economic, and social factors.

The political climate in Atlanta during the 1960s was divided along race and class lines. Within the Black community, political leadership rested in the hands of the Black clergy, Black

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[2] Charlayne Hunter-Gault, *In My Place* (United States & Canada: Harper Collins, 1992) 173.

[3] William Frantz Elementary School in New Orleans, LA in 1960 (Charlene Hunter Gault, Interview with Ruby Bridges Hall, *PBS Online NewsHour,* February 18, 1997); East High School in Nashville, TN in 1955 (Sonya Ramsey, We Will Be Ready Whenever They Are: African American Teachers' Responses to the Brown Decision and Public-School Integration in Nashville, Tennessee, 1954-1966." *The Journal of African American History,* no. 1-2 (2005): 29.*;* Harding High School in Charlotte, NC in 1957 (Dorothy Counts at Harding High: A Story of Pride and Prejudice, *The Charlotte Observer,* March 18, 2016.

[4] James Coleman. "Equality of Educational Opportunity." Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, 1966.

entrepreneurs, Black lawyers, and other Black civic leaders. White politicians formed alliances with Black leaders mostly out of necessity. Without the support of Black leadership, peace could not be guaranteed, and neither could votes. The alliance of Black leaders with the White establishment was disappointing for some working-class Blacks who saw this as a conflict of their interests due to the fact that many of the Black leaders came from middle class backgrounds and had access to resources, opportunities and information that working-class Blacks did not have. This explains, in part, why working-class Blacks were more likely to espouse radical, less conciliatory views than middle class blacks.

The key political players in Atlanta were elected officials such as Governor Ernest Vandiver, Mayor William Hartsfield, APS School Superintendent John Letson, and Police Chief Herbert Jenkin. Most of the political officials were White and conservative and wanted to maintain a dual school system. Their views on school integration were no secret, not even to the Atlanta 9. Because of such conservative views at the top, officials at the local and school level felt justified in protesting the transfer of the Atlanta 9 students and they boldly made it clear that although they were obeying the desegregation order, they despised having to do so.

The general integration plan was to select nine academically strong mature Black high school students and place them in White schools, one or two to each school.[5] The role of the key players was to set a criterion for who would be allowed to transfer, sift through applications and interview potential candidates. Atlanta's political, social, and economic climate influenced who they selected to integrate the schools. Only the right kind of student could handle what was sure

[5] Kathy Loving (retired historian/archivist, Atlanta Public Schools), interview by Tanya Crawford, Atlanta, GA, June 14, 2016.

to come. Atlanta's political community was closely tied to the economic community because the actions of one affected the other.

Economically, the city of Atlanta was developing rapidly during the 1960s and all sides had a stake in what economic growth would mean to the city. As time progressed politicians were forced to change their conservative views on integrated school in order to prevent economic backlash from the federal government and the business industry. The social, political, and economic contexts influenced the other, but some might argue the economy had the greatest influence because economic issues proved most persuasive in winning over separatists, who wanted no part in desegregating the school district.

The key players in the economic community were companies like the Atlanta Urban League (founded in 1930), the Atlanta Chamber of Commerce (founded in 1861), Coca Cola (founded in 1892), Delta Airlines (founded in 1924), and the Southern Company (founded in 1945). The Black community had its own financial institutions to boast about: HJ Russell & Co. (founded in 1952), Citizens Trust Co. (founded in 1921), Atlanta Life Co. (founded in 1905).

Economics definitely played a role in shaping the historical context of Atlanta in 1961.[6] Board members, knowing that integration needed to go smoothly to appease the business community took these facts into consideration when selecting the Atlanta 9 students. Class divisions were evident in the Black community, just like in every other culture and community. With the Atlanta 9, their middle-class backgrounds gave them exposure and access to resources that many other Blacks did not have. Understanding the economic conditions of Atlanta helps

[6] Kathy Loving, interview.

historians and onlookers better comprehend internal and external conflicts participants grappled with during this time.

With regard to social factors, Atlanta's reputation as "the city too busy to hate" was plastered across newspaper articles, business advertisements, and fundraising memos. In order to keep Atlanta on its economic trajectory, the city and the state would have to overhaul the racist narrative that dominated, not just Atlanta, but the South in general during this period. While Black civic and religious groups fought for the equality of Blacks for obvious reasons, White groups advocated for the equality of Blacks most often to ensure their White children's wellbeing remained uninterrupted.

While the Atlanta 9 was preparing to integrate APS, other events were happening globally, nationally, and statewide. At the national level, there were other cities allowing Blacks to enroll at White schools just like in the case of Atlanta. Their headline making stories were mostly violent, which weighed on some of the Atlanta 9 students as they prepared for their first day of school. Not to mention, during this same time period, lynchings were happening in southern cities. Blacks were being denied voting rights, and public facilities (restaurants, stores, and theaters) were still segregated.

The historical context of Atlanta and the conditions surrounding the Atlanta 9 illustrate why their actions were so nuanced and help illuminate the themes that surfaced during the interviews: community cultural wealth, double consciousness, resilience, tokenism, personal sacrifice and moral obligation. The political, economic, and social contexts help to substantiate the experiences of Madeline Nix, Thomas Welch, Mary Francis, Rosalyn Walton Lees and Martha Holmes.

Significance of the Study

In 1954, the United States Supreme Court declared separate schools inherently unequal. All public schools were ordered to end racial segregation. After six years, Atlanta begrudgingly complied with the order to desegregate its school system rather than risk having their schools closed due to noncompliance. After a rigorous application process that included interviews and IQ tests, nine Black students were selected to integrate the White schools. But, they were chosen only as symbols of compliance. They were not embraced. They were merely tolerated.[7]

The literature tends to highlight long drawn out court cases designed to stall school integration. Existent research also emphasizes coalitions of Blacks and Whites uniting to defeat conservative legislators intent on keeping schools segregated. Furthermore, the literature prioritizes notable civil rights leaders challenging the unfair treatment of Blacks and makes the popular activists heroes while ignoring lesser known individuals. Although in this dissertation I analyze court cases, community groups and influential leaders from a contextual standpoint, my research is different because it specifically focuses in depth on the students and their personal experiences.

This research adds a layer to the desegregation narrative in the U.S., as I explore the psychological and emotional turmoil experienced by these Black students. While Atlanta was progressing economically, Black Americans were struggling to figure out where they fit into the city's progressive landscape. Atlanta had risen from Sherman's 1865 campaign[8] that destroyed

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[7] Mary Francis, interviewed by Tanya Crawford, June 16, 2018.

[8] In his chronicle of Atlanta from the 1820's -1930's, Franklin Garrett writes, "With the dawn of the sixties Atlanta entered its decade of greatest travail…Antebellum Atlanta all but disappeared in the crucible of war, but the seeds of its future survived the ordeal and flowered mightily in the years to follow." Franklin Garrett, Atlanta and Environs: A Chronicle of Its People and Events Volume I (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1954) 471, 99.; Franklin Garret also discusses the progress of Atlanta as it sought to recover from the damage of Sherman's March to the Sea. He quotes Clara Mildred Thompson in his chronicle, "From all of this ruin and devastation a new

the city's infrastructure to become a major cosmopolitan city. Atlanta promoted business development, established Black colleges, expanded transportation modes, and created sports teams. If Atlanta were to continue its momentum, it would have to correct the social ills plaguing its Black and White citizens. In this dissertation, the voices of the Atlanta 9 add a layer to school desegregation narratives by revealing what happened when Atlanta was forced to fix its racial problems to maintain its economic growth. The only way Atlanta was going to succeed as a thriving city was by ensuring its public schools had a favorable outcome, which meant obeying the mandate to integrate its schools, whether the governor wanted to or not. The city had a lot riding on the Atlanta 9, and the nine students knew it. The burden was on the students to make integration a success. Shedding light on their stories demonstrates the complexity involved in this process. Contemporary popular recollections tell a much less complicated version of the impact of school integration on Atlanta's economy and its future.

Second, the psychological and emotional turmoil of integrating the schools took its toll and required that the students adopt a sense of "double consciousness" first espoused by W.E.B. DuBois.[9] The quiet bravery of nine "token" students situated in an unfamiliar and hostile environment for eight hours each day trying to learn and receive an equal and decent education deserves to be explored and honored. Regardless of the quiet and non-dramatic way the Atlanta 9 entered the school, their story is no less courageous and required no less perseverance than the stories of those making media headlines across the nation.

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city is springing up with marvelous rapidity." Clara Mildred Thompson. *Reconstruction in Georgia: Economic, Social, Political 1865-1872.* (Upperville, VA: Beehive Press, 1972), 100.

[9] William Edward Burghardt DuBois, *Souls of Black Folk*, Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, (2007).

The third reason this research is significant is the implication it has for today's ongoing discussions over educational access, academic content, and pupil funding to achieve equity in schools. Schools have been debating equity in schools since the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) court case. During the 1960s, it was believed by many that the only way to ensure quality education was for Blacks to attend schools with Whites. Parents who disagreed with this notion were outnumbered during the 1960s, and many second-guessed their instincts. These parents and other community stakeholders knew the value of African American students attending African American schools with African American teachers. They went along with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) litigators and believed the benefits outweighed the risks because placing their students alongside White students meant the same access, content, and funding as White students. Access refers to the opportunity for students regardless of their race to have the same resources, extracurricular programs, teacher training, instructional materials, and technology.[10] Quality content refers to, "rigorous content-rich curriculum and the deeply embedded loyalty to 'child-centered' teaching."[11] Although Black children in integrated schools have higher academic outcomes, it is important not to ignore the psychological impact that schools and teachers have on the hearts and minds of Black students. "A sense of inferiority affects the motivation of a child to learn."[12]

In the same way that segregation is harmful, integration done poorly can be equally as harmful. People looking back at the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision argue that if

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[10] Catherine Harmon, "Ensuring Equal Educational Access for All Students," U. S. Department of Education (2014).

[11] Arit John, "Even Well Integrated Schools Treat Black Students Differently," New Republic," (2014).

[12] *Brown v. Board of Education*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954).

integration had taken place more thoughtfully, it would have benefitted more students and communities.[13] Almost 60 years after the Atlanta 9 integrated Atlanta, many schools are still segregated, and a disproportionate number of African American students lag behind their White counterparts. Thus, the experiences of the Atlanta 9 are insightful and demonstrate the importance of attending to the social, mental, and emotional needs of the students rather than obsessing over symbolic court victories. The school experiences of the Atlanta 9 reveal the success and failure of our schools, neighborhoods, and the entire society. These lessons can help inform educational policy and pedagogy today.

Research on the Atlanta 9 places the spotlight on the power of youth activism.[14] Seven months after the integration of the University of Georgia, nine high school students managed to accomplish a feat that adults in Atlanta had not been able to attain. As a matter of fact, the desegregation of Atlanta's schools was soon followed by the integration of Rich's Department Store, the desegregation of the Fox Theater, as well as, several other public spaces the following year.

> On March 7, 1961, student leaders King and Sullivan were summoned to a downtown meeting, where they learned that the city's White and Black leaders had brokered a deal to desegregate the city's lunch counters. Under the arrangement, desegregation

[13] Jack Balkin, *What Brown Should Have Said*, (New York: New York University Press, 2002).

[14] Jon Hale writes students about the grassroots movement of the Freedom Schools which consisted of youth, "A history of the freedom schools reveals that young people still in middle and high school were on the front lines of the Civil Rights Movement, and in many instances it was the young people, not rebellious college students or established NAACP people who inspired local movements in their own community." Source: Jon Hale, *The Freedom Schools: Student Activists in the Mississippi Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 19.

> would occur the following fall, following the court-ordered integration of local schools. Although they objected to the delay and felt betrayed by their elders in the Black community, King and Sullivan ultimately consented to the settlement.[15]

The Atlanta 9 may not have been the direct cause of subsequent desegregation victories in Atlanta but the brave role of these youth in the larger movement for civil rights cannot be underestimated. Although the integration of Atlanta's public schools marked the beginning of desegregation in other public facilities in Atlanta, the perspectives of the nine Atlanta students were notably absent. This dissertation will add to the school desegregation literature and highlight Atlanta's rich civil rights history even more, by offering a historical narrative from the perspective of the students.

How Did I Arrive Here?

This research journey began three years ago with a middle school field trip to the Martin Luther King Center for Nonviolent Social Change with 84 middle school seventh graders. I almost missed the 4x6 photo of the Atlanta 9 hanging on a wall near the massive Civil Rights timeline. As I waited for the remaining students to finish the tour, two of my students lingered behind staring at the picture near the end of the exhibit. My eyes landed on the black and white image the students were fixated on, which I apparently missed during my own prior walkthrough. Indeed, I had overlooked it during my previous six visits to the King Center as well, because the tour guide informed me it was not new at all, it had been there all along. While

[15] Edward Hatfield, "Atlanta Sit-ins," *New Georgia Encyclopedia* (August 1, 2016). Lonnie King and Herschelle Sullivan, chairmen of Committee on Appeal for Human Rights (COAHR), consisted of college students from historically Black colleges. They orchestrated restaurant sit-ins across Atlanta.

reading the caption, several more students curiously walked over to see the photos as well. We all stood in amazement at the notion of Atlanta as a once segregated school system. “You mean to tell me Brown Middle School used to be all White?” Not quite sure why I was just then learning the same fact myself, I replied, “So it seems.” It struck us all for the first time. Before our eyes was a reality that we had taken for granted. Atlanta had not always been ripe with equality, fairness, and opportunity that we benefit from today. The photo changed my life and marked a turning point in my academic career.

For a while, after the tour, the image of the Atlanta 9 integrating Atlanta's public schools stayed with me. I began to read about the history of my own school district. Most of my pre-dissertation knowledge of the school system dated back to the beginning of Dr. Alonzo Crim’s appointment as Atlanta's first Black superintendent. Digging up extensive, less circulated information about Atlanta's segregated schools in the 1960s was a challenge. The literature most cited on desegregation in Atlanta featured curriculum changes and how the educational system went about implementing and modifying the social studies curriculum while it was in the middle of integrating its students.[16] Another popular literature topic was the White flight that happened when middle-class Whites decided to side-step the integration of Atlanta's schools by fleeing to the suburbs.[17] I discovered the reason I had not heard about the Atlanta 9 was that there was

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[16] Chara Bohan and Patricia Randolph, “The Social Studies Curriculum in Atlanta Public Schools During the Desegregation Era,” *Theory & Research in Social Education* 37, no. 4 (2009): 543-56

[17] Kevin Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the making of modern conservatism*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press. 2005); Elizabeth Henry and Katherine Hankins, “Halting White flight: Parent activism and the (Re)shaping of Atlanta’s “circuits of schooling: 1973-2009,” *Journal of Urban History,* 38 no. 3 (2012): 532-552.

little primary data about them. There were quick blurbs and commemorations[18] to honor the nine students or a follow up on the students' present whereabouts. But no extensive record of the students' experiences or their current lives existed. I began to incorporate the story of Atlanta's school history into my social studies classroom lessons, and it made the curriculum content more relevant, relatable, and engaging. Students were fascinated by the irony of desegregation during the 1960s and the re-segregation of modern times. The lack of available information about the Atlanta 9, plus the reaction of my students after hearing the Atlanta 9 story, inspired me to take on this research for my dissertation. At first, all I envisioned was the narratives, but the more I studied the history of Atlanta, the more obsessed I became with the nuances that made the Atlanta 9 different from South Carolina, Louisiana, Virginia, and Memphis, where the desegregation of schools was marred with violence.

Atlanta gave the appearance of acceptance, but quietly the trailblazing students who integrated the schools suffered. The publicity had to be positive, unlike in other cities, which is why the students felt burdened. They felt that peace rested on their shoulders more so than it did on the White students. The nine students realized during their integration training sessions that everything needed to go smoothly[19] and they felt they would be to blame if it did not. The adults conveyed these expectations nonverbally by repeatedly reminding the students of such. They all knew the world was watching, including the President of the United States, who commended the students and the city at the end of the first school day. The intense pressure facing the Atlanta 9

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[18] John Martin, "New Housewives and Atlanta Nine Integrated Georgia's Public Schools" *CNN-Schools of Thought* (blog), October 19, 2012, http://schoolsofthought.blogs.cnn.com/; Maureen Downy, "Today Marks 55th Anniversary of Integration of Atlanta Public Schools," *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, (blog).

[19] Martha Ann Holmes (Former Atlanta 9, Brown High School student), in discussion with author, June 2016.

students was too much to bear for one student and caused her to abandon the White school and return to her former all-Black school. "I am not cut out for this" she declared.[20] Another student stated that no one talked to her at her new school, as "they pretended I wasn't there."[21] For the media, business owners, and political leaders, the silent rejection and suffering did not seem to matter as long as there was no blood shed or bad press for the city. Also, teachers apparently were not told to be nice, although some of them voluntarily chose to do so. Some teachers were helpful, but most were just as cold and indifferent as the White students.

The Role of Objectivity

"A method of conducting historical research through recorded interviews between a narrator with personal experience of historically significant events and a well-informed interviewer, with the goal of adding to the historical record" -definition of Oral History

Historical objectivity is hard to define because history or the re-telling of history is constantly evolving and is relative to the context in which the history is presented. Historical objectivity is also dependent on who is doing the "telling." Peter Novick, in his book, *The Noble Dream*, declines to disclose whether he supports or opposes objectivity, instead declaring his views are shaped by the historical context. I agree with Novick's views about pure objectivity being nearly impossible for historians to achieve as, "no one could escape the influence of background and experience."[22] Moreover, Novick's assertion implies that factors such as culture, background, and prior experiences hinder researchers from being able to claim

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[20] *Jet* magazine, 1961.

[21] Rosalyn Walton, (Former Atlanta 9, Brown High School student), in discussion with author, July 2016.

[22] Peter Novick, "That Noble Dream: The 'Objectivity Question' and the American Historical Question'" (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

objectivity. However, I contend that objectivity does not exist because everyone speaks from a particular perspective. Derrick Bell points out, "the problem is that not all positioned perspectives are equally valued, equally heard, or equally included.[23]" Simply put, objectivity is nearly impossible to achieve in a study such as this.

I aim to be as objective as possible but the very nature of oral history research guarantees there will be some level of subjectivity during the process because there are biases when doing oral history research.[24] For instance, because oral history research relies on participants remembering past events, researchers cannot be assured of 100 percent accuracy in their recollections. Thus, when participants recall and retell stories, they are often influenced by contemporary events and new perspectives that they were not privy to when the experiences initially occurred. Therefore, historians have an ethical responsibility to spend time analyzing the data and unpacking the narratives if the research is to be considered scholarly.[25]

The Dominant Narrative

"The first duty of historians is to ascertain as nearly as possible and to record exactly what happened…there is no history until historians tell it, and it is the way in which they tell it that becomes what we know of as history." -Peter Novick

The dominant narrative around the desegregation of public schools in the South focuses on White resistance to desegregating schools and Black efforts at integrating them. The narrative assumes that Blacks fought to integrate White schools in the 1960s to obtain a better education,

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[23] Derrick Bell, "Whose afraid of critical race theory," *University of Illinois Law Review* no.4 (1995): 893-910.

[24] Richard Wilson, "Combining Historical Research and Narrative Inquiry to Create Chronicles and Narratives," Qualitative *Report* 12, no.1 (2007): 20-39.

[25] Wilson, "Combining Historical Narrative," 20-29.

and our post-racial society is a much better place because of their actions. The narrative usually goes something like this: back when schools were segregated the Black schools were inferior due to poor students, ill-prepared teachers, and inferior resources. Integration was necessary because it was the only way Blacks could obtain an equal education. The cause of the re-segregation of schools today is because Blacks and Whites choose to live and attend school separately.[26]

This sentiment would be fine if public schools did not remain racially segregated and inadequate with Blacks lagging behind Whites economically, educationally, and politically some 50 years later. The more realistic narrative for many Black students and their families is considerably more complex and nuanced than the simple narrative disseminated over the years. Many believe the *Brown v. Board* of Education decision was more symbolic than practical[27] because Black students were the ones inconveniently bussed to White schools. Qualified Black teachers were shipped off to White schools while unqualified White teachers were moved to Black schools. The curriculum taught in integrated schools minimized the contributions of Blacks and failed to provide the nurturing holistic school experience that many Black children were used to in Black schools.[28] Nevertheless, the Atlanta 9 students forged ahead and succeeded despite the sacrifices they endured when they left their home schools to attend White schools. The emotional turmoil and pressure to succeed in their new schools was stressful and

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[26] "Quality education, therefore, is not just an advantage of race and class; it is also an advantage of geography" Source: Mara Casey "The Spatialization of Racial Inequality and Educational Opportunity: Rethinking the Rural/Urban Divide," *Peabody Journal of Education 92, no. 3: 385-404;* Gloria Ladson Billings sums up how property relates to education, *"*The quality and quantity of the curriculum varies with the 'property values' of the school. *Gloria* Ladson Billings and William Tate, "Toward a Critical Race Theory of Education" *Teachers College Record* 97, no 1(1995): 47-68.

[27] Derrick A. Bell, "*Brown v. Board of Education* and the Interest Convergence Dilemma," in *Critical Race* Theory: The Key Writings that Formed the Movement, (New York: The New Press, 1980).

[27] Vanessa Siddle Walker, *Their Highest Potential*, (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 1996).

affected their young lives. Without the oral histories about the lived experiences of the students revealed in this research, the public might continue to believe that Atlanta "got it right" when other cities "got it wrong." It was not the city of Atlanta that got it right, it was the students of Atlanta who got it right. The students' only motive was earning a quality education in stark contrast with the city of Atlanta's motives.

I agree that Atlanta should be commended for its efforts, but not without acknowledging the hidden motives behind the city's actions. Everything about the desegregation of Atlanta Public Schools was carefully considered and executed to ensure peace and the emotional well-being and academic success of the students was secondary to Atlanta's reputation at that time. Through this research, I aim to give voice to the Atlanta 9 and provide a fuller picture of the Civil Rights Movement and the role lesser known individuals played in the fight for justice.

Positionality

"I don't believe that researchers can eliminate tensions, contradictions, or power imbalances, but I do believe we can (and should) name them."[29] -Wendy Luttrell

Before I could interpret the stories of the Atlanta 9, I had to first engage in what Wendy Luttrell advocates as my own self-reflective lens,[30] where I identify the contradictions and tensions I might encounter during my oral history study. Milner introduces a framework to guide researchers conducting research involving issues of race and culture. In preparation for unanticipated "dangers" that might arise, researchers need to be conscious of their own biases,

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[29] Wendy Luttrell, "Good Enough' Methods for Ethnographic Research Qualitative Educational Research: Readings in Reflexive Methodology and Transformative Practice," *Harvard Educational Review*, 70, no. 4 (2000): 499-523.

[29] Luttrell, "Good Enough Methods." 499

beliefs, and thoughts. If this prior self-reflection is not done, researchers run the risk of misrepresenting or misinterpreting the data and opting to remain color-blind. Milner's premise is that we all began our research with ingrained ideas whether we admit it or not. The key is to be conscious of this fact because it will undoubtedly influence research decisions during the process.

As an African American teacher and former Atlanta Public School student, I struggled with my role as a researcher telling this story and my role as a beneficiary honoring and paying homage to the Atlanta 9 because their actions paved the way for me. At the beginning of this research, I was determined to present myself as an outsider, with a clean slate dismissing all biases and prior knowledge. As time went on, this approach felt futile and deceptive. No matter what strategies I put in place to ensure I remained objective, my subjectivities proved inescapable. Detaching myself from the narrators and the history of Atlanta was "dangerous" because it meant the potential to ignore my hidden biases and misinterpretations.[31] Milner also argues that it is essential for researchers to consciously go through the process of self-awareness before engaging in research on race or culture because a researcher's position, role, and identity undoubtedly impacts the research they are conducting. As a Black person, my first realization was that I could not take for granted that my race automatically authorized me to tell the story of the Atlanta 9, nor did it mean I could take shortcuts in researching the history of Black education in Atlanta which I complete in chapter two.

I have been an Atlanta resident most of my life, but I tried to sort through the data as an outsider while owning my subjectivities. I have walked the same halls the Atlanta 9 students

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[31] Richard Milner, "Race, culture and researcher positionality: Working Through Dangers Seen, Unseen, and Unforeseen," *Educational Researcher* 36, no. 7 (2007): 388-400.

walked numerous times, but I always reminded myself their motives and feelings were a lot different during the 1960s. Reminding myself of the historical context during the Atlanta 9 research was my way of following Milner's advice of self-reflection. Through this process of self-awareness, I realized that my own racial, cultural, and professional positionality meant I had to work twice as hard to prove my research was valid, credible, and worthy. Likewise, I must acknowledge that my positionality also privileged me in ways that others may not have been privileged. For instance, even though a couple of the narrators seemed hesitant initially to indulge me with their stories, I believe they were eventually persuaded because they saw me as one of them, a Black student in higher education pursuing a doctoral degree. Only 2% of Americans have earned doctoral degrees and 6.6% of those doctoral degrees are earned by Blacks.[32] They likely empathized with my efforts and remembered what breaking through barriers felt like. It also may have helped that I was not an outsider looking for a sensationalized news story to report, nor was I a struggling biographer seeking financial gain. Perhaps they saw, in me, a piece of their own stories. I was possibly the very reason they had decided to integrate the schools in the first place. Whatever the reason, I was conscious of my positionality and biases throughout the process. And, I soon discovered that the more research I gathered, the more I did not know about my own race and culture.

My biggest challenge during this study was the data analysis where I chose to critically interpret the narratives, while also paying homage and being respectful of the interviewees' struggle at the same time. Whenever there were contradictions between the participants'

[32] Only 2% of Americans have doctoral degrees. They (blacks) are 6.4% of all Ph.D. degrees, which is only 2% of the population. Source: *Doctoral Degrees Reach Another All Time High*. The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, 2004. Accessed October 25, 2018 http://www.jbhe.com/news_views/50_black_doctoraldegrees.html.

memories and the primary source data, I struggled with what to include and what to omit. It is my natural inclination to view life optimistically through a strengths-based lens, but the need to critically examine the desegregation of schools and the lives of the Atlanta 9 was a challenge. It required me to consciously seek out the non-strengths of my beloved Black community, which was tough. Aldridge[33] writes of the "dual agenda" that Black scholars face in trying to uplift the Black race while also achieving scholarly recognition for good research at the same time, "I am committed to the concept of race and uplift to improve the social and educational conditions of Black people. At the same time, I strive to make my scholarship rigorous, precise, and respected in the academy."[34]

Furthermore, my positionality as a teacher caused me to agonize over the symbolism that *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) represented for Blacks and the negative realities that came with actually implementing the *Brown* decision. I was torn over how to represent the beauty of school integration and the detriment of desegregating the Black community, which had built solid Black segregated schools with loving, strong, and smart teachers. Many Black schools were closed, and numerous Black teachers were fired or sent elsewhere.

Examining the excitement of Blacks and the reluctance of Whites was nothing short of heartbreaking for me during this research. Whites and Blacks were both supposed to benefit from integrated schools but angry Whites did not share this perspective. I had to step away and take several sabbaticals from this topic because it was emotionally taxing. I often asked myself if it was worth it to continue this research, and then I would stop and read the transcripts and get

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[33] Derrick Aldridge, "The Dilemmas, Challenges, and Duality of an African American educational historian," *Educational Researcher* 3, no. 9, (200): 25-34.

[34] Alridge, "Dilemmas, Challenges," 25-34.

encouraged every time I remembered each of the five interviewees saying, "yes, and I would do it all over again if I had to." The self-reflection I experienced during this research enabled me to become a better listener and to place the Atlanta 9 experiences into a unique perspective. Much of what I thought I understood about school desegregation was turned upside down during this process. I better comprehend what Dr. Martin Luther King meant when he said, "morality cannot be legislated, but behavior can be regulated. Judicial decrees may not change the heart but they can restrain the heartless."[35] This research made me question my beliefs and knowledge about the Black community, about class structures, and about motivations that inspire people's actions. All Blacks were not good and all Whites were not bad. I now have a broader perspective on history and the role it plays in access, power, and policy making. Reflecting and acknowledging my positionality was an important part of this research.

Explanation of Chapters

The questions that guided this research were: (1) Who were the Atlanta 9? (2) What themes emerged from the Atlanta 9 as they discussed/reflected on their experiences integrating Atlanta High Schools? This study answers these questions by telling the stories of the students who integrated the public schools. I will substantiate the student's memories, thoughts, and feelings with archival data from newspaper articles, school board minutes, photos, legal briefs, and other archival data.

This research is organized into six chapters. Chapter two outlines the methodology of the study as well as a discussion of the role of theory in oral history research. Chapter three provides a comprehensive literature review, organized thematically and chronologically with regards to

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[35] Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., "On Being a Good Neighbor," *Martin Luther King Jr. Papers Project (*sermon), July 1962-March 1963, ADd MLKJP-GAMK. Vault box 3

the history of education in Atlanta. Chapter four is a descriptive discussion of the five respondents. Out of the original nine, two of the students could not be located and two are deceased. The chapter designates a section for each of the five students. Chapter five provides a critical analysis of the interviews and highlights the challenges the Atlanta 9 faced integrating APS. I wrestled with several themes that emerged from the interviews and chose those that I felt were most important to understanding the experiences of the Atlanta 9. The themes that emerged were: community cultural wealth, double consciousness, resilience, tokenism, personal sacrifice, and moral obligation. Lastly, chapter six contains a summary of the study, a summary of the results, the importance of the study, and implications for further research.

2 METHODOLOGY

The methodology for this study is separated into two parts. In part one, the research design section, I explain the research decisions that laid the groundwork for setting up and carrying out this qualitative study. In part two, the data collection and analysis section, I discuss the setting and the participants of the study along with the processes involved in conducting the study. The steps in this section were cyclical and often done simultaneously.[36]

Oral histories have been around since the beginning of time. Oral history research is a significant field of study because it is how history is preserved and passed down. William McDowell claims oral history allows listeners to "glean valuable information about how individuals make sense of past events and then place these experiences within a much broader social context if the stories are gathered thoughtfully and methodically.[37] The definition of "oral history" can be as simple as reminiscing about the past to a complex definition such as, an interview that has been recorded, transcribed, safeguarded, and made public for others to access.[38] When novices pass down stories, traditions, etc. they are doing informal oral history. However, oral history as a formal methodology is structured, deliberate, and well planned. Oral history has become a form of qualitative research acknowledged and respected across various disciplines. William McDowell describes oral history as, “the technique of gathering evidence

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[36] Patricia Leavy, *Oral History: Understanding Qualitative Research* (New York: Oxford University Press), 70. The reason for breaking up the steps is to show full disclosure and transparency of the research decisions.

[37] William McDowell, *Historical Research: A Guide*. (New York, NY: Longman, 2002).

[38] “Oral History: Defined,” *Oral History Association*, (2016) http://www.oralhistory.org/about/do-oral-history/

through interviews."[39] In line with Linda Shopes who describes oral history as "imprecise,"[40] it is important to make the distinction between simply passing down "stories" and engaging in oral history for official research purposes. For example, a priest in the community who has been designated as the official storyteller of historical events may tell a different account of the same story than an elderly family member reminiscing on the porch with her grandchildren. Despite this variation, both views are considered valuable because they offer a unique perspective that might otherwise not have been uncovered.

Several qualitative interview techniques were considered for the data collection. Most of the techniques were either too rigid or too passive, including focus group interviews, in-depth interviews, structured interviews and biography interviews. Because of the historical nature of this study and the crucial role the participants played in adding to the historical record, oral history interviewing was best suited to answer my research questions.

The oral history method presented in this research highlights the experiences of nine students chosen to integrate the Atlanta Public schools in 1961. The five narrators gave voice to Atlanta's school desegregation experience and corroborated primary sources gathered from the archives by the researcher, as suggested by Green and Troupe, who describe oral history as, "a technical process in which the memories of the elderly are elicited through questions recorded on tape machines."[41] When researchers conduct history they often give a unique insight into events

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[39] McDowell, Historical Research.

[40]Linda Shopes, "Making Sense of Oral History," History Matters: The U.S. Survey Course on the *Web"* (2002). http://historymatters.gmu.edu/mse/oral/

[41] Anna Green and Kathleen Troup, The Houses of History: A Critical Reader in Twentieth-Century *History and Theory*." (New York: New York University Press,1999).

that happened in the past and they usually do it through untold stories.[42] Patricia Leavy clarifies my research intent with her explanation, "oral historians seek to document firsthand accounts while they are still available. In other words, those who have borne witness share their stories for the historical record."[43] Five of the nine Atlanta students were located for this study. Two of the students could not be found and two of the students have passed away. The oral history methodology is critical for ascertaining the perspectives of the remaining students and preserving their narratives while they are still alive.

Theoretical Considerations

"Can theories be developed within the discipline of history to assist us in the explanation of historical change?" -William McDowell

Oral history research does not emphasize theoretical frameworks which is why I initially did not commit to any particular theory and focused instead on allowing the participants to freely share their experiences.[44] The discussion of theory for oral historical research is ambiguous because of the interpretive and subjective nature of history. "When oral historians stir up memories of school experiences, they stir up worlds of identities in the making. They also stir up present-day integrated meanings of school and the educational system.[45]" In other words as people remember former experiences their recollections can be influenced by present

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[42] Anna Green and Kathleen Troup, The Houses of History: A Critical Reader in Twentieth-Century *History and Theory*." (New York: New York University Press,1999).

[43] Leavy, *Oral History*, 17.

[44] The researcher does not initially employ any particular theory to develop the interview questions; but later on, during the analysis of the interviews, the researcher employs Critical Race Theory as a lens to analyze the interviews, page 30.

[45] Caroline Eick, "Oral Histories of Education and the Relevance of Theory: Claiming New Spaces in a Post Revisionist Era," *History of Education Quarterly*, 51, no. 2 (2011): 150-157.

circumstances or by events that have happened over time. Furthermore, oral histories present a challenge for researchers looking for theoretical constructs because as people remember events there might be a tendency to reconstruct the past in ways that justify the past or the present. Settling on a framework to deconstruct these memories is not easy.[46]

Because of the nature of oral histories and the conflicting and varying interpretations of the same event, there are often conflicting theories used to explain a particular historical event. Oral historians have developed a number of interpretive theories about memory and subjectivity and the narrative structures which provide the framework for oral stories about the past.[47] If a historian adopts a particular theoretical framework, he or she must be prepared to have it challenged. Consider the desegregation of Atlanta, for instance. The integration of White schools will be remembered differently by different students because their experiences varied. A middle-class Black student may have integrated more smoothly into an all-White school than a Black student from a working-class background integrating into an all-White school.

These multiple perspectives are a challenge with oral history analysis and help explain why oral histories can so arguably be examined using multiple theories. One such theory is John Ogbu's cultural ecological theory which could be used to explain Madelyn's ability to adapt to the integration into an all-White school. Ogbu's (1998) research correlates minority student performance with their cultural backgrounds. "The cultural ecological theory places great weight on formidable non-school community forces that affect school success."[48] The theory concludes

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[46] Eileen Tamura, "Narrative History and Theory," *History of Education Quarterly,* 51, no. 2 (2011).

[47] Green and Troup, *Houses of History,* 30.

[48] John Ogbu, "Voluntary and Involuntary Minorities: A Cultural-Ecological Theory of School Performance With Some Implications for Education," *Anthropology & Education* Quarterly, 29, no. 2 (1998): 55-188.

that out-of-school forces are so strong that instructional strategies alone will not improve student success. In relation to the research on desegregation, Ogbu's theory would conclude that Madelyn was able to successfully integrate into a previously all-White school because the community forces and strategies she learned from her family and friends enabled her to withstand the negativity and isolation. I decided against Ogbu's cultural ecological theory because it was inadequate for analyzing the Atlanta students' success because the theory downplays institutional factors like racism and classism which had an impact on their success and experience. This theoretical example underscores the difficulty of theorizing in oral history research, which relies on personal memories for much of its data. McDowell says, "theory does not play a vital role in historical research because it de-emphasizes the uniqueness of past events, as well as the role of individuals who helped shape those events."[49] Thus, the dynamic nature of oral histories requires flexible frameworks and approaches to analyzing data.

Critical Race Theory

> *"Education policy is the product of disparate and competing interests between differently and often unequally situated groups."* -Kristin Buras, Georgia State Professor[50]

Critical race theory exposes the underlying, often invisible forces present in society.[51] Since the founding of America, notions of White superiority have dominated our society through media images, legal decisions, and academic curriculum, among other things. Most people do

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[49] McDowell, Historical Research, 22.

[50] Kristen Buras, "Let's Be For Real: Critical Race Theory, Racial Realism, and Education Policy Analysis," in *Handbook of Critical Race Theory in Education*, eds. Marvin Lynn and Adrienne Dixson (New York, NY: Routledge, 2013).

[51] Although oral history research minimizes theoretical frameworks (see page 23), Critical Race Theory serves as a lens to aid in analyzing the interviews.

not realize the role that race plays in the everyday lives of citizens because its implications have become subtler and more institutionalized over the years. Race impacts people's perceptions, choices, and life experiences, both consciously and subconsciously, whether one is a member of the minority group or majority group. Just as race was a factor during the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) case and during Atlanta's attempt at "integration," race remains a factor today in our society and in our interactions with one another.

Definition of Race

"From the very inception of the Republic to the present moment race has been a profound determinant of one's political rights, one's location in the labor market, and indeed one's sense of 'identity.'" Omi and Winant[52]

"Race is defined by Omi and Winant as, "a 'decentered' complex of social meanings constantly being transformed by political struggle."[53] Because there is no biological basis for race, classifications based on race are regarded as social and political constructs that have been created by people as a way to differentiate human beings.[54] In other words, race is not "real." It is a social category that lumps people together based on ethnic, religious, and other physical traits. The sad part is the groupings tend to be hierarchically structured so that certain races are considered better than others. A discussion of race is important because society uses racial categories to make all sorts of decisions about its citizens. Furthermore, racial structures offer

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[52] Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States* (New Yew, NY: Routledge, 1994).

[53] Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation.*

[54] Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation.*

insight into the experiences of the Atlanta 9 and help contextualize educational, political and social practices in the 1960s and during modern times.

Definition of Racism

Audre Lorde (1992) defines racism as, "the belief in the inherent superiority of one race over all others and thereby the right to dominance."[55] The very act of racism causes one group to have an advantage over another group and historically speaking Blacks have always been the disadvantaged group in the U.S.

The rationale for highlighting race and racism in this research is because of its importance in understanding the story of the Atlanta 9. Race was at the center of school desegregation and in order to fully understand the students' experiences one must understand racial identity as a process that the students had to navigate their way through once they were chosen. The Atlanta 9 students were conscious of the racial stereotypes that separated them socially, economically, and politically from their peers before entering the White schools and they braced themselves accordingly. The tensions created by race continued to plague them throughout the school year, resulting in isolation and loneliness. Nonetheless, they overcame.

Origins of Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory grew out of the Critical Legal Studies (CLS) community during the Civil Rights Movement. CLS scholars noticed in their analysis of legal cases how biased the law was against minorities, regardless of the guarantee of equal protection under the law, and they began to challenge the idea of the law as neutral and color-blind. CLS activists also noticed that Blacks were worse off after Civil Rights victories that were supposed to make life better for

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[55] Audre Lorde, "Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference," in *Race, Class, and Gender: An Anthology,* Eds. M. Anderson & P. Hill Collins (Bellmont, California: Wadsworth, 1992), 496.

them. Opponents had figured out how to use the law to further perpetuate discrimination at the systemic level.[56] For example, even though individual overt acts of discrimination became taboo new approaches were needed to deal with the covert institutionalized racism that had developed in decisions related to housing, employment, affirmative action, etc. As a result, critical race theorists who had little faith in traditional techniques' ability to combat racism decided that more radical approaches were needed. Old strategies were no longer sufficient for the new forms of discrimination.[57]

In the 1980s, Critical Race Theory (CRT), which began in the legal community as previously stated, started gaining enormous attention in the field of education, making it well suited for my research. CRT is an umbrella framework composed of several tenets that challenge underlying acts of racism. Among the tenets that inspired me to embrace this framework were the following:[58] (1) CRT's emphasis on the historical context of race and racism in understanding modern injustices, (2) CRT's acknowledgement of intersectionality (overlapping identities of gender, class, etc.); (3) CRT's use of storytelling by people of color designed to counter the master narratives usually told; (4) The importance of social justice within the CRT framework has implications that are just as important as the oral histories themselves, which is partly why my interviewees agreed to share them with me. In committing myself to this research, I hope the stories will not just add to the literature but that my analysis will showcase the need

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[56] Richard Delgado, "Crossroads and Blind Alleys: A Critical Examination of Recent Writings About Race," *Texas Law Review* 82,121 (2003).

[57] Gloria Ladson-Billings Article: "Race to the Top Again," *Connecticut Law Review* 43, 1439 (2011): 1439.

[58] Jessica Decuir and Adrienne Dixson, "'So When it Comes Out, They Aren't That Surprised That it is There:' Using Critical Race Theory as a Tool of Analysis of Race and Racism in Education," *Educational Researcher* (2004).

for more thoughtful ways of integrating students and promoting educational equity. I have a responsibility to my participants who came from beneath the shadows, some reluctantly, to share their experiences and CRT's social justice aim helps me accomplish this; (5) CRT's claim that racism is an endemic part of society, with schools being no exception, was a huge part of my decision to use this framework in my research with the Atlanta 9. (6) Lastly, the claim that society is not naturally inclined to eradicate racism because too many powerful people benefit from it (interest convergence) was the tenet most responsible for persuading me to select CRT to help frame my data.[59]

Data Collection and Analysis

As Patricia Leavy explained, research decisions are based on philosophical assumptions that guide the methodology,[60] As I viewed this study ontologically as an evolving process rather than a single event because it took several follow up conversations with participants to clarify and elaborate on the data. As new information emerged, I was forced to apply new theoretical frameworks that were not initially planned. Leavy explains, "the practice of oral history assumes that meaning isn't 'waiting out there' to be discovered, but rather that meaning is generated during the research process."[61] Creswell echoes this sentiment, "the key idea behind qualitative research is to learn about the problem or issue from participants and to address the research to

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[59] Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, Critical Race Theory: An Introduction (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2001).

[60] Patricia Leavy supports explaining the ontological and epistemological stances that one takes during the gathering and analysis of data. She concludes that ontological assumptions are based on the social world and what can be known about it, while epistemological assumptions consider the nature of the relationship between the researcher and the participants. Source: Patricia Leavy, *Oral History: Understanding Qualitative Research* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011): 7.

[61] Leavy, Understanding Qualitative Research, 7.

obtain that information."[62] Throughout the study, new data emerged that had to be figured into the ongoing analysis and changes occurred, making this dissertation a non-linear process. One factor that remained constant throughout the research was the critical role my participants played in the analysis and interpretation of data. Epistemologically, the relationship between me and the participants was collaborative and reciprocal which Leavy describes as, "a relationship in which both parties are integral to the data generation process…the researcher is not conceptualized as 'the knowing party' with full authority over knowledge production."[63] The shared authority between the narrators and me was integral to this research. The ontological and epistemological reflections were necessary for this study.

I did not interview any of the participants with a formal theoretical framework in mind, which was beneficial to the study because each of the participants provided a unique perspective. "Biographical research begins with an empty void and shuns the formulation of theories and concepts prior to the research."[64] Two of my participants answered the questions freely during their open-ended responses without me having to actually pose the questions. One of the participants welcomed the structured question format because it helped her to stay focused and not "go off on a tangent." Three of the interviews took place separately, while two of them occurred together.

Before conducting the interviews, I completed an initial review of the literature about the history of education and school desegregation to investigate how the Atlanta 9 stories were

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[62] John Creswell, *Research Design* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2009), 176.

[63] Leavy, Understanding Qualitative Research, 8.

[64] Elaine Batty, "Reflections on the Use of Oral History Techniques," *People, Place & Policy* 3, no. 2 (2009): 109-121.

already being highlighted in the literature. The existing literature added credibility to this study and revealed that even though school integration in Atlanta was peaceful, the perspectives of the students were missing from the literature. The accidental discovery of the Atlanta 9 and this research helped to fill the gap. The interviews were arranged using information obtained from the former Atlanta Public Schools archivist, Kathy Loving, and the APS archives. The five interviews and follow-up contacts took place over a period of 11 months.

As the researcher, I used an interview protocol during the interviews which consisted of ten planned questions. I was prepared for the open-ended conversations to venture off in other directions, but the goal was to ensure that each of the participants was asked the same questions as a baseline. The focus of the interviews was the students' experiences from the beginning of the application process in May 1961 through the end of the students' first year integrating their White schools in May 1962. After the interviews were completed, they were transcribed.

The process of listening to the audio interviews and writing them up over a three-week period was tedious and time-consuming. I wrote memo notes during the interviews when participants paused for extended periods, laughed loudly, or cried. In addition, I jotted down noticeable changes in the participants' tone, emotions, and facial expressions. The participants were interviewed in 2-3 hour sessions at either the library, their homes, or restaurant meeting rooms. I typed my researcher statements in bold to distinguish them from the participants' words. After collecting data from the participants, the interviews were transcribed. I chose to transcribe each interview verbatim[65] to ensure important data was not omitted. Then, I proceeded

[65] Expressions such as: "uhm," "you know," pauses, crying, etc. spoken during the interview were transcribed.

with a more formal analysis,[66] which consisted of coding, categorizing, and interpreting the interviews.

Leavy insists the researcher engage in the process of "immersion" first in order to "get to know the data."[67] Immersion for this study meant re-reading the interviews, jotting additional ideas into the margins of the transcripts, and noting patterns that were emerging across the participants. During the immersion process, the numerous pages of interviews were overwhelming and needed to be reduced to manage the data. Holstein and Gubrium (2002) suggested the process of coding to better organize the data and highlight the emerging themes. The codes were pulled directly from the data and allowed me to place participants' responses into categories. Rather than use predetermined codes, I developed codes based on the information that emerged from the participants. As Creswell explained, coding involves "taking text data or pictures gathered during data collection, segmenting sentences (or paragraphs) or images into categories, and labeling those categories with a term, often a term based in the actual language of the participant."[68] Six dominant themes emerged from this inductive analysis: community cultural wealth, double consciousness, resilience, tokenism, loss and sacrifice, and patriotism and moral obligation.

Researchers play an important interpretive role in history because they determine what information will be evaluated and ultimately how the data will be interpreted. "Historians end up having to reconsider the facts in light of their interpretations and change their interpretations in

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[66] Data collection and data analysis occurred simultaneously (grounded theory) throughout the research. Leavy claims, "A grounded theory approach is an open approach to data analysis where codes are generated directly out of the data." "Oral History," 58.

[67] Leavy, *Oral History*, 58.

[68] John Creswell, *Research Design* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2009), 186.

light of the facts."[69] The researcher's role is crucial to how the story will be understood and in helping readers better understand the impact of certain events. Historians also use their skills to assess the credibility of sources gathered and to ensure that historical events are represented accurately.

As John Martin Vincent noted,[70] once an oral history is recorded, it is subject to the same rigorous analysis as written history. Elizabeth Danto echoes this point when she says researchers need to probe oral history transcripts in order to enrich the interpretation and credibility of the data, "because of the inaccuracies of memory, oral history must be evaluated and judged for its accuracy as much as any other source, even documents found in an archive."[71] Although historical researchers find themselves analyzing data as soon as they collect it, there is a systemic process that must take place for credibility.[72] According to Marshall and Rossman, "data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure, and meaning to the mass amounts of collected data."[73] Marshall and Rossman offer an analytical process that falls into five phases:[74] (1) organizing the data, (2) generating categories, themes, and patterns, (3) testing the emergent hypotheses against the data, (4) searching for alternative explanations of the data, and (5) writing the report. A second literature review was conducted after the interviews followed by visits to the Atlanta

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[69] McDowell, Historical Research,12.

[70] John Martin Vincent, Historical Research: An Outline of Theory and Practice (Lenox Hill Pub. & Dist. Co, 1974), 142.

[71] Elizabeth Ann Danto, *Historical Research* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008), 99.

[72] Leavy, *Oral History*, 48.

[73] Catherine Marshall and Gretchen Rossman, *Designing Qualitative* Research, (Newberry Park, CA: 1989), 112.

[74] Marshall and Rossman, *Designing Qualitative* Research, 114.

Public Schools archives, the Georgia Archives, Clark Atlanta University Archives, Emory University Archives, and the Atlanta History Center Archives. I analyzed student records, news articles, school board minutes, photos, community meetings, legal briefs, and memos. The archival sources provided additional data to corroborate the participants' recollections and to help plug holes in participants' memories. As the researcher, I continued the inductive qualitative approach to examine the oral history interviews.

3 LITERATURE REVIEW

"Few things rest in isolation from historical precedent. Historical literature reviews focus on examining research throughout a period, often starting with the first time an issue, concept, theory, phenomena emerged in the literature, then tracing its evolution within the scholarship of a discipline. " -Alan Smith, Ph.D.[75]

The sections of this chapter are organized thematically and chronologically. Chronology is useful because with historical research, dates are important for recalling events and contextualizing information. The chronological approach helped me trace the development of education from the emancipation of Blacks in 1865 to the establishment of Atlanta's first Black High School in 1924. Assembling the facts into a coherent timeline allowed me to appreciate the progress that Blacks have made over time. It also compelled me to recognize the work that still needs to be done in order to achieve equality.

> In a literature review organized chronologically, you group and discuss your sources…highlighting the changes in research in the field and your specific topic over time. This structure is useful for reviews focusing on research methodology, historiographical papers, and other writing in which you want to empathize how ideas developed over time. [76]

Organizing information chronologically was much easier than using the thematic approach to analyzing data. Nevertheless, both the chronological and thematic approaches were

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[75] Alan Smith, How to Write Social Sciences Research Paper: For Students and Professionals (Online Self-Publishing Company, Lulu Press, 2016), IBN97813299937444.

[76] Dr. Sally, "The Structure of Your Literature Review," Dissertation Doctor (blog), Academic Coaching and Writing, September 9, 2013, https://academiccoachingandwriting.org/dissertation-doctor/dissertation-doctor-blog/iv-the-structure-of-your-literature-review.

utilized because they were both essential to describing and understanding the historical background of school integration.

The goal of this historical literature review is to provide an overview of the existing research on school desegregation and then demonstrate how my research fits into this larger field. I also hope to provide a new interpretation of the literature based on my oral history interviews. I begin with an overview of the city of Atlanta and the evolution of public education in Georgia 1865-1896. In the next sections, I explore the themes of self-help among Blacks and massive resistance to *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) by Whites. Up until now, the research has tended to focus mostly on race but in recent decades more information has become available on intersections of race and class. Mary Patillo's work on Chicago's middle class[77] and Kevin Kruse's research on White Flight in Atlanta[78] illustrate this point clearly. My research will add to the field.

The modern Civil Rights Movement[79] of the 1950s and 1960s in the U.S. has been well chronicled in numerous research studies. Although most of the Civil Rights Movement literature focuses on the 1950s and 1960s the fight for justice and equality began centuries earlier, soon after Blacks arrived in the United States. Since this dissertation is about school desegregation, in the review, I examine the period following Reconstruction that coincided with the establishment

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[77]Mary Patillo, *Black Picket Fences* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

[78] Kevin Kruse, *White Flight* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007).

[79] Susan D. Carle, *Defining the Struggle: National Organizing for Racial Justice, 1880–1915* (New York: Oxford University Press), 1084. In the book, Carle writes that, "to understand the iconic protests and legal achievements of the 1950s and 1960s one must look to the work of early generations. The long movement framework allows her to connect the work of largely forgotten organizations and individuals, working in a time when victories were rare and often ephemeral, to the better-known history of civil rights in post–World War II America."

of schools for Blacks in Atlanta. Chronologically, I cover two major time periods. First, during the Public Education in Georgia (1865-1954) discussion, I underscore themes of Black collective agency and the unintended consequences of segregation. During the B*rown v. Board of Education* (1954-1961) era, I highlight the integration of Atlanta's Schools (1961-1965), White flight, and the rise of the Black middle class. Thematically, within these three time periods, I address the following reoccurring themes: Black collective agency, unintended consequences of segregation, White flight, the rise of the Black middle class, and interest convergence.

Public Education in Georgia

During the time following the Civil War, Blacks and Whites in Georgia led largely separate lives. The political, economic, and social differences between the races were apparent in Georgia in the late 19th century. Blacks struggled to figure out what to do at the end of Reconstruction and Whites fought to maintain their racial supremacy. Blacks were no longer enslaved, and Whites no longer had the labor to sustain their crops. Blacks realized that their future survival necessitated acquiring a formal education.

Before the Civil War, free Blacks and sympathetic Whites were legally punished for helping enslaved Blacks to read or write.[80] The punishment for slaves and those aiding them included whippings or fines. For the slave masters, smart slaves represented the potential for rebellions and uprisings. But regardless of the risks, enslaved Blacks continued to use covert tactics to secretly learn to read and write. For them, literacy meant freedom as espoused by

[80] State Law of Georgia, Article I (1848) "Crimes Offenses and Penalties. Sec.II "Minor Offenses." no. 2 "Punishment for teaching slaves or free persons of color to read."

Frederick Douglas, “knowledge is the pathway from slavery to freedom.[81]" They were so strategic that sometimes they pretended to be less literate than they actually were to keep Whites from feeling threatened. Slaveholders were largely correct in their beliefs about the power of literacy, "unsettling to the bound underclass believing that it taught them to despise their condition, unsuited them for menial labor, gave them access to seditious literature, and poisoned their minds and morals."[82] The assertiveness and self-empowerment of Blacks were met with resistance from Whites because slave-owners relied on Black subordination and oppression to maintain White economic and cultural superiority.

Collective Agency and Self Help of Blacks

Collective agency amongst Blacks economically, educationally, and morally was common at the national, state, and local level. Several historians have illustrated the resourcefulness, creativity, and commitment of Black communities following Reconstruction.[83] “Decisions to gain an education, to build schoolhouses, recruit teachers, spread literacy in their community, bespoke a level of Black autonomy, an autonomy that flew in the face of cherished racial beliefs and provoked White rage.”[84]

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[81] Frederick Douglass, “Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass, an American slave.” *Narrative of The Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave* (Anti-Slavery Office, 1845), 1.

[82] Harvey J. Graff, The *Legacies of Literacy: Continuities and Contradictions in Western Culture and Society* (Bloomington, Indiana: University Press, 1987).

[83] Walter Rucker and Sabriya Kaleen Jubilee, “From Black Nadir to Brown v. Board of Education and Empowerment in Black Georgian Communities-1865 to 1964. *Negro Educational Review* 58, no. 3-4 (January 1, 2007).

[84] Ronald E. Butchart, Schooling the freed people [electronic resource]: Teaching Learning, and the *Struggle for Black Freedom, 1861-1876* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2010).

Although Black Codes forbade the education of Blacks, it was not uncommon for Blacks to get their finger removed for hiding books in their clothes: "Slaveholders and their overseers often took the law into their own hands and sometimes removed the thumb or finger of a slave who was caught in the act of instruction." For Blacks, the danger was worth the risk as they continued building schools and training teachers. Black parents knew education was the only way to ensure their Black children had any chance at success and freedom.

Blacks were socially, economically and politically disenfranchised. Employment opportunities were limited. They did not own land or wealth, and many were illiterate. During Reconstruction in Georgia, private tuition schools were set up for wealthy Whites and publicly funded schools were set up for poor Whites, but there were no government provisions for Blacks to attend school. Atlanta mirrored the nation as Blacks found themselves excluded from tax-supported schools, forcing them to obtain schooling through their own efforts. They established schools in churches, on plantations, or wherever they could, but their efforts were still not enough.[85] Blacks benefitted from the help of northern progressive Whites who came down to help build and run schools through the Freedmen's Bureau, established by the United States Congress at the end of the Civil War.[86] The Bureau officially lasted from 1865-1868 and its goal was to assist former slaves as they transitioned from slave life to freedom. The Bureau is

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[85] "Prior to the opening of Booker T. Washington High School in 1923, if you were Black and wanted to attend high school in Atlanta, you paid tuition to be schooled at the local black colleges. Subsequently, many of those same students went on to earn college degrees at the black colleges where they attended high school," interview with Kathy Loving.

[86] In 1866, the Freedmen's Bureau opened two grammar schools for children of former slaves, Storrs and Summer Hill, near the Atlanta University Center, interview with Kathy Loving.

credited with helping Blacks develop their own educational and political institutions, and it played a huge role in the establishment of day schools, night schools, and colleges for Blacks.

> As the state had no common school system and provided no education for negroes at public expense at the time, and as the private attempts for negro education were of small consequence, it may be said that the Freedmen's Bureau was the only important medium through which the freedmen could gain an education.[87]

Many of the South's White leaders resented having the Freedmen's Bureau workers in their states educating Blacks and came up with ways to rid southern states of their influence.[88] Hostile opponents viewed the Freedmen's Bureau as too empowering for Blacks and rushed to thwart any positive gains implemented by the agency. They refused to grant protection for Freedmen's Bureau employees and they enforced the Black Codes designed to restrict opportunities for Blacks.[89] The Freedmen's Bureau worked with limited staff, resources, and authority. Sadly, if White personnel, with the backing of the United States government, could not provide the proper protection and aid to Blacks, who else would? Thus, Blacks had to often rely on themselves and their own efforts to advance economically, politically, and educationally.

Atlanta's First Black High School

"The Negro needs neither segregated schools nor mixed schools. What he needs is education…there is no magic, either in mixed schools or in segregated schools. A mixed school

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[87] Mildred C. Thompson, "The Freedmen's Bureau," *The Georgia History Quarterly 5*, no 1(921): 48.

[88] Paul Cimbala, and Randall M. Miller. *The Freedmen's Bureau and Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 608.

[89] Robert Harrison, "New Representations of a Misrepresented Bureau," *American Nineteenth Century* History 8, no. 2 (2007) 205

with poor and unsympathetic teachers…A segregated school with ignorant placeholders, inadequate equipment…is equally bad." [90]

Georgia's agricultural economy meant that school was a priority only for elite Whites. Blacks and poor Whites had to fit school attendance around their crops' growing season. Georgia's 1877 state constitution allowed local governments to collect taxes for racially segregated elementary schools throughout the state but not for high schools. The state's decision not to spend money on high schools did not affect five urban cities, including Atlanta, that had already established independent high schools which allowed them to collect local taxes to fund their high schools.[91] Privileged Whites outside of the government also opposed public schools for Blacks and poor Whites. They resented having to fund what was referred to as "charity" schools for the poor.[92] Eventually, in 1873, the state of Georgia resolved to fund White high schools but refused to fund Black high schools. Thus, Blacks in Atlanta were forced to operate their own public high schools through the Atlanta University Center, since the city made no provisions for them.[93] Black students who could afford to pay tuition were educated at Atlanta University and other Black colleges that housed high school departments. Unfortunately for Blacks, the tuition prevented many Blacks from achieving education beyond elementary school, thereby making it impossible for them to complete high school.

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[90] William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, "Does the Negro Need Separate Schools?" *The Journal of Negro Education* 4, no. 3 (1935): 328-35. doi:10.2307/2291871.

[91] Thomas O'Brien, "Georgia's Response to Brown vs. Board of Education:" The Rise and Fall of Massive Resistance 1949-1961," Serial online April 1, 1993. ERIC, EBSCOhost.

[92] Henry Reid Hunter, The Development of the Public Secondary Schools of Atlanta, Georgia 1845-1937." n.p.: Atlanta: Office of School System Historian, Atlanta Public Schools, 1974.

[93] Kathy Loving, interview.

After 52 years of surviving on their own and being left out of the public education system, Black Atlantans received their first public high school. Booker T. Washington High began classes in Atlanta in 1924.[94] In 1930, the city's second Black high school, Howard High, opened to alleviate overcrowding at Washington.

Unintended Consequences of Segregation

"What did the schools become that Whites never expected they would be?"[95]

Vanessa Siddle-Walker

The literature on segregation presents a very complex debate over the issue. During the early 20th century, the Black community was split on whether Black children should integrate White schools or remain in separate Black schools with Black leaders fighting for resources "equal" to those in White schools. Two prominent Black figures on the issue were W.E.B. Dubois and Booker T. Washington. Shircliff (2010) says the unintended consequences of segregation benefited Black children in ways that are lost when Black children are sent to White schools.[96] Booker T. Washington, the founder of Tuskegee University, supported vocational and industrial education for Blacks because it provided Blacks the opportunity to advance themselves, independent of White people, "we may overlook the fact that the masses of us are to

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[94] Hunter, Development of Public Secondary Schools, 19.

[95] Vanessa Siddle-Walker, *Their Highest Potential* (Charlotte, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996); 5.

[96] Barbara J. Shircliffe, Desegregating Teachers: Contesting the Meaning of Equality of Educational Opportunity in the South Post Brown (New York, Peter Lang Inc., 2012).

live by the productions of our hands and fail to keep in our mind that we shall prosper as we learn to dignify and glorify common labor."[97]

In contrast to Washington's accommodationist approach to Black advancement were W.E.B. Du Bois' integrationist and Talented Tenth approach. Du Bois advocated inclusion for Black children to employ more direct and assertive tactics like mass protests in order to gain access to better schools.[98] Du Bois, co-founder of the (NAACP) demanded that Blacks be integrated into all aspects of American life. The goal of the NAACP was to end notions of "separate but equal" because separate schools had proven to be unequal and unfair.[99] The NAACP demanded equal pay and training for Black teachers and better school buildings and resources for Black students. They did not support Washington's gradual "self-help" approach to gaining equality. Ironically, sometime later, W.E.B. Du Bois showed how complex the issue was when he later clarified. Du Bois initially advocated for the integration of Blacks but later expressed his commitment to promoting strong Black institutions that honored Black culture.[100] For Du Bois, the emphasis needed to be on quality education, whether in a Black school or a White school. Forcing Black students to attend White schools where White teachers and White peers were hostile towards Black children was just as detrimental as leaving Blacks to linger in ill-equipped Black schools. Atlanta's Black parents were caught in the crosshairs of the debate

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[97] Booker T. Washington, "1895 Atlanta Compromise Speech" (Speech, Atlanta, Georgia, September 18, 1895).

[98] Zachery Williams, *In Search of the Talented Tenth: Howard University Public Intellectuals and the Dilemmas of Race, 1926-1970.* Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2010.

[99] Thomas Bynum, *NAACP Youth and the Fight for Black Freedom, 1936-1965*. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2013).

[100] Thomas V. O'Brien, *The Politics of Race and Schooling, Public Education in Georgia, 1900-1961* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Book, 1999), 34.

and many of them quietly went along with the NAACP's plan to advocate for Black children to gain admittance to White schools. Over time, parents started to question whether integration was best for their Black children. Research presented in recent years in racially isolated communities have concluded that segregated schools were certainly problematic, but they were not all bad. When Black children left Black schools they often gave up the nurturance, advocacy, and pride that was an important part of Black school culture.[101] Policies that sought to integrate schools with no respect or appreciation for Black norms, families, or educators did more harm than good. Evidence of one successful Black segregated school in North Carolina was the Caswell County Training School which operated from 1934-1969.[102] In spite of limited resources teachers at the Caswell School implemented creative strategies that made up for unequal resources at their school.

Historical recollections that recall descriptions of differences in facilities and resources of White and Black schools without also providing descriptions of the Black schools' communities' dogged determination to educate African American children have failed to tell the complete story of segregated schools.[103]

Another example of culturally relevant teaching that takes place in classrooms with empathetic and skillful instructors who incorporate Afrocentric perspectives into the content and curriculum is Chantee Earl McBride's study of African American teachers and their use of

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[101] Vanessa Siddle-Walker, *Hello Teacher* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

[102] Vanessa Siddle-Walker, *Their Highest Potential* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 1996).

[103] Vanessa Siddle-Walker, *Their Highest Potential*, 5.

instructional strategies.[104] The teachers in the study overwhelmingly found the curriculum "written from a dominant, mainstream Eurocentric perspective." And, in order to address the experiences, histories, and culture of their African American students, the teachers in the study went out of their way to incorporate emancipatory strategies that highlighted historical omissions and multiple viewpoints. There is ample literature on the unintended consequences that occur in environments where students background and culture is valued and appreciated.

Brown v. Board of Education

The *Brown v. Board of Education* decision served as the backdrop for the desegregation of the Atlanta Public Schools. The doctrine of "separate-but-equal" began in 1896 when the *Plessy v. Ferguson* Supreme Court decision declared that separate facilities were acceptable as long as they were equal. The ruling was used to maintain segregated schools until the decision was overturned by *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* in 1954.[105] The ruling ignited a contentious debate over schools as southern states crafted various schemes to avoid complying with the verdict. A second 1955 ruling, known as *Brown v. Board of Education II*[106] made matters worse for Blacks declaring that schools be integrated with "all deliberate speed." The subsequent 1955 ruling placed oversight of school desegregation in the hands of the local district courts, many of whom supported segregation.[107]

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[104] Chantee Earl McBride, "Teaching African American Youth: Learning from the Lives of Three African American Social Studies Teachers" PhD diss., University of Pittsburge, 2010, Institutional Repository at the University of Pittsburg. http://d-scholarship.pitt.edu/7793/

[105] *Brown vs. Board* of Education of Topeka 347 U.S. 483 (1954).

[106] *Brown vs. Board* of Education of Topeka (2) 349 U.S. 294 (1955).

[107] Trina Jones, "Brown II: A Case of Missed Opportunity," *Law and Equity: A Journal of Theory and Practice* (2006): 9-30.

Integration of Atlanta's Schools

Local leaders were allowed to desegregate schools as fast or as slow as they desired. Atlanta, being no different than the rest of the state of Georgia, moved slowly. The city took six years to end its stalling tactics and comply with the court mandate.

The opponents' initial response to *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) was to enforce its equalization plan rather than integrate the schools. The equalization plan proposed earlier was designed to advocate increased funding for Black schools so that they would be more on par with White schools. Perhaps if the district had enforced the equalization plan the way it was intended, Black parents and the NAACP would not have felt the need to demand integration so adamantly. Racial integration would have been a choice rather than a necessity. A year after *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), seven unsuccessful petitions were submitted to the school board on behalf of parents demanding the immediate integration of schools in compliance with the *Brown* verdict.[108] The Board's response to the parents reiterated their intent to maintain segregated schools in Atlanta. As a result, the NAACP filed a case in the U.S. District Court, *Calhoun v. Cook,* (1959) to end Atlanta's dual school system. The Board of Education's reply was that no student had ever been denied admission to a school based on their race and that students simply attended the schools located closest to them in their communities. The Atlanta board's final tactic insisting that both Whites and Blacks decided for themselves where they wanted to attend school, not the board, was defeated and Atlanta Public Schools was ordered to desegregate its schools.[109]

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[108] Ronald A. Johnson, "Desegregation of Public Education in Georgia-One Year Afterward," *The Journal* of Negro Education (1955): 234.

[109] *Calhoun v. Cook et al*., Civil Action No. 6298.

The school board was required to submit a school desegregation proposal describing how it would proceed with integrating its schools as a result of the *Calhoun v. Cook* (1959) decision. The plan stated that Atlanta Public Schools would integrate the 11th and 12th grades in 1961 followed by the integration of additional grades each year thereafter. Standing in the way of APS' desegregation plan was the state of Georgia's segregation laws that needed to be abolished before integration of schools could take place. Georgia legislators fought against racial integration and initially decided to close integrated schools and deny funding to desegregated independent schools rather than integrate the schools. The governor declared in a speech, "as long as Earnest Vandiver is your governor there will be no mixed or college classrooms in this state-no, not a single one."[110] In 1959, a group of White parents in Atlanta spoke out in opposition to the closure of Atlanta's public schools. Helping Our Public Education (H.O.P.E.) members persuaded other parents and leaders to keep Atlanta's public schools open through grassroots efforts.[111] Among their strategy was a coalition building with Black parents, politicians, and business people, and it worked.

The organization, along with other advocates of integration, was useful in building support for Atlanta's schools convincing officials the detriment that closing schools would have on Atlanta's White and Black children.

White Flight

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[110] Harold Paulk Henderson *Ernest Vandiver, Governor of Georgia* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2008), *252*.

[111] Elizabeth E. Henry "Halting White Flight: Atlanta's Second Civil Rights Movement," PhD diss., (Georgia State University, 2012).

By the time the Atlanta 9 students transferred, many White families had fled to the suburbs and to private schools to prevent their children from attending school with Blacks. During the six-year period from *Brown v. Board of Education*'s 1954 decision to Atlanta's 1961 integration, White middle-class suburban communities were created alongside all-White private schools designed to keep the races separate. Kruse (2005), in his research into Atlanta's "White flight," writes about the justification of some Whites to assert their right to "freedom of association."[112] The argument from these Whites, who saw themselves as "victims of the Civil Rights Movement," was that people have the right to associate with whomever they please and the right not to associate with whomever they please. This assumption resulted in the request for one White student to transfer from a White school, that was about to be integrated, into a different White school in the same district, that intended to remain all White. After segregationists failed to stop the integration of Atlanta's schools based on the "freedom of association" argument, Whites worked harder to ensure the neighborhoods remained segregated. They took advantage of federal housing policies enacted in 1934[113] that treated Blacks and Whites differently with regard to down payment assistance and access to quality living areas. The policies were designed to legally keep White and Black residences separate: "considering the dilapidated conditions of urban neighborhoods, this bias guaranteed that new housing would be built outside of the inner city, far away from African Americans and other poor minorities who were viewed as a bane to property values."[114] The relationship between school

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[112] Kevin Kruse, *White Flight* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 161.

[113] Pavla Vobornikova, "Transformation of American Public Housing," *Scientific Journal of Humanistic Studies* (2016): 75-83.

[114] Valerie Johnson, Black Power in the Suburbs: The Myth or Reality Of African-American Suburban *Political Incorporation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003).

desegregation and neighborhood segregation is hard to miss. Whites recognized this as they fled, "the desegregation of neighborhoods and the neighborhood high schools generally involved the same families, the same students, the same struggles against segregationist resistance."[115]

Rise of the Black Middle Class

"The Black middle class and their residual enclaves are nearly invisible to the nonBlack public because of the intense (and mostly negative) attention given to poor urban ghettos."

While Whites were fleeing to the suburbs, working and middle-class Blacks were using their capital to build Black suburbs, albeit on a lower scale when compared to White suburbs, "Black middle-class neighborhoods are often located next to predominantly Black areas."[116] Research has shown that the experiences of middle-class Blacks differ from those of middle-class Whites and that these differences translate into differences between the achievement of middle-class Black students and middle-class White students.[117]

Throughout much of the literature on desegregation, race is centralized more often than class. However, as more and more Blacks acquired wealth and access to opportunities in the South, discussions about race became nuanced and required that class be considered in order to gain a fuller picture of the context. "Racial experience is altered or alterable because of the privileges that class brings…the Black middle class does not escape the entire burden of race."[118]

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[115] Kruse, *White Flight,*164.

[116] Kruse, White Flight, 20.

[117] Constance Lindsay, "All Middle-Class Families are not Created Equal: Explaining the Contexts that Black and White Families Face and the Implications for Adolescent Achievement," *Social Science Quarterly* (2011): 761-781.

[118] Audrey McFarlane, "Operatively White? Exploring the Significance of Race and Class through the Paradox of Black Middle-Classness. *Law and Contemporary Problems (*2009): 163-196.

More money brought greater opportunities, yet the Black middle class could still not escape the perils of racism. Take, for instance Madelyn Nix, one of the Atlanta 9 students, who could only gain access to advanced technology and newer books by transferring to Brown High School. Her family's prestige and wealth could not buy her the same education that attending Brown High School afforded her. Furthermore, Madelyn's attendance at Brown High School gave her the preparation she needed to successfully matriculate to a top law school. Her narrative is proof of Lindsay's (2011) claim that the experiences of middle-class Blacks differ from those of middle-class Whites and that those differences translate into differences between the achievement of middle-class Black students and that of middle-class White students.[119] Conversely, the problem with the success of middle-class Blacks was that it diverted attention away from the struggles of working-class Blacks who did not benefit from the same opportunities as their middle-class peers. Middle-class Blacks, like Madelyn Nix, were not purposely trying to make life harder for other Blacks, they were merely caught in the middle of whether to integrate with Whites or remain segregated with Blacks. McFarlane describes it as, "the inadvertent complicity of the Black middle class participating unquestionably in those structures," often unbeknownst to them.[120] Were the Atlanta 9 students complicit in these structures? Should they have remained at their all-Black schools and fought for equality rather than integrate with Whites?

Critics of equal opportunities for Blacks see the upward mobility of a small percentage of Blacks as proof that society is no longer racist. As a result, arguments are made opposing the

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[119] Constance Lindsay, "All Middle-Class Families are not Created Equal: Explaining the Contexts that Black and White Families Face and the Implications for Adolescent Achievement," *Social Science Quarterly* (2011): 76.

[120] Audrey McFarlane, Operatively White?" Exploring the Significance of Race and Class Through the Paradox of Black Middle-Classness," *Law and Contemporary Problems* 72: 163.

need for institutional and systemic changes. An example was the election of President Obama as the first Black President of the United States. If this country can elect an African-American president, there is no need for discussions on race. The election also caused people to be less empathetic for poor and marginalized people whom they viewed as undeserving of assistance because they themselves were the ones responsible for their own misfortunes, "believing that we have entered a post-racial period may result in a lack of attention to the very real products of continued, systemic racism in society."[121] In similar fashion, once the Atlanta 9 symbolically "integrated" the White schools, the city hoped life would get back to normal, which meant going back to segregation, with the exception a few token Black students scattered across the district. However, the city continued efforts to integrate the schools.

Atlanta's Black middle class played an instrumental role in educating Blacks prior to *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) in the establishment of secondary and post-secondary schools for Black students who were not allowed to attend White schools. The institutions yielding the most influence within Atlanta's Black middle class were the Black media, the Black church, the Black lawyers, and the Black business community. "The existence of a Black middle class, whose economic position came from banking, insurance, construction as well as higher education, had created a leadership who could converse with the White economic and political leaders.[122] By the mid-twentieth century, Atlanta's Black middle class and the NAACP made up of middle-class lawyers utilized their status and talent to integrate Atlanta's schools through legal battles.

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[121] Bettina Love and Brittany Tosolt "Reality or Rhetoric? Barack Obama and Post-Racial America," *Race, Gender, and Class* (2010): 19-37.

[122] Barbara Jackson, "Desegregation: Atlanta Style." *Theory Into Practice.* (1978): 43.

The Black middle class was not a monolithic group of citizens as they were made up of conservatives, liberals, and independents with diverse views about education and other issues. This diversity was evidenced by dissenting Black community members who disagreed with the premise that integration was the solution for disparities in the education of Blacks. While some middle-class Blacks saw Black schools as ideal for students because they provided a nurturing environment that Black students would not obtain in White settings, others felt integration was the only way Black children would be guaranteed a quality education.

Ironically, the Black middle class had interests on both sides, which at times proved problematic because they made up both sides of the conflict: "The Black middle class is put in the position of reinforcing a structure of race and class exclusion."[123] What happened was that after years of discrimination, middle-class Blacks were finally allowed to participate in exclusive activities because of their social class, which trumped their race. They were able to play the "class" card and disregard their race in ways that less fortunate Blacks were unable to do.

The intent here is not to demonize the Black middle class, which is a diverse group. The attempt is to examine their role in the desegregation of public schools and inspect how their interests fit into the overall desegregation narrative. In many instances, as in the case of Madelyn Nix, it was the Black middle class and its ability to play different roles that helped secure justice in ways that might not have happened without their efforts. Had it not been for the Atlanta 9 and the interests of "token" middle-class Blacks in banking, insurance, and

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[123] Audrey McFarlane, "Operatively White? Exploring the Significance of Race and Class through the Paradox of Black Middle-Classness. *Law and Contemporary Problems (*2009): 163-196.

construction, the integration of Atlanta might never have taken place.[124] The oral histories of the Atlanta 9 illustrate the implication of race and class, and deserve to be explored.

In this research study, I also utilize the experiences revealed during the narratives to provide new insight into the role of class in the fight for educational equality. Atlanta's Black middle class was more instrumental during the Civil Rights Movement than explicitly indicated in the literature. Much of the research tends to focus on poor Blacks in urban areas.[125] Mary Patillo-McCoy makes a good point in her research on the Black middle class when she argues for a more holistic focus on the Black community to provide a more accurate picture of Black people as a whole. During my research, two of my participants referred to their families during the 1960s as "middle class" and two described their families as "working class." Having these class differences among the participants added to the overall narrative of Atlanta's desegregation era. Recognition of class and race was just as crucial in explaining Madelyn and Mary's experiences as other factors. The Black community is not monolithic, and the varied narratives of Mary and Madelyn demonstrate this fact.

The research shows that much of the division over desegregated schools among Blacks fell along class lines. Many more middle-class Blacks tended to support integrated schools than lower class Blacks. As a matter of fact, two of the students chosen to integrate the schools indicated that "only a certain type of student" was chosen to transfer. The Atlanta school board seemed to be looking for students with middle-class backgrounds. Martha graduated and went

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[124] Barbara Jackson, "Desegregation: Atlanta Style." *Theory Into Practice.* (1978): 43.

[125] Mary Patillo-McCoy, *Privilege and Peril Among the Black Middle Class* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

on to attend college. Another student interviewed said she was able to attend college and pursue a degree that she may not have had access to if she had stayed at her all-Black school.

As time progressed, Blacks separated more and more along socioeconomic lines. As many or some Blacks gain increased opportunities, some of their decisions and interests realign and those interests do not always match the interests of lower-class Blacks.[126] In this study, I will also consider this phenomenon because it surfaced in the narratives of the students. Working-class Blacks did not benefit from the progress that successful middle-class Blacks experienced.

In 1961, Atlanta was an empowering place for African Americans who were surrounded by prestigious historically Black colleges and universities (HBCU's), multiple Black churches, several Black media outlets, and numerous Black businesses. No other city boasted this type of progress amongst Blacks in one central location. Much of this success can be ascribed to the Black middle class, which is rarely examined in the desegregation literature. In Mary Patillo's book, *Black Picket Fences* (1999), she focuses on the residential experiences of the Black middle class, which she argues is too often overlooked in mainstream research, "the Black middle class and their residential enclaves are nearly invisible to the nonBlack public because of the intense (and mostly negative) attention given to poor urban ghettos." I concur with Patillo's argument because of my findings during this research. Voluminous research on school desegregation highlights: the losses experienced by Blacks during the process, the failures of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision to maintain integrated schools, and the heroism of Whites who joined the struggle (Baker, 2006; Jacoway, 2008; Kluger, 1975). But limited research suggests how pivotal the Black middle class was in fighting for equality, while still supporting and

[126] Patillo-McCoy, Black Picket Fences.

building up the Black community. The findings of this research revealed how crucial those elite and privileged Blacks were to the success of the movement.

Interest Convergence

Derrick Bell pioneered the theory of interest convergence in the 1970's after realizing that although Blacks had made significant gains, Whites still had an advantage. He argued that Blacks received favorable treatment within society when the conditions were equally beneficial to the interests of Whites. He initially applied his claim to the legal community after analyzing the *Brown v. Board of Education (*1954) case, leading him to assert that even the judicial system operates in the biased interests of the majority, rather than in the interests of marginalized students. Delgado and Stefancic observed that when it comes to justice for Blacks, little is done out of altruism alone. If members of the majority group have nothing to gain they will be hesitant to agree to any plan that might inconvenience their lives, "because racism advances the interests of both White elites (materially) and working-class people (psychically), large segments of society have little incentive to eradicate it." [127]

Examples of interest convergence can be found as far back as the Civil War. In 1965, the South's productivity was severely impaired after the Civil War. The Union army destroyed farms, businesses, homes, and railroads: "unlike other towns where antebellum structures were preserved and residents remained in place, Atlanta was wiped clean:"[128] When the war ended, Blacks were emancipated but the celebration was short lived. The political leverage earned by Blacks was brief and ended once Whites began to feel threatened. Because Whites could no

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[127] Delgado and Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2001), 7.

[128] Rebecca Burns, "The City Was Burned to the Ground 150 Years Ago. Could It Be the Best Thing That Ever Happened to Us?" *Atlanta Magazine*, July 15, 2014.

longer depend on the free labor of Blacks, they began efforts to disenfranchise Blacks economically, politically, socially and educationally. During the period following the Civil War, it was not in Whites' best interest to support policies aimed at equality for Blacks, so they did everything possible to deny such equality.

Over time, both groups came to "need" the other and slowly their divergent interests began to fade, making way for common interests to emerge. Whites, who previously needed subordinated Blacks to maintain their cotton economy in the late 1800s, subsequently needed the labor of Blacks to help transition the South into an industrialized region during reconstruction. At the same time, many Blacks who had been enslaved in America since the United States' independence from Great Britain relied on White philanthropy for the acquisition of land and advancements in education.[129]

> Overwhelmingly, Black Southerners remained trapped in poverty, caught in a web of repressive labor arrangements…that made a mockery of their new freedom, and often in more desperate material straits than they had known even under slavery.[130]

Without initial White support and guidance, some people believe Blacks might have fallen back into the perils of slavery. And without the commitment and labor of Blacks, the United States would not have the foundation it has today.[131]

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[129] Danne Johnson, "What's Love Got to Do with It-Interest Convergence as a Lens to View State Ratification of Pose Emancipation Slave Marriages," *Western New England Law Review* 36, 2(2014): 143-168.

[130] Robin Kelly, "We Are Not What We Seem: Rethinking Black Working-Class Opposition in the Jim Crow South," *Journal of American History* 80, no.1 (1993): 75-112.

[131] Rebecca Burns, "The City Was Burned to the Ground 150 Years Ago. Could It Be the Best Thing That Ever Happened to Us?" *Atlanta Magazine*, July 15, 2014.

This move towards converging interests continued until the modern Civil Rights Movement. Blacks were becoming intolerant with racial injustice and disparate opportunities and progressive Whites who had previously opposed equality for Blacks were beginning to change their views. The economic and political situation in the 1960s persuaded many Whites to reconsider school segregation and the impact it would have on society. The White establishment also realized the political and economic disadvantages of desegregation.

Derrick Bell provides three compelling arguments as evidence for why it was in the United States' best interest to improve the treatment of Blacks.[132] First, the U. S. could not justifiably continue its fight with communist countries while denying equality to Blacks at home. Second, the U. S. could not expect Black soldiers to sacrifice their lives defending the nation abroad only to return home to discrimination from their own country. The final reason Whites yielded to fairer treatment for Blacks is that it would help the South's economic interests. Particularly in Atlanta, which had transitioned from an agricultural to an industrialized society, progress would not happen if segregation remained. "Even public-school desegregation, often derided today as a misplaced priority or an outright failure has had lasting economic benefits."[133] Hence, the desegregation of Atlanta's schools was inevitable in light of Bell's theory.

Six years after the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision, the White community complied with the verdict to avoid a school shut down that would prevent their White children from attending school, Atlanta maintained its positive clean image, and the business

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[132] Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, Critical Race Theory: An Introduction (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2001).

[133] Gavin Wright, "The Stunning Economic Impact of the Civil Rights Movement," *Bloomberg View* February 13, 2013, https://www.bloomberg.com/view/articles/2013-02-13/the-stunning-economic-impact-of-the-civil-rights-movement.

community's profits continued uninterrupted. Unfortunately, the interests of the Black community did not work out as planned. For years the Black community had fought for "equal" schools and was assured of this after the 1954 ruling, but improvements lagged behind what was promised. Mention should be made that many Blacks disagreed with the convergence of White interests and Black interests as the best solution and more and more Blacks began to quarrel publicly over what was in the "best interest" of Black children-segregation or integration. Leading up to the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision, the majority of Black parents sided with the NAACP, which had long supported and fought for integrated schools. But over time, a surprising number of Black parents started to express their opposition to the integration of schools. Those Black parents advocated for equal access as a legal right, but many were reluctant to accept the notion that Black children could only be assured a "good education" if they attended school with White children. Furthermore, some Blacks argued that valuable instruction and educational experiences were lost when Black children left their nurturing community schools to integrate White schools.[134] The interest convergence framework helps illuminate the impact of converging interests on schools, children and communities.

While the literature favored chronology, the interviews followed a more thematically centered paradigm because of the open-ended nature of thematic analysis. It is also less restrictive and more open to alternative perspectives. The analysis in this dissertation leans more towards the thematic approach.

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[134] Vanessa Siddle-Walker, *Their Highest Potential: An African American School Community in the Segregated South,* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

4 DESCRIPTIVE FINDINGS

"The teachers had already talked to the parents of the students because they had to get the parents' permission of whoever we were sitting beside, to make sure it was alright for their [White] children to sit beside us"[135] -Martha Holmes

In this chapter, I discuss Atlanta's uniqueness and the tense racial climate surrounding the Atlanta 9. Then, I describe the acts of White kindness highlighted during the interviews that underscore Atlanta's reputation as the "City Too Busy to Hate." A profile of the five students rounds out the chapter, along with justifications for why Madeline, Mary, Rosalyn, Martha, and Thomas were more than prepared mentally, psychologically, and attitudinally to integrate Atlanta schools.

In order to appreciate the struggle, the triumph and the story of the Atlanta 9 students, one must understand the city of Atlanta and what made it such a "unique" town. Atlanta was a paradox, a place of both racists and progressives. The town prided itself on being "a city too busy to hate" inside a state where the governor detested any notions of racially mixing Black and White children. There were Blacks who wanted to remain segregated in their nurturing environments and Whites who advocated for the integration of schools, which added to the irony during this tumultuous period. The Atlanta 9 students grew up in the shadows of Atlanta's paradox and figured out how to use education to bring social change to Atlanta's school system.

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[135] Rosalyn Walton Lees, interview by Thomas Kuhn, Atlanta, GA, July 16, 2013.

The Overall Racial Climate

For the Atlanta 9 students, the racial tone was set before school began. Martha recalls "all of the other kids were in class when we got there. We didn't choose our seat."[136] Eventually, Martha became used to the stares from others and feelings of isolation from peers. Being different was a part of the responsibility she took on when she left behind all that was familiar to her. She accepted her role as the only Black at Turner gracefully. The challenge was for her to be different in a positive way rather than in a negative way, "if they said things about us we had to do the best we could to keep everything we did positive because everybody was watching."[137] With the world watching, Martha felt she had to do everything right, with little room for error.

Atlanta's racial climate in the 1960s was tense and for the Atlanta 9, school was merely a microcosm of what was happening in society at large. The same resistance displayed by White adults striving to keep schools segregated was felt by the children of those Whites. Segregationists did all they could to maintain a dual school system for as long as they could. They won a slight victory from *Brown v. Board's* second ruling in which school districts were given autonomy to desegregate with "all deliberate speed." This meant districts could move at their own pace and pretty much interpret the ruling however they saw fit. The city of Atlanta did just that. Atlanta's other massive resistance tactics to limit Blacks and Whites from integrating included: more training for Black teachers, equalization of funds to put Black schools on equal ground with White schools, and the creation of private academies outside the city limits for Whites only. All of these attempts were designed to maintain segregation.

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[136] Rosalyn Walton Lees, interview by Tanya Crawford, July 19, 2016.

[137] Martha Holmes, interview by Tanya Crawford, July 19, 2016.

At one point, Atlanta was on the verge of following the lead of districts in Virginia, Maryland, and Alabama. Prince Edward County was so intent on maintaining segregation, it closed its schools for five years rather than integrate.[138] Then in 1956, Georgia's Alabama neighbors passed laws allowing schools to close if they were forced to integrate. It was not until 1963's *Lee v. Macon County Board of Education*[139] court case that Alabama schools were desegregated.[140] Former student, Thomas, recounts Georgia's Governor Ernest Vandiver who made his feelings clear throughout his 1959 campaign with the "no, not one" motto where he insisted that no Black child would ever attend a White school during his administration.[141] Thomas discussed persevering in the face of such staunch political and social opposition where Whites fled to the suburbs to keep from interacting with them, "People who felt like their world was disappearing said, 'look, just shut all the public schools down.' We'll send our kids to these

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[138] As of October 5, 2018 the Virginia Museum of History and Culture's collections page confirmed that part of Virginia's 1959 defiance of the *Brown v. Board* (1954) decision was the closure of its public schools in Prince Edward County. Citizens chose to close their public schools rather than integrate them. They [Whites] opened private schools with the help of government tuition grants. The schools were closed for 5 until 1964. There were no government provisions put in place to ensure the education of Black students. In the same manner, Kristen Green, who attended the private White academy founded by her grandfather, during this time period, points out in her book how Prince Edward County used tax revenues to fund private schools while its 21 private schools remained closed. Some Blacks were educated by relatives or were schooled in other counties, if they were lucky. Source: *Kristen Green, Something Must Be Done About Prince Edward County:A Family, A Virginia Town, A Civil Rights Battle* (New York, NY: Harper Collins Publisher, 2015).

[139] Lee v. Macon County Board of Education, 267 F. Supp. 458 (M.D. Ala. 1967) March 22, 1967.

[140] In Macon County, Alabama four Black students sued for admittance to all-White Tuskegee High School in 1963. Alabama, like many other southern states operated "segregation academies" while they stalled and resisted the *Brown vs. Board (1954)* ruling. In 1967, Macon County was forced to integrate its public schools, but only four after years of legal maneuvering. *The Encyclopedia of Alabama*, s.v. "Lee vs. Macon County Board of Education." http:/www.encyclopediaofalabama.org/article/h-3407

[141] Newsfilm clip of Georgia governor Ernest Vandiver speaking to reporters about the civil rights movement in Albany, Georgia from a press conference in Atlanta, Georgia, 1962 July 30, WSB-TV newsfilm collection, reel 0946, 51:01/59:48, Walter J. Brown Media Archives and Peabody Awards Collection, The University of Georgia Libraries, Athens, Ga, as presented in the Digital Library of Georgia.

private academies. That's how they were dealing with integration."[142] Even the families who remained in the city may not have shown outward hostility, but they stealthily made sure Thomas remained excluded and unwanted, "there were a number of students and teachers who went out of their way to make sure we didn't feel welcomed…who said, 'we have to do this but we don't have to like it,' and we don't have to make them feel welcome."[143]

Rosalyn felt similar microaggressions during her experience. "They [Whites] quietly demonstrated their dismay about our presence. You felt it," Rosalyn said. The Quaker House helped prepare the Atlanta 9 students for the opposition they would confront by pairing them with White students to help make the process smooth. "They were assigned to help make us feel comfortable around Whites and less secluded,"[144] but according to Rosalyn, it helped only a little because even though they didn't always say mean or derogatory words, the covert hostility was in the atmosphere through their actions. The students were isolated and made to feel invisible.

The tension and hostility went beyond school hours, affecting the students' lives outside of school as well. Thomas remembered getting phone calls at night the first year he transferred, "they said, 'if you send that nigger boy to school tomorrow, we gone kill him.' My mother didn't want me to hear, but when the phone rang at that hour in the morning, I knew it was something."[145] For Thomas, this was especially painful because of the impact it had on his mother. "I heard her crying and that pissed me off. I felt like they stepped over the line when

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[142] Thomas Welch, interview by Tanya Crawford, Atlanta, GA, October 25, 2016.

[143] Thomas Welch, interview.

[144] Rosalyn Walton Lees, interview by Thomas Kuhn, Atlanta, GA, July 16, 2013.

[145] Thomas Welch, interview.

they made my mother cry."[146] In spite of the overall negative climate, there were expressions of hope and goodwill.

Acts of "Kindness"

"Atlanta became something of an island of moderation in the midst of a tempestuous ocean of defiance. For this reason Atlanta developed a reputation all across the nation as a paragon of racial harmony and the epitome of social progress." -Dr. Martin Luther King[147]

For awhile it looked like Atlanta was the model city. It got through the first day with little incident. In spite of obvious feelings of isolation, loneliness, and fear, the Black students did have some pleasant interactions with Whites that helped compensate for the hostility. Thomas shared his first day experience in American History, "as I walked in the classroom on the first day, I chose a seat in the middle row. Every seat around me pushed away and left me right in the middle by myself and that happened every day. The feeling was, 'you chose to come so this is what you get.' I didn't do very well in that class. And the teacher couldn't care less."[148] Thomas went on to share a much different experience later the same day with what he describes as "one of the best teachers" he ever had.

> I came in class and students tried that again [moving their seats away from me] in her class. She looked up and in her angry southern drawl said, "Are you crazy?

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[146] Thomas Welch, interview

[147] Martin Luther King Jr., "Pilgrimage for Democracy" (speech, Atlanta, GA, December 16, 1963), The King Center, http://www.thekingcenter.org/archive/document/mlks-address-pilgrimage-democracy#

[148] Welch, interview.

> What is this? We're not doing this. What are you treating this person like that for?"[149] And bam, that was it! It turns out that was my best class!"

According to Thomas, several kids who did not really want to be mean had a reason not to do so because the authority figure had said "we're not doing this." The teacher's reaction was more in line with what the students knew "in their hearts" to be the right way to behave. Regardless of the behavior of others and the threats from the governor, teachers like Thomas's chemistry teacher set a different tone that went beyond the racist actions of others. This action made a world of difference to him.

There were some courageous White people, but it was not in their best interest to be public about it. So they were kind in secret, while no one was watching. Mary and Madelyn recalled similar stories about the "secret kindness" they experienced with Whites. According to the two former students, as long as society at large opposed Blacks and Whites intermingling, it was neither popular nor safe for well-meaning Whites to publicly align themselves with Blacks. Mary learned this lesson early on.

> I never went over to their table. They came to my table. And on that very first day I was in the cafeteria. I had gone through the line and I was sitting down and this White girl came over. She stopped by the table, she leaned over, and whispered, 'I think what you're doing is a really great thing' and then she quickly sped off before anyone could question her actions. It was the first encounter that I had like that, and it was a pleasant one, totally unexpected. We never had a

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[149] Welch, interview.

conversation. She never came back. She never spoke. I saw her, but we never spoke again.[150]

Madelyn had a similar experience outside of school when she ran into a student that had once shown kindness towards her during the school day. Madelyn later passed the same student on the street outside of school and prepared to make eye contact with the student but the student, who clearly recognized Madelyn, looked away as if she had never known Madelyn. The White student's behavior was no surprise to Madelyn, given the context of the time period. Regardless of other students and the choices they made about the role they would or would not play in seeking justice, Madelyn continued the journey, albeit alone. For she had learned from her parents that people can change for better or worse, but she could not allow the actions of others to determine her behavior. "Growing up, it was instilled within me by my mother and father, that regardless of what others said or did, I had to remember who I was and what I represented. Because of this, I may not have had the same struggles or insecurities as others. Also, I didn't have the same expectations of others as a result of my upbringing. I knew the world didn't owe me anything and that I would have to work hard for everything I got."[151]

Madelyn's classmate, Thomas, supported her wholeheartedly and added another perspective to describe the relationship between Blacks and Whites, "As fellow students they made the effort. They were under as much pressure [as us], if not more pressure because you

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[150] Mary McMullen Francis, interview by Tanya Crawford, Lithonia, GA, June 24, 2016.

[151] Madelyn Nix, interview by Tanya Crawford, Atlanta, GA, December 6, 2015.

couldn't easily, openly, be nice to us [Blacks] unless you were a strong individual because they had peer pressure from other people who didn't want us near them."[152]

Both Madelyn and Thomas shared similar sentiments about what they went through while the world watched, "there was pressure from the White community telling us we were not good enough and would not succeed, and pressure from the Black community telling us we had no option but to do well."[153] The participants wrestled with how to navigate the two worlds to which they belonged. They are perfect examples of the intersections of race and class, and of what it is like to live in between two very different worlds.

The City Too Busy to Hate.

> "I just remember getting my name on a list. There were tracks, even at the Black schools and they had determined that these are the talented folk academically and they're gonna go on in the college track. My homeroom was one of those homerooms and we were encouraged to enter into the transfer process. I'm not saying it was right but for whatever reason, and however they did it, a determination was made that some kids were not going to pursue higher academics-that high school was going to be it for them. If you weren't on the college, you were say on the "trade" or "vocational" track? That was a pretty prevailing mode of thought back then. You're part of the talented tenth. We have expectations of you."*[154]*

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[152] Thomas Welch, interview.

[153] Madelyn Nix, interview.

[154] Thomas Welch, interview by Tanya Crawford, October 25, 2016, Austell, GA.

The city of Atlanta had run out of options and officials decided to comply with the mandate to integrate its schools rather than close them down.[155] In other words, they were forced to desegregate. The Atlanta district defined desegregate as "more than 10% minority race students enrolled .[156] Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. weighed in on the distinction between "integration" and "desegregation" during a discussion with students at Cornell University in 1960, "by desegregation, I mean a breakdown of all legal barriers. Integration, we know, is more than breaking down legal barriers, it is true interpersonal, intergroup living which takes place not because the law says so, but because it is natural and right. This will take a lot longer."[157]

Six months prior to the selection of the Atlanta 9 students, Dr. King anticipated, "the people have made it clear that when the final choice approaches they will choose their schools open, with token integration, rather than closed schools."[158] The powers that be, made up of White males, set out to find Atlanta's best and brightest Black students to integrate its school system. "The plan was to choose a representative sampling of kids from, at the time Black high schools, and offer them admission to some of the White schools." They decided that there would be a rigorous set of academic and psychological tests and that those who wanted to participate in this experiment would be chosen through that process.

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[155] Kathy Loving, interview.

[156] Paul West; and Others, "School Desegregation in Metro Atlanta 1954-1973" (1973). *Research Atlanta*, 1973), 5.

[157] "A Talk With Martin Luther King" (Cornell University, Ithaca, NY, November 13, 1960). The Martin Luther King Jr. Papers Project. Dr. King answered questions from students and faculty. "Excerpts from the session were published one month later in December 1960 in *Dialogue,* which was a Cornell student publication.

[158] "A Talk With Martin Luther King,"1960.

This effort to keep desegregation to a minimum was known as the Token Integration Plan in APS, which was "the admission of just enough Negroes to predominantly White schools to get by the law."[159] There were 333 Black students that picked up transfer applications. The students were given a limited two-week window to finish them. One hundred and thirty-two of those students submitted completed applications and 16 made the final cut. In the end, ten "token" Black students were deemed good enough to transfer to all-White high schools under Atlanta's "freedom of choice" plan.[160] Despite being highly qualified, Thomas Welch was surprised to be one of the ten students chosen. He elaborated on the process during our meeting, "So, the plan was to choose a representative sampling of kids from at the time Black high schools, and offer them admission to some of the White schools. And so they came to Washington High School and asked who might be interested and suggested that in fact it would be a rigorous set of academic and psychological tests and that those who wanted to participate in this experiment would be chosen through that process and I was one who managed to come out on the other end of the process."[161]

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[159] *Post Script: Atlanta. Keep Em Open.* Council Quarterly. Georgia Council on Human Relations. Atlanta, Georgia. Atlanta History Center. Box Folder 12 of 17. MSS 374. Miscellaneous publications on school desegregation 1955-1961. Atlanta History Center Archives. Definition for token integration plans: "The term is generally used to describe deliberate efforts keep racial integration at a minimum…Token integration has essentially the same goal as massive resistance Atlanta set forth a criterion designed to keep desegregation to a minimum… token integration has essentially the same goal as massive resistance." Source: Moreland, Kenneth, *Token Desegregation and Beyond*. Atlanta, GA: Southern Regional Council Papers 1944-1968. Reel 213. Robert Woodruff Library. Reel 213.

[160] "Pupil placement in the 11th and 12 grades will be made without regard to race or color. In each successive year the plan will be expanded to the immediate lower grade, until all grades are included." An annotated written message is scribbled in the margins of the OASIS memo which states, "12-1 rather than 1-12 chosen deliberately as harder for negroes to apply." Atlanta's Pupil Placement Program. Source: Box 374. OASIS: Inter-Group Committee on Schools, Member Lists for Sections on Civic and Service Organizations and Religious Organizations. No date. Folder 8 of 17. OASIS: Desegregation Discussion Sheets May-August,1961.

[161] Thomas Welch, interview.

The nine students were deliberately sent to four different schools. Madelyn Nix's theory about the process was that there was strength in numbers and separation prevented the nine students from concocting revolutionary ideas.[162] Another reported reason the nine were placed in different schools was that local leaders wanted to do the bare minimum to comply with the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision.[163] As long as there were at least two Black students at each school, the courts were satisfied that Atlanta had complied with the integration mandate, "since the law will not be altered, we hope for a pupil placement law and the opportunity for local people to do what they wish."[164] No White students applied to transfer to all-Black schools in Atlanta during this time making this a one-way transfer.

All aspects of the desegregation process were carefully considered and executed to ensure peace and to guarantee the city of Atlanta would not earn the violent reputation given to other southern cities when they desegregated. Both the White community and the Black community placed the incredible burden of guaranteeing the successful integration of APS on the Atlanta 9 students who had proven themselves to be academically, socially, and emotionally sound. They were also modest with non-aggressive temperaments. "They [city officials] were mindful of the bad publicity New Orleans had received when the nation saw these mobs spitting on Ruby Bridges and they did not want that to happen in Atlanta."[165] As a result, months leading up to the first day, the nine Black students received training on how to handle hostile incidents that

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[162] Madelyn Nix, interview by Tanya Crawford, December 6, 2015, Atlanta, GA.

[163] Archive document #53

[164] New briefings compiled HOPE, Inc. "Georgians Must Keep Public Schools Open." *The Vienna News. D*ecember 20, 1959. Robert Woodruff Library Archives.

[165] The Atlanta Nine, interview by Thomas Kuhn interview, First Iconium Baptist Church, July 16, 2013, Dekalb History Center, Decatur, GA.

might arise at their new schools, "there were rehearsals of the first day of school so that we would not have any opportunity for confrontation with other students."[166] At these rehearsals, the Atlanta 9 students walked through the halls and practiced the routine for moving from class to class and explored the best routes that would avoid confrontation with others. The emotional turmoil and pressure to succeed was stressful and affected their young lives. Madelyn shared, "once the decision was made and our names provided to the press, life as I knew it changed. I was not permitted to go alone to many places that I was able to go previously." [167] Five of the remaining Atlanta 9 students were interviewed for this research: Madelyn Nix, Mary Francis, Martha Holmes, Thomas Welch, and Rosalyn Walton Lees. Here are their stories.

A Profile of the Atlanta 9

Madelyn Nix

> *"I was asked how I will conduct myself if, say, girls are waiting for me in the restroom. I responded they'll probably say 'hello' then I'll say 'hello' and that's all." -Madelyn Nix*

Madelyn Nix, who hesitantly opened the door, was articulate and direct. My first impression of Ms. Nix was that she was self-assured but shy. She was guarded and skeptical but also warm and approachable. Ms. Nix's tall and commanding presence was intimidating at first, but this sentiment changed once she went out of her way to welcome me. She listened intently as I shared my research interests, and she seemed just as interested in me as I was in her. Ms. Nix genuinely did not believe she had anything of interest that I wanted to hear for my research because she did not see her story as exciting when compared to the similar experiences of other

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[166] Madelyn Nix, interview by Tanya Crawford, December 6, 2015, MSE Oral Histories Collection, Georgia State University, Atlanta, GA.

[167] Madelyn Nix, interview by Tanya Crawford, December 6, 2015.

students that had encountered violence and emotional trauma. Nevertheless, she agreed to sit down to talk with me at a later date as she was recovering from an illness on the day of my "surprise" arrival.

Madelyn arranged to meet me at a café near Emory University, her law school alma mater. Before the meeting, I sent Madelyn the questions I wanted to ask so that she would have time to reflect and recall the events from 1961. Madelyn, who is 72 years old, was prompt, professional and prepared to share her story. This meeting was the first of two meetings with Madelyn.

Mary McMullen Francis[168]

"I think they asked me how would I react if someone hit me or how would I respond to violence, and I probably said something like, 'you know I'm not here for that. I'm not going to start fights or be in fights period.' Whatever I said…I obviously I said the right thing. They were looking for students who were nonviolent." -Mary Francis.

During my first encounter with Mary, I sensed that she was skeptical of who I was and my mission. As time went on, she seemed grateful and flattered for my interest in her story. I located Mary using information obtained from the Atlanta Public Schools Archives. It took three visits to her home for me to finally make contact. Mary had informally shared her story with others but never officially. She agreed to meet a week later for our interview at a library. When she arrived, she was prepared with tons of information to share. Mary, a retired educator, thought carefully about each of the questions that were asked as evidenced by her pauses throughout the conversation. Her demeanor was matter of fact and somber at times. Mary took

[168] Mary McMullen Francis, interview by Tanya Crawford, June 24, 2016, Lithonia, GA.

her role as one of the Atlanta 9 very seriously and she seemed to feel the weight of what she and other students accomplished. She was reflective and able to vividly recall many small details about integrating the schools in a way that the others were not. For Mary, it was important to educate others about the sacrifices that older generations made in the fight for equality, and she worked hard during the conversation to be as accurate as possible.

Mary's interview elicited various emotions for both the interviewer and the participant during the dialog. At times, Mary seemed able to literally take herself back to difficult moments in the movement, and she found the language to convey her feelings beautifully. For Mary, it was regretful that more young people did not realize how fortunate they were and how far the city had come from its past.

Rosalyn Walton Lees[169]

"We were not hot-tempered. We didn't react. They didn't want anybody who, if somebody said something to them, they were gonna start a big argument." Rosalyn Walton Lees

Rosalyn Walton Lees was cooking for her family when I arrived at her home to ask if she would be willing to share her story with me. Rosalyn, along with Martha Holmes, has her portrait hanging at an exhibit at the Atlanta History Museum in honor of Atlanta's Civil Rights era. She had shared her experience integrating Murphy High School on a few occasions and she readily agreed to share her experiences again with me.

Out of all of the former students, Rosalyn has been the most visible of the Atlanta 9 students. She regularly participates in ceremonies in the city honoring the achievements made by the Atlanta 9. Rosalyn was comfortable and outspoken about her feelings integrating the

[169] Rosalyn Walton Lees, interview by Tanya Crawford, July 19, 2016, Atlanta, GA.

schools. Even in her optimism, she did not sugarcoat her painful experiences, “I don’t remember on purpose. It was a bad time. I went and I’m glad I did, but it wasn’t a happy time. I pushed some stuff out of my mind a long time ago.”[170]

In addition to her memories at the White schools, Rosalyn also provided a unique glimpse into her tenure at her former Black school, “I missed out on my prom. I missed out on my friends. I missed out on social things that I would have done being at my old school.”[171] But, as much as Rosalyn missed her Black school, she stubbornly refused to fail at the White school which helped her to survive the taunts and hostility by Whites, “you didn’t want to be known as a quitter...like you couldn’t hack it with those White kids. I was better than that.”[172]

Rosalyn, who was very modest and motherly was soft-spoken but emotionally strong and grounded. She took pride in her large family and welcomed any questions during the interview. Upon learning of my research interests, she asked if I also wanted to interview Martha Holmes, one of the other Atlanta 9 students. I excitedly responded "yes," and within two days Rosalyn made arrangements for the three of us to talk at a meeting room inside a local restaurant.

Martha Holmes[173]

"If they said things about us we had to do the best we could to keep everything we did positive because everybody was watching." - Martha Holmes

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[170] Rosalyn Walton Lees, interview.

[171] Rosalyn Walton Lees, interview.

[172] Rosalyn Walton Lees, interview.

[173] Martha Holmes, interview by Tanya Crawford, July 19, 2016, transcript, MSE Oral Histories Collection, Georgia State University, Atlanta, GA.

The first observation I made of Martha, a former elementary teacher, was her warm and engaging demeanor. Martha showed tremendous delight in sharing her story. Although Martha and Rosalyn transferred from and enrolled in the same schools, their experiences were not always the same. This phenomenon added to the dynamics of our interview because I was able to hear different perspectives. Rosalyn offered a "big picture" perspective while Martha remembered more minute details:

> I remember one incident-Rosalyn can't remember-but we were walking up Clifton headed toward Boulevard drive, and there were some apartment buildings. We had gone past all the houses, but when we got to this particular set of little apartments, there was a lady back in there. I guess she had come to the door and seen us approaching. We couldn't see her you know, you can't see inside through a screen door. But she was cursing and fussing and calling us all kinds of names; and that made us a little uneasy, but we kept walking and not looking back.[174]

Throughout the application process there were encouraging memories of people trying to help them that Rosalyn recalled, "*The Atlanta Daily World* wrote about us. There was John Sibley, Quaker House, League of Women Voters…I remember Jesse Hill in particular, he came out to the churches." Martha also vividly recalled unfavorable incidents that might have dissuaded others in her position. "When you're changing classes, they would bump into you, deliberately push you. I had a note in my locker, it was go back to Africa jungle bunny."[175]

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[174] Martha Holmes, interview with Thomas Kuhn, July 16, 2013 at First Iconium Church, Atlanta, GA. Interview recordings housed at The Dekalb History Center, Decatur, GA.

[175] Martha Holmes, interview.

Of the five interviews I completed with the Atlanta Nine students, Martha and Rosalyn are the two that have maintained the closest relationship over the past 55 years. Martha, who has had fewer opportunities to publicly share her story with others, said she was honored to give her perspective during the interview.

Thomas Welch[176]

Thomas Welch agreed to meet with me during his visit to Atlanta, where he and his wife were celebrating his alma mater's (Morehouse College) annual homecoming weekend. I found Thomas with the help of Madelyn Nix, who matriculated to Washington High with him. They have kept in regular contact over the years. We met at the home of Thomas's younger sister for two and a half hours.

My first impression of Thomas was that he was hospitable, positive, hopeful, and gracious. It was easy getting him to open up during our meeting and he loved sharing. Thomas, a real estate developer living in Boston, seemed genuinely delighted to share his memories and he showed no hesitations about telling his story. Throughout our meeting, he was direct, sincere, and honest. When his memories failed, Thomas was quick to admit that he had forgotten. He was lighthearted and coped with uncomfortable memories with a smile or a chuckle. He was confident and had a strong sense of self, but he also seemed determined to remain humble. He understated his current success, preferring instead to focus on the importance of determination and hard work. He had lots of stories and ventured off into other topics, which was excellent for my research, but I found myself having to regularly refer to my notes to ensure I was obtaining

[176] Thomas Welch, interview.

the data I set out to collect and to ensure the interview followed as close as possible the basic protocols of the other interviews.

As a Black male, Thomas's fears and perspectives were distinct from the Black females because Black males were seen differently by society. Thomas, who was the only male from the Atlanta 9 that I was able to interview, gave a perspective that I did not obtain from the other participants. What stood out for me most during the interview was how much Thomas remembered about his feelings during the time of the desegregation:

> As I walked in the classroom on the first day, I chose a seat in the middle of the middle row. Every seat around me pushed away and left me right in the middle by myself and that happened every day. And the teacher could care less saying, 'you chose to come so this is what you get.' You can probably tell it still affects me.

Thomas conveyed emotions during the interview that spoke volumes about the impact of desegregating Atlanta's schools. His pauses, facial expressions, and digressions added just as much to my data as his actual words. I picked up on how complicated, messy, and exhausting the process was, even for an eternal optimist like Thomas.

Prepared to Integrate

"We've got a saying around here that it is easier to go to Yale than to transfer from one public school to another in Atlanta."[177] -NAACP Official

This section is about the students' impressive academic, psychological, and interpersonal skills that were evident through test scores, psychological assessments, and interviews. The

[177] "School Desegregation in Metro Atlanta," Spokesman for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, 1954-1973" U.S. Department of Health, Education & Welfare Office of Education.

required battery of entrance examinations was used to screen and classify students. Only applicants demonstrating exceptional academic capabilities were chosen. The Atlanta 9 were among the academic top ten percent at their Black schools before volunteering to enter what Sonya Douglas refers to as "a burning house."[178] By this, Horsford asserts that efforts to integrate schools were, in many ways, just as harmful as segregating them, echoing the sentiments of Dr. King who remarked, "I fear I may have integrated my people into a burning house."[179]

The students knew the dangers they were up against. Mary stated, "when the call came out telling us that they were interested in integrating the schools we already knew what was going on in the country…I had seen the news and I knew of the beatings and what happened to others."[180] But regardless of the challenges before them, there was no turning back for Madelyn, Mary, Rosalyn, Martha, and Thomas. They had no reason to believe they were not good enough or smart enough to survive and master the flames in the proverbial "burning house." Their cultural backgrounds and family upbringings prepared them academically, psychologically, and socially.

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[178] Sonya Horsford, Learning in a Burning House: Educational Inequality, Ideology, and (Dis)Integration. (New York: Teacher's College, 2011).

[179] "According to Belafonte, King responded, "I've come upon something that disturbs me deeply. We have fought hard and long for integration, as I believe we should have, and I know we will win, but I have come to believe that we are integrating into a burning house. I'm afraid that America has lost the moral vision she may have had, and I'm afraid that even as we integrate, we are walking into a place that does not understand that this nation needs to be deeply concerned with the plight of the poor and disenfranchised. Until we commit ourselves to ensuring that the underclass is given justice and opportunity, we will continue to perpetuate the anger and violence that tears the soul of this nation. I fear I am integrating my people into a burning house." Dr. Martin Luther King, personal communication with Harry Belafonte. speech, Autodidact 17, "Dr. Martin Luther Jr.: I Fear I am Integrating My People into a Burning House." *The Amsterdam News*, January 12, 2017. http://m.amsterdamnews.com/news/2017/jan/12/dr-martin-luther-king-jr-i-fear-i-am-integrating-m/

[180] Mary Francis, interview.

Academically Prepared

As stated earlier, the selection committee was not interested in average Black students, only exceptional ones like Madelyn Nix who was accustomed to performing well in class and scoring high on standardized tests.[181] "I held my own at Washington [the Black school], I took advanced classes, and I was a year ahead at the Black school. I was comfortable taking tests and had been taught skills to help me do we well. "[182] Madelyn was a 12th grader at her former Black school but she entered her new White school as an 11th grader. School officials claimed she did not have enough credits to enter the White school as a senior. As a result, Ms. Nix was forced to spend an extra year in high school because of the transfer.

The Atlanta 9 students were smart, and they knew it. They all hailed from families that valued education and hard work, "I couldn't go outside until I finished my homework so while everyone else was having fun, I was doing academic work,"[183] Mary declared. Her family insisted she excel beyond the basic requisites for school, even more so after she entered the White school. She explains having to work twice as hard.

> I was operating on adrenaline. It's as though there was so much stress on me. Wanting to do your best. And afraid of doing your best. So when the time came for us to actually take the test I said to myself, if you take this thing now you're going to pass and you're gonna have to go. So, I thought well, you could fail and

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[181] Madelyn Nix, interview.

[182] Madelyn Nix, interview.

[183] Mary Francis, interview.

then you wouldn't have to go. But I knew I couldn't just fail on purpose. I couldn't do that.[184]

Martha remembers excelling and still having to prove herself, "I worked for, I guess, half the semester alone in physics class. I did all of my experiments… nobody would even come to the lab table with me…and when I finally happened to luck up and found that I kind of knew what I was doing…the same fellow came over to the lab table and asked if he could be my partner."[185]

The Atlanta 9 were tested in a myriad of ways to prove they were good enough to learn alongside Whites. "Nobody ever bothered to say, "we're gonna do this for this purpose or we're gonna do that. You didn't really know what they were testing, and I just didn't question it. I believe they were giving IQ tests."[186] Although Rosalyn remembers little about the actual exams, she remembers feeling upbeat and confident, "I thought I was as smart as any of them White kids. That was our mentality at the time. If we could pass them tests, we were definitely smarter than them White kids."[187] It took a while for the students to realize how selective the process was for transferring, "If you smart you always run with the smart group of kids. We all thought we could go over there, take the test, and then we gone all go over there together. We wouldn't be by ourselves because there was gone be a group of us to go." It soon became clear

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[184] Mary Francis, interview.

[185] Martha Holmes, interview by Thomas Kuhn.

[186] Mary Francis, interview.

[187] Rosalyn Walton-Lees, interview.

what the Atlanta 9 were up against because everyone in the smart group was not chosen, Thomas explained, "Everybody didn't pass the test. Everybody didn't get accepted."[188]

Mary shared how insulted she felt once she realized what the competition consisted of,

> Students convinced me that we were gonna have this hard time because the White kids were so much smarter, [and] we were gonna be struggling and we wouldn't be able to keep up because they were just so much smarter. And then I got in the classroom with a White boy who was upset because I made A's and he didn't. I sat back and I said he's just as dumb as some of us are and I had to take tests to go to school with him? In my mind it was easy. I was looking for more.

The five students interviewed were excited about the newfound resources that matched the knowledge they were already acquiring at their quality Black schools.[189] But none of them were impressed with the intellect of White students they were learning beside because they had come from schools with quality instruction from competent, trained, and knowledgeable Black teachers. They had no reason to feel inferior because they were transferring from exceptional learning environments as noted by Vanessa Siddle Walker, "many Black segregated schools were characterized by self-efficacious, committed, and well-trained Black teachers, extracurricular activities that encouraged students to utilize their multiple talents, strong leadership that engaged parents in the support of the children's education, and institutional and interpersonal forms of caring that encouraged students to believe in what they could achieve."[190]

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[188] Martha Holmes, interview.

[189] Kathy Loving, interview.

[190] Vanessa Siddle Walker, "Second-Class Integration: A Historical Perspective for a Contemporary Agenda" *Harvard Educational Review* 79(2). (Page 272).

In spite of these inequalities, Black educators and Black teacher organizations throughout the South and particularly in Georgia advocated for Black children and struggled to ensure Black children still received the quality instruction they deserved.

Thomas noted that transferring to Brown was a chance to experience learning opportunities that were not available at his former school. Thomas insisted that their transfer was not an indictment of their former Black schools and that "newer resources did not necessarily mean "better" or superior. It meant better teacher salaries, better equipment, better buildings, etc. that Siddle-Walker noted.[191] The students simply wanted more options and greater access. Thomas argues, "there were things that Brown could not have given you that we got in our community. I couldn't take ROTC at Washington High School cuz we didn't have it." [192] Rosalyn echoed the same point, "I had books that had been used at Grady High School and then passed down to us. They would get new books at White schools and send the used books that had been written and drawn in over to the Black schools. That was the general practice."[193] Mary had similar sentiments about access to greater resources, "I did notice that the classrooms were better equipped, and when they were talking about space flights and rocket ships in physics class, I noticed we had all kinds of equipment that I had never seen. As a result, I had all kinds of questions and I wasn't afraid to ask."[194] Madelyn concurred that resources at the White schools were more desirable because they tended to be newer and more abundant, "as newer knowledge

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[191] Vanessa Siddle Walker, "Tolerated Tokenism, or the Injustice in Justice: Black Teacher Associations and Their Forgotten Struggle for Educational Justice, 1921-1954," *Equity & Excellence in Education* 46, (Jan 2013): 1, 64-80.

[192] Thomas Welch, interview.

[193] Rosalyn Walton Lees, interview.

[194] Mary Francis, interview.

and discoveries became available in books, access to that knowledge should have been available to all of us, regardless of the schools we attended."[195]

Each of the five participants was clear in stating that they were not looking for handouts and that nothing was handed to them. "They [teachers] were not lenient. We worked hard. We earned all of the grades and accolades we got honorably. We only sought fairness. We did not expect anything we hadn't earned. I knew that if we were given a chance we could outshine even the best of them."[196] Martha expressed similar feelings, "I knew that we were all caught up in a big social issue over which we had just a little control, so I wasn't expecting them to roll out the red carpet for me and bow down and give me any special treatment…I just wanted to be a student and do my best." [197] Their hard-earned intellect helped them to obtain acceptance into the White schools, but the Atlanta 9 knew they were going to need more than that to continue the journey.

Psychologically Prepared

"When the Atlanta school board decided to take only a scattering of Negro children for the initial attempt at desegregation it had to choose among many aspirants. Despite interviews and a host of psychological tests it would be difficult for any group of educators or psychiatrists to predict the progress of many of these children." [198]-Dr. Cole

The selection committee insisted the students undergo psychological testing and participate in panel interviews with board members. Mary Francis remembers, "it was very

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[195] Madelyn Nix, interview.

[196] Martha Holmes, interview.

[197] Martha Holmes, interview.

[198] Robert Coles, MD, "In the South These Children Prophesy" *The Atlantic 1932-1971* (March 1963): 111.

serious. Very serious. They told us there would be I think two rounds."[199] To guarantee a smooth process, it was Dr. Cole's, a psychiatrist, job to prepare the Atlanta 9 for their new schools. The students met with Dr. Cole, who assessed their readiness, and helped prepare them for this major undertaking. It would require intestinal fortitude, vision, optimism, and strength for the Atlanta 9 to thrive in a place where they were not wanted or welcomed. They would have to remain calm and tempered in the face of the intense scrutiny and hostility that was bound to happen.

Attitudinally Prepared (Non-Violent)

I got called for an interview and I remember saying 'this must be it' because they asked me 'what are you gonna do when a White boy calls you nigger…and I think my answer was, 'I wouldn't like it but I'm not gonna react because that wouldn't be helpful.'[200] -Thomas Welch

The final step in the selection process was the interview, which Mary, a retired school teacher and self-professed overachiever, described as exasperating, "I remember sitting out there in a room, and they called me in, and I walk in and there were maybe two or three older, big, White men sitting at a table."[201]

The committee knew that surviving school integration would be difficult and would require a combination of academic, social and emotional readiness which explains why they interrogated the Atlanta 9 with hypothetical what-ifs. None of the students chosen was militant. In the end, they only selected students they knew could withstand difficult situations. At times, maintaining calm was difficult as Rosalyn confirmed. For Rosalyn, this proved difficult on one

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[199] Mary Francis, interview.

[200] Thomas Welch, interview.

[201] Mary Francis, interview.

occasion where she recounts, “I knew I was supposed to keep my temper under control, but I threw a book, and then I took myself to the principal’s office.”[202] Out of all of the participants interviewed, Rosalyn expressed the most cynicism with the process.

The selection of Mary, Madelyn, Thomas, Rosalyn, and Martha was deliberate, intentional, and methodical. It had been six years since *Brown v. Board of Education’s* ruling and the city was depending on the Atlanta 9 to keep the town peaceful, to keep the business community happy, and to keep the federal government from imposing sanctions, "a coalition of business leaders, politically elected officials, church leaders, and other community leaders, both Black and White, determined that they did not want Atlanta to suffer the kinds of publicity that other places had suffered when people rose up in strong opposition to school desegregation.”[203] The students had no delusions about their roles.

They knew what they needed to do and they succeeded with little recognition. Some of the participants remembered the interviews in detail, while others had sketchy recollections. Interestingly, the one interview question that all five participants instantly remembered was a hypothetical question designed to weed out any person who might provoke a confrontation or who could not handle the White resistance that was bound to happen.

They asked me, how would I react if someone hit me or were somehow violent towards me and I probably said um you know I'm not going there for that. I'm not going there to start fights or to be in fights period. I apparently said the right thing. [204]

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[202] Rosalyn Walton Lees, interview with Thomas Kuhn.

[203] Thomas Welch, interview.

[204] Mary Frances, interview.

All of the students were from middle-class and hardworking families with no history of subversive or violent behavior which Madelyn says is exactly what APS wanted.[205] "Whatever I said it came across. I think they perhaps were looking for students who were nonviolent which was obvious or else you wouldn't be taken. They asked how I would react if someone hit me, I said "I'm not going there for that. I'm not going to start fights or to be in fights period you know, and I obviously said the right thing."[206] Thomas remembers being asked the same question, "I think my answer was that while I wouldn't like it I'm not gonna react to that cuz that's not gone be helpful. They must have seen that we had the capacity to do what we did because they needed for this experiment to not fail."[207]

Madelyn remembers the interviewers taking notes on her gestures and body language whenever she shifted or moved her hands or legs during the interview.[208] The board appeared most interested in Black students who knew how to respond in certain situations and the Atlanta 9 passed the interviews. They were not the type, or so it seemed, that would cause the tensions that militant Black students might create, as Madelyn noted, "I think they wanted candidates whom they saw as smart, low key, slow to anger, and focused."[209]

Just because the students understood their role as peacekeepers who had to help preserve Atlanta's image as the "city too busy to hate," the burden was still heavy because the same demeanor the students exhibited to get accepted into the White schools was the same behavior

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[205] Mary Frances, interview.

[206] Mary Frances, interview.

[207] Thomas Welch, interview.

[208] Madelyn Nix, interview.

[209] Madelyn Nix, interview.

they would exhibit daily to ensure peace during the desegregation process. Rosalyn adamantly insisted that, "if there had been a big outburst we would have been the ones suspended [not the Whites]."[210] To help her survive the journey, Rosalyn remembers the advice her mother gave during the process, "I knew to smile and be nice because that's what my mama told me. We didn't want to be angry Black people because that's what they expected you to be. Sometimes you didn't want to smile and be nice but you had to smile and be nice all the time."[211] Convincing the committee that they were disciplined and capable of surviving whatever might happen during the process was not difficult because of the strength and perseverance the students already possessed. The next chapter chronicles the hardships students faced integrating Atlanta's public schools.

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[210] Rosalyn Walton Lees, interview.

[211] Rosalyn Walton Lees, interview.

5 CONCEPTUAL FINDINGS

"Two powerful forces have collided in the South-the force of segregation and the force of public schools. By having these two institutions collide we have seen something very interesting."[212] -Dr. Martin Luther King

Once the cameras packed up and left Atlanta to cover other salacious news, "the city too busy to hate" returned to normal with little regard for the well-being of the nine forgotten students whose lives had forever changed. The city congratulated itself and took credit for its peaceful integration, due in huge part to Madelyn, Martha, Thomas, Rosalyn, and Mary who went to school daily and "worked their butts off."[213] The missing spotlight was fine with the students, who did not seek the extreme media attention. They only wanted to prove that "Blacks deserved the same access and resources as Whites."[214] They were not expecting entitlements or stardom, only a good education. Dr. King captured the sentiments of the students beautifully in 1963, two years after the integration of APS.

Honesty impels us to admit that we are disappointed with Atlanta. While boasting of its progress and virtue, Atlanta has allowed itself to fall behind almost every major southern city in progress toward desegregation. Atlanta says her schools are integrated. Are they really? Not a single child attends a public elementary school with his White brothers.[215]

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[212] "A Talk with Martin Luther King," (Cornell University, Ithaca, NY, November 13, 1960).

[213] Thomas Welch, interview.

[214] Thomas Welch, interview.

[215] Martin Luther King Jr., "Pilgrimage for Democracy" (speech, Atlanta, GA, December 16, 1963), The King Center, http://www.thekingcenter.org/archive/document/mlks-address-pilgrimage-democracy#

Five major themes emerged from the inductive analysis of the five interviews. This chapter explores each of these conceptual themes: community cultural wealth, double consciousnesses, resilience, personal sacrifice, and moral obligation. Notably, the marginalized theme of tokenism, which also emerged from the interviews is highlighted in this chapter.

Theme One: Cultural Wealth

Tara Yosso defines community cultural wealth as, "an array of knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts possessed and utilized by communities of color to survive and resist macro and micro-forms of oppression."[216]Kerry Woodward expresses the importance of theoretical frameworks in helping us understand and explain how individuals, namely marginalized individuals, utilize their talents and skills to endure challenges and advance through life.[217] One such theorist is Pierre Bourdieu, who uses the concept of cultural capital to explain social mobility and the reproduction (or lack thereof) of wealth. His theory of economic, social, cultural, and symbolic capital as primary forces in the reproduction of social inequality has served as a basis for much contemporary scholarship on poverty." Bourdieu believes capital is transmitted from one generation to the next. In other words, those whose families lack capital will, themselves, lack capital and those whose families have an abundance of resources, they too will be in abundance. Based on Bourdieu's assumptions, there is a correlation between wealth and academic success as well as a correlation between poverty and failure. The problem with

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[216] Yara Yasso, "Whose Culture Has Capital? A Critical Race Theory Discussion of Community Cultural Wealth" *Race, Education, and Ethnicity* 8, no.1 (2005): 69-91.

[217] Kerry Woodward, "The Relevance of Bourdieu's Concepts for Studying the Intersections of Poverty, Race, and Culture," in *The Oxford Handbook of Pierre Bourdieu,* eds. by Thomas Medvetz and Jeffrey J. (April 2018).

Bourdieu's assumptions is that society has decided whose capital is worthy, which is where the implications for Yosso's research comes in.

According to Yosso, Bourdieu's description of cultural capital places value on one's education, social networks, language, and other material possessions. Yosso outlines six additional forms of cultural capital[218] she felt needed to be considered in order to better understand the experiences of marginalized communities (most often communities of color): social capital, familial capital, linguistic capital, resistant capital, navigational capital, and aspirational capital.[219] These alternative forms of capital nurtured within communities of color serve as an appropriate lens for analyzing the experiences of the Atlanta 9 students who possessed an abundance of "alternative" wealth gained within their families and communities prior to integrating APS.

While Bourdieu's (1986) cultural capital concept underscores the economic, cultural, and social resources valued by the dominant class, Yosso's community cultural wealth concept includes the resources, perspectives, experiences, and voices of the nondominant social classes.[220] Woodward credits Tara Yosso with making Bourdieu's theory more practical for understanding the lives of those less valued by society.[221] In Yosso's *Whose Community has Capital*, she builds on Bourdieu's "cultural capital" theory as a form of wealth and challenges traditional interpretations of the theory by introducing a more inconclusive concept entitled,

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[218] Capital is defined as knowledge, skills, and abilities. Tara Yasso, "Whose Culture Has Capital? A Critical Race Theory Discussion of Community Cultural Wealth" Race, Education, and Ethnicity 8, no.1(2005): 69-91.

[219] Woodward, "Relevance of Bourdieu."

[220] Yosso, Whose Culture Has Capital, 181.

[221] Woodward, "Relevance of Bourdieu."

"community cultural wealth." Yosso's concept recognizes and acknowledges the assets of underutilized populations, "These forms of capital draw on the knowledges Students of Color bring with them from their homes and communities in their classrooms."[222]

In the past, the experiences of Black people were described using cultural deficit models.[223] The purpose of incorporating community cultural wealth in this study is to better understand and explain the experiences of the participants whose cultural assets were clearly evident during their journey. This research also gives voice and context to the vast wealth within the Black community, which is not always included in historical narratives. Additionally, Yosso's community cultural wealth model gives context to the fortitude and resilience of the Atlanta students. The students' ability to endure was more than a coincidence and should not be minimized as such.[224] "Rather than trivializing aspects of students' backgrounds, Yosso's framework identifies how those aspects of the students' lives provide value to their experiences."[225]

Community cultural wealth gives a broader lens for viewing the value of marginalized communities. With Yosso's six forms of capital, the model offers the strengths-based language

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[222] Yosso, Whose Culture Has Capital, 18

[223] Diana H. Kirk & Susan Goon. Desegregation and the Cultural Deficit Model: An Examination of the Literature." *Review of Educational Research, no. 4(1975): 599-600.* "The cultural deficit literature is concerned with explaining why it seems that low-income minority groups have not acquired American middle-class attitudes, values, and behaviors. The problem, according to the literature, arises from the lack of contact low-income minority group children have with the American middle-class, especially within the schools during the children's formative years. It is assumed that this contact will alleviate the problem. 6

[224] Holland says, "Rather than trivializing aspects of students' backgrounds, this framework identifies how those aspects of the students' lives provide value to their experiences." Nicole Holland, "Beyond Conventional Wisdom: Community Cultural Wealth and the College Knowledge of African American Youth in the United States," *Race Ethnicity and Education* 20, no.6 (2017): 796.

[225] Nicole Holland, "Beyond Conventional Wisdom: Community Cultural Wealth and the College Knowledge of African American Youth in the United States," *Race Ethnicity and Education* 20, no.6 (2017): 796.

researchers lacked when trying to describe certain traditions, dialects, and family structures found in communities of color.

Forms of Cultural Wealth- Aspirational and Resistance Capital

The aspirational and resistance capital of Yosso's community cultural wealth model stands out most. Resistance capital refers to, "those knowledge and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality."[226]Seeing the impact college students were having on the movement for equality inspired Thomas.

> The tenor of the times. In 1961 the Civil Rights Movement was in its heyday. Voting rights, the right to shop and eat and to participate as a full citizen of the United States was a right that I was prepared to fight for. I thought this is my opportunity to participate, make an impact, and further the cause.[227]

While Thomas recalled the nonviolent sit-ins initiated by college students as resistance capital that inspired him to transfer, Mary remembers feeling anxiety when she saw the boycotts, lynchings, and violent protests happening throughout the south during school integration, "that whole period as I look back on it, I was operating on adrenaline. There was so much stress on me and I imagine on the others, but we were doing what we had to do to gain access to the resources that others were getting. We were no different and no less. This is what we had to remember when times got difficult."[228] The Atlanta 9 undoubtedly applied their resistance capital from family members and community members to survive. Each of the Atlanta 9 students possessed a

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[226] Yosso, Whose Culture Has Capital, 180.

[227] Thomas Welch, interview.

[228] Mary Francis, interview.

historical legacy of participating in social justice and they applied their family resistance capital and community resistance capital to help them.[229]

Yosso defines aspirational capital as, "the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers." [230]Living in the heart of the modern Civil Rights Movement and amongst a plethora of Black middle-class families, clergy, media, and entrepreneurs, the Atlanta 9 were as familiar with ambition and success as they were violence and hostility. "I saw the Civil Rights activities going on around me within the Atlanta University Center. My parents owned a television and my brother and I watched the national news. I heard and saw the negative interaction between races and images of what could happen. There were meetings with the Atlanta Police Department, the GBI, and the FBI but I did not fear for my personal safety." Madelyn and Thomas were surrounded by exemplars of social justice, which made standing up to injustice unavoidable, even while pursuing their "hopes and dreams." During one incident, Madelyn knew she was not welcomed in her English class and was told such by the teacher. Regardless, she was determined to receive what she earned and she demanded the teacher recognize her efforts. While enduring microaggressions from teachers and classmates, Madelyn's aspirational success helped her to persevere, "there was pressure from the White community telling us we were not good enough and we would not succeed." The snubs were designed to intimidate Madelyn and make her feel inferior, but the insults did not work. "I loved education, so I did not feel a lot of pressure and I kept my anger to myself."[231] Madelyn's

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[229] Yosso, Whose Culture Has Capital, 178.

[230] Yosso, Whose Culture Has Capital, 178.

[231] Madelyn Nix, interview.

aspirational capital empowered her to forge ahead and earn scholarships to Spelman (Undergraduate), Emory (Law School) and Fordham University (M.B.A).

Familial Capital

Similar to aspirational capital, the participants demonstrated **familial capital** when discussing the immediate and historical significance of their actions. According to Yosso,[232] this form of cultural wealth carries "a sense of community history, memory, and cultural intuition." They felt the strength of the Black community validating and backing their efforts when they were selected. The pressure was great but the students felt the need to make the sacrifice not merely for themselves but for generations of Blacks before and after them. The familial capital made up of biological and extended family members also helped the students counteract the daily isolation they felt being in a hostile environment. All of the participants used family resources to transcend the adversity they experienced during the integration experiment. "I had lots of support from the president of Morehouse College, Dr. Benjamin E. Mays, down to the students on campus who would come out to see me off when the police arrived to pick me up in the mornings and bring me home in the afternoons."[233]

Thomas credits his sense of self-worth to the familial capital obtained from his working-class family, which valued education, integrity, and spirituality, "my father had ownership in two service stations, and he worked very hard. For my mother and my father there was no question, I had to go to school, and we were in church every Sunday. We were going to be successful and

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[232] Yosso, Whose Culture Has Capital, 177.

[233] Madelyn Nix, interview

my parents saw to that."[234] Thomas also gained familial capital from allies like Hamilton Holmes and Charlayne Hunter Gault, who integrated UGA six months earlier than APS. Holmes and Gault met with the Atlanta 9 the summer prior to integrating APS. On top of that, community members and friends from Thomas's former Black school were supportive of one another. "I didn't have any fear. There were, community-based and church-based movers, very quietly, helping to make it work. I don't want to overstate the mood but there was this mass hysteria. But, I had a sense of self-worth that got me through."[235]

Social Capital

Yosso's **social capital** refers to the access that students of color have within their own networks[236] that helped them thrive in segregated communities prior to *Brown v.Board of Education.*[237] Vanessa Siddle Walker's study of the Caswell County Training School in North Carolina, underscored the significance of the Black community, whose traditions and rituals helped encourage students' self-worth, "to remember segregated schools largely by recalling their poor resources presents a historically incomplete picture…the environment of the segregated school had affective traits, institutional policies, and community support that helped

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[234] Thomas Welch, interview.

[235] Thomas Welch, interview.

[236] At one time, when the Atlanta school system was established teachers didn't even need a bachelor's degree to teach, but Booker T. Washington High school's principal, Charles Lincoln Harper, required every teacher on staff have at least a bachelor's or graduate degree in order to teach the black students there." Interview with Kathy Loving.

[237] Yosso explains how "deficit scholars" focus on the lack of 'cultural literacy' within communities of color and use a deficit lens to judge and analyze the experiences of students of color, "This shifting of the research lens allows critical race scholars to 'see' multiple forms of cultural wealth within Communities of Color." Source: Yosso, "Whose Culture Has Capital," 180-1. "

Black children learn in spite of the neglect their schools received from White school boards."[238] Likewise, by the time students like Martha arrived at formerly all-White Murphy High School, she was more than confident, "we had a lot of help and encouragement from black businessmen and our teachers as well, they told us 'you go and represent us well."[239] Hence, the peer networks and community resources, that make up their social capital were an invaluable form of emotional support for the participants, "even though it was hard, and there was troubles, and you know, I missed out on a lot of things that I would have had a change to do had I been at Howard, [the Black school]. I just never thought of going back. Never thought of going back."[240]

Navigational Capital

Yosso's **navigational capital** allowed the students to master two separate worlds, one of which was purposely created to exclude communities of color. Navigational capital connotes the resources and strategies the students employed to "maneuver through structures of inequality permeated by racism." One day while sitting in class, Martha's navigational capital kicked in, "once in social studies class, I wore my hair curly all over, and I kept feeling these thumps, and it turns out that a boy in class was tossing little wire fishing nails. And when I went to brush my hair, there were several [nails] falling out on the desk."[241] Martha grew accustomed to the unfriendliness and malice at Murphy High.

The community cultural wealth framework helps us understand and appreciate the Atlanta 9 students and their experiences using a strengths-based perspective. Sometimes

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[238] Siddle Walker, Their Highest Potential, 3.

[239] Rosalyn Walton Lees, interview with Thomas Kuhn.

[240] Martha Holmes-Jackson, interview with Thomas Kuhn.

[241] Martha Holmes-Jackson, interview with Thomas Kuhn.

researchers inadvertently or even deliberately use deficit theories to interpret people's stories. According to Cate Samuelson & Elizabeth Litzler, deficit-based theorizing is often applied by those in power as a frame of reference for those who are less powerful. "Groups who lack the characteristics of the group in power are assumed to be 'less than."[242] For instance, Shawn Harper, in his research on minority students in STEM programs found that, "most empirical studies amplify minority student failure and deficits instead of achievement."[243]This study strives to portray a narrative more authentic to the students' ordeal, illustrating their stamina, their preparedness, and their boldness in spite of any anxiety they were feeling. When researchers employ deficit models, the focus is on the weaknesses rather than the strengths of the group, which affects how the group is perceived by others. Yosso's community cultural wealth construct connotes the strengths the Atlanta 9 brought to the integration process.

The students' ability to endure and to thrive in White schools was more than a coincidence and it should not be minimized as such. The cultural wealth and internal fortitude the students possessed should not go unnoticed.[244] "From their decision to apply all the way to their graduation, the students leveraged the cultural wealth developed in their families and communities to navigate their contentious White environments. The Atlanta 9 students may have carried themselves gracefully but their restrained response to the ugliness they experienced was an example of multiple forms of capital and should not go unnoticed. Their nonviolent response

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[242] Cate C. Samuelson and Litzler, Elizabeth. *"Community Cultural Wealth: An Assets-Based Approach to Persistence of Engineering Students of Color." Journal of Engineering Education 105*, no. 1 (2016): 93-117. Doi: 10.1002/jee.20110

[243] Shaun R. Harper, An Anti-Deficit Achievement Framework for Research on Students of Color in STEM." *New Directions for Institutional Research*, no. 148 (Winter 2010): 63-74, Doi: 10.1002/ir. 362.

[244] Holland, "Beyond Conventional Wisdom," 796.

to the microaggressions from teachers and peers did not always come naturally and required extreme restraint for the participants not to respond in kind to their offenders. Their actions were necessary and intentional, and they should be heralded. The Atlanta 9 students shied away from the limelight for 60 years and have gone on to have thriving lives, free from bitterness and regret, but their memories clearly illustrate a strong reliance on the wealth gained from their communities as a means of survival. The history of the Atlanta 9 is credible and deserves its rightful place in Atlanta's local history. Even for those who possessed the economic capital, it was the cultural wealth that contributed to their ability to persevere.

Five Profiles of Cultural Wealth

Madelyn's Cultural Wealth

"We knew our real friends and former teachers were still available to us." -Madelyn Nix

Madelyn Nix grew up on the campus of Morehouse College, which is an all-Black male college in Atlanta. Her father was the dean of students for the college and her mother was a homemaker. Madelyn had one younger sibling who did not apply to transfer. Madelyn was an A student. Madelyn not only possessed the economic capital that many in the dominant group possessed (i.e., wealth), she also had the educational capital and "community cultural wealth"[245] of the Black community (aspirational, navigational, and resistant), which gave her an even greater advantage. "I had a unique situation living on the Morehouse College campus. I had lots of support from the president of the college, Dr. Benjamin Mays, down to the students on campus."[246]

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[245] Yasso, "Whose Culture Has Capital? A Critical Race Theory Discussion of Community Cultural Wealth" Race, Education, and Ethnicity 8, no.1(2005): 69-91.

[246] Madelyn Nix, interview.

Mary's Cultural Wealth

"When I was little, and someone had hurt my feelings she told me you never let them see you cry. She [my mom] never showed any fear." -Mary Francis

Mary grew up in the Fourth Ward's Grady Homes housing projects in a working-class home with three younger siblings whom she helped to raise. Her mother was a homemaker and her father worked in a warehouse. She attended Our Lady of Lords, a Catholic elementary school and the neighborhood high school designated for Blacks. Grady High School was inconveniently located over four miles from Mary's home, which is why her initial reason for applying was to be with her friends. "I had not heard of Henry Grady [school]. I applied to transfer to Grady because of classmates. I said it won't be as bad because I'll have my friends with me." Her education at Howard High had suited her fine and prepared her well for the transfer. Weeks later when Mary learned she was the only one of her friends to advance to the next step, the loneliness sank in but the support of her family forced her to continue. Mary's memory of how she felt amidst the application and enrollment process was extremely detailed. She recalled going to school, receiving the cold shoulder, being insulted by other students, and having to follow her mother's advice and not cry in front of others at school. As soon as she saw her mother at the end of the school day, the tears broke through. Mary exhaled, "all day long it's sitting there, just sitting there. And then when she [mom] got off that bus from work, when I heard her feet, it was like the damn broke." But it was not just her mother's strength that came in handy as she walked the halls of Grady.

Mary credits her family with shielding her from the cruelty of others during her integration experience. She described her transfer to Grady as a family sacrifice because the decision affected her entire household and required everybody to be courageous when they

received threats and harassing phone calls. One of Mary's painful recollections was her father's experience at work. Mr. McMullen had a 4th-grade education. He was good at math and an avid reader of the newspaper. When her father's supervisor at the Lay's Potato Chip Company learned of Mary's role in desegregating the schools, he was not pleased.

> My sister told me that he [father] had gotten into an argument at work about me. And they had suspended him. I wondered why he wasn't going to work. He never told me, I found out later. They did everything they could just to let that year pass. They didn't want to worry me. Everybody in our little group, all of them protected me. There was nothing negative that came towards me. I was to be left alone.

Mary also spoke of her six-year-old brother, who answered the phone at the end of her first day of school. "There was this White man on the phone telling him that if I went to school and went through with those plans of going to school he was going to blow up the whole building. And he never told me [until later]." When recalling how even her little brother accepted the job of protecting her during this era, the interview became emotional. There was a pause and a break in Mary's voice, but she remained poised and completely held herself together. She had tears there, but they never left her eyes.

"Once their names and addresses were published in the newspapers everybody in our little group protected me. They did everything they could just to let that year pass. I was to be left alone and they didn't tell me certain things to protect me from worry and upset her and for that I'm grateful. They never let anybody step in that bubble. Nothing negative came towards

me."[247] She says she would never have survived the lonely stay at Grady without her network of family and community.

Roselyn's Cultural Wealth

"I pushed it out of mind a long time ago…it was just a bad time. I did it and I'm glad, but it wasn't a happy time." -Rosalyn Walton[248]

After her father died, Rosalyn Walton-Lees was raised by her single mother and older brother in a working-class home. She is the middle of five children. Rosalyn's reason for applying to an all-White school was to remain beside her friends, all of whom had decided to apply together. For Rosalyn and her friends, transferring to a White school was an opportunity to obtain a better education. They were on a mission to change the world. But what began as a group effort quickly became a one-woman show. Fortunately, or unfortunately for Mrs. Walton-Lees, she was the only one in her group to gain acceptance. Although Rosalyn's friends did not make the cut, she transferred anyway and became what she described as a "representation" of all smart Black children. It was heartbreaking for Rosalyn to leave behind her friends, but she was determined to finish alone what she and her peers originally set out to do together. It took time for Rosalyn to figure out how to cope after leaving her friends behind. She thought it would become easier, but it never did. She maintained friendships with the students at her former Black school where she opted to participate in the senior activities. She did not engage in activities at her White school because she did not feel welcomed. While Rosalyn had few positive memories about her experience, she still harbored no regrets about her decision to transfer.

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[247] Francis, interview.

[248] Walton, interview.

Martha's Cultural Wealth

"Church people were all supportive, community people were supportive. We were a small-knit group and they encouraged and always said we proud of you and we know you can do it."

-Martha Holmes

Martha Holmes-Jackson grew up the youngest of five children in what she refers to as a poor area in Atlanta. Her dad was a self-employed carpenter and her mother was a domestic worker. She was elected vice president of the Student Government Association and was an active member of the band at her Black school but had to relinquish those honors when she transferred to her White school. The adjustment was difficult for Martha who remembered being shoved and insulted in the hallways.

Martha's inspiration for wanting to transfer came from civic leaders who urged her to consider it, "they pretty much encouraged us to apply, saying that we were just as good as White students. We just weren't given the same opportunities. Having this level of community support boosted Martha's hopes and convinced her that she could succeed. Academics were not a factor because she had already proven herself an excellent test taker, which she credits as a major reason for being chosen. "I guess without sounding too cocky, we were smart."[249]

Growing up amidst segregation taught Mary that there was always somewhere to find help and encouragement and that there was rarely time to complain or wallow in victimhood when bad things happened. It was Martha's extended network of supporters living all throughout her block which helped instill this idea within her.

Thomas's Cultural Wealth

[249] Holmes, interview.

"I was living in a solid, nurturing African American culture. People will tell you that we thought not only did we think that we were good, we thought we were better. Whether it was true or not, what was important was that you believed that." -Thomas Welch

Thomas Welch's motivation for applying to integrate the schools was the ROTC program at the White school, which his Black school did not offer. Thomas, who grew up on the west side of Atlanta, had lots of cultural capital behind him that contributed to his ability to navigate both segregated and integrated settings. Mr. Welch grew up in what he describes as a working-class home with middle-class values. He was the oldest of seven children who regularly babysat for siblings and younger relatives. Although his father ran several gas stations and allowed him to help out, Mr. Welch's father insisted that he attend college rather than settle into running the gas stations.

Regardless of the perks acquired by the Welch family, Thomas was reluctant to label his family "middle class," preferring the term "working class" instead. Thomas maintained, "my father never had a middle-class income, what they did have were solid middle-class values, values for education, values for integrity." Thomas was dissuaded from learning a trade like his father for fear it would take away from his concentration on education. Thus, one of the family's "middle class" values was their emphasis on formal schooling rather than mastering a skill. The impression Thomas provided was that parents believed "working class" people honed their craft and performed manual jobs, albeit respectful, while "middle class" people focused on sharpening their brains and furthering their mental skills. The idea of self-worth was repeated throughout Thomas's interview. Leaving behind Washington High School meant leaving behind a protective African American community that helped shape who he had become. But rather than dwell on

the sadness of leaving, Thomas used the energy to help him survive the nine challenging months at his White school.

When Yosso conceived the community cultural capital framework she helped to expand what was considered capital, giving more value to the experiences of the Atlanta 9 students. The greatest academic challenge for the Atlanta 9 was not the content itself but leaving behind their teachers and friends who had provided a foundation of discipline and love that they had grown accustomed to in their segregated Black schools. Vanessa Siddle-Walker refers to this as "the unintended consequences" of segregation.[250] The Atlanta 9 had received quality instruction in supportive, close-knit environments that celebrated their culture and talents more authentically than in predominantly White schools. This culturally-responsive teaching and support happened during decades of neglect and isolation in a segregated environment. In spite of racial oppression and education inequities, the Atlanta 9 embodied strong cultural assets acquired from their Black families and communities. Leaving their black institutions, communities, and friends behind was agonizing but the cultural wealth the Atlanta 9 embodied helped to prepare and strengthen them. There is a vast amount to be learned from the skills, knowledge, and networks the Atlanta 9 embraced. Tara Yosso's aspirational, resistance, familial, navigational, and social capital was the perfect framework for understanding and interpreting the experiences of the Atlanta 9.

Theme Two: Double Consciousness Theme

W. E. B. Du Bois's[251] idea of double consciousness is reflected in the Atlanta 9's descriptions of their experiences throughout chapter four. Double consciousness theory is a lens

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[250] Vanessa Siddle-Walker "Valued Segregated African American Children in the South, 1935-1969: A Review of Common Themes and Characteristics" *Review of Educational Research 70*, no.3 (2000): 254.

[251] William Edward Burghardt (W.E.B.) DuBois, *Souls of Black Folk* (A. C. McClurg: Chicago, 1903): 2.

for understanding and explaining the experiences of the Atlanta 9. In the *Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois describes the struggles of Blacks,

One ever feels his twoness, an American, a Negro: two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being asunder.[252]

This idea of "splitting oneself into two" is a concept rarely mentioned in previous literature on school desegregation. W. E. B. Du Bois's dual consciousness discovery came about during a critical moment in his childhood when one of his White playmates refused to trade cards with him. Du Bois described suddenly realizing he was different and that he was not a part of the White world. Du Bois's first known mention of double consciousness appeared in his 1903 book of essays, *The Souls of Black Folk,* where he described the "strife" of the American Negro (p. 2). He used double consciousness to explain the struggle that Blacks experienced in trying to reconcile their identities as Blacks with their identities as Americans.

W.E.B. Du Bois's theory revolves around the belief that marginalized outsiders blended themselves into the dominant world by adopting dual identities for survival. "He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of opportunity closed roughly in his face."[253] Du Bois suggests that it was inevitable for Black Americans to embody two identities as they simultaneously participated in American culture and Black culture. Whether they were conscious of it or not, Blacks were forced to live dual lives as both Americans and Blacks. Du Bois asserts

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[252] DuBois, Souls of Black Folk, 2.

[253] Du Bois, Souls of Black Folk, 3.

that it was not the desire of Blacks to compromise either aspect of their identify because they identified with and were entitled to both, and "in his merging, he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost."[254] Likewise, the challenge for the Atlanta 9 was figuring out how to be a part of both worlds, Black and White, even when one of those worlds refused to acknowledge their humanity.

When explaining his Double Consciousness Theory, Du Bois uses the "veil" metaphor to symbolize the divide between Blacks and Whites.[255] He argues that Black people lived behind this veil in an entirely different world apart from their White counterparts. And while Whites did not seek to understand Black humanity and life behind the veil,[256] Blacks were tasked with the burden of understanding and mastering how to be members of the "White world."

The Atlanta 9 students were a part of two very different worlds. The White world consisted of resources and opportunities the Black students sought when they applied to transfer. This White school world was considered superior and exclusive, as evidenced by the process that was required to gain access. The process included: applications, tests, and interviews. The Black world had its own wealth, but not always the kind of wealth valued or appreciated by mainstream White society. Black wealth consisted of strong family ties, nurturing community networks, community values and norms, and qualified teachers who understood the individual

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[254] Du Bois, Souls of Black Folk, 2.

[255] Du Bois, Souls of Black Folk, 1.

[256] Tayebeh Nowrouzi and Sophella Faghfori, "Am I an African or an American? Duboisian Double Consciousness in a Raisin in the Sun," *International Journal of Applied Linguistics and English Literature,* 4 no. 3 (2015): 174-180.; Ellen. Daugherty, "Negotiating the Veil," *American Art* 24, no. 3 (2010): 52-77.; Lynn England & Keith Warner, "W. E. B. DuBois: Reform, Will, and the Veil," *Social Forces* 91, no. 3 (2013): 955-973.

needs of Black children.[257] The White world of schooling had more material resources, such as superior science laboratories, up-to-date textbooks, and access to advanced courses and equipment.

Research suggests the "veil" analogy has multiple meanings with both negative and positive implications. Howard Winant's[258] explanation hints that the veil is a paradoxical symbol of oppression and empowerment for Blacks, "he did not only seek to lift the veil…he was also searching for a means to transform the veil." In this transformation, the veil is a curse that separated the races and a blessing that shields and preserves the culture and identity of the Black race. While relegated to life behind the veil, Blacks learned to make the most of their circumstances by working together, building their own institutions, and preparing to infiltrate a world determined to keep them marginalized, which came with a price. At times Blacks found themselves caught in the middle feeling isolated from both the Black world and the White world.

Throughout the integration process, the students steadfastly held on to the culture, values, and identities of their Black families and communities, which helped them adapt and excel at the integrated White schools. Their double consciousness became the gift that Du Bois describes, "after the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuto and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world."[259] The students expressed having no desire to completely assimilate into the White culture they had

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[257] Vanessa Siddle-Walker, *Their Highest Potential: An African-American School Community in the Segregated South (*Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina, 1996).

[258] Howard Winant, H. *The New Politics of Race: Globalism, Difference, Justice* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).

[259] Du Bois, Souls of Black Folk, 3.

entered in 1961. They merely wanted the basic privileges of an excellent education, which they believed they had a greater chance of acquiring at the White schools.

> I thought the textbooks were more current at Brown. In my view, newer does not necessarily mean better, but in this case, it meant better…A big reason for me wanting to go to Brown High was so I could take an ROTC class, which they didn't offer at Washington High. I became an ROTC squad leader and taught drill techniques that I'd learned from my elder African American role models…I did notice that the classrooms were, for example, better equipped. I took a physics class and they had all kinds of equipment that I'd never seen when we were talking about space flights and rocket ships.[260]

The participants in this study, the Atlanta 9 students, allude to the "strife" that comes with dividing oneself into two. The students recalled the good and the bad that came with leaving their all Black high schools to integrate the White schools during their senior year. They remembered feeling like "tokens" who were chosen and tolerated because of a court mandate. As proud as the Atlanta 9 were about being Black, they were aware of how the White world viewed them, "this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity."[261] The two worlds the Atlanta 9 experienced were evident throughout their narratives when they explained the application process, when they described walking through newly integrated hallways, and when they discussed their daily experiences returning back home to their Black communities. The

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[260] Welch, interview.

[261] Du Bois, Souls of Black Folk, 2.

Atlanta 9 figured out how to survive and excel socially, politically, and emotionally in two different worlds.

Theme Three: Resilience

Dr. Vanessa Siddle Walker portrays the black educational model during the segregated schools era as one where black children experience interpersonal and institutional caring with Black parents who trusted teachers to provide their children with a solid educational foundation.[262] She argues that Black teachers believed in teaching the whole child and saw the child as more important than the content being taught. During the pre-Brown era, segregated Black schools were also tasked with equipping students for the hostilities they would face beyond their school years. "Black schools gave counter messages that prepared the students for the real world."[263]Black teachers understood the role resilience would play. "Curriculum for African American educators [during segregation] is a form of resistance. They are attempting to build resilience in these children."[264]

The American Psychological Association defines resilience as, "the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or significant sources of stress. It means bouncing back from difficult experience."[265]The Atlanta 9 students' ability to cope and bounce

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[262] Note: During the segregated era, many Black teachers held credentials that far exceeded white teachers. Vanessa Siddle Walker. "Historical American Pedagogical Model of Education: Reclaiming the Vision." Lecture at 23rd Annual Benjamin E. Mays Lecture, Alonzo Crim Educational Center, Atlanta, Georgia. Fall, 2011.

[263] Siddle Walker, "Pedagogical Model." Fall, 2011.

[264] Vanessa Siddle Walker, V. "Continuing Problems And Forgotten Solutions: Resurrecting The Historical Resistance Strategies of Southern African American School Leaders." 2nd Annual Edmund Gordon Lecture, Educating Harlem Lecture Series, Teachers College Columbia University, New York, New York. Fall, 2014.

[265] American Psychological Association. "Road to Resilience." Washington, D.C., 2019

back from the resistance and rejection they experienced during this process was a result of the strength they gained behind the "veiled" walls of their Black communities. Resilience has been a hallmark of African American culture since 1619, when the first slave ship arrived in Virginia.[266] Take Mary for instance, when she learned that she was the only one of her friends to advance to the next step, the loneliness sank in, but the support of her family forced her to continue. She recalled going to school, receiving the cold shoulder, being insulted by other students, and having to follow her mother's advice and not cry in front of others at school, "all day long it's sitting there, just sitting there. And then when she [mom] got off that bus from work, when I heard her feet, it was like the damn broke." Her mother's strength came in handy as Mary walked the halls of Grady. She says she would never have survived the lonely stay at Grady without it. Mary admits being nervous, but her fears did not stand a chance given the cultural capital (strength, courage, intellect) she received from her family and community.

The resistance to integration happened at the hand of Whites mostly, but there were encounters with some Blacks who also made the participants feel rejected. Although Mary felt protected by Blacks, she was initially not sure what to make of their response to her decision to transfer to Grady. Mary noted,

> I just remember how it was quiet and nobody said anything. How was your first day? It was as though they didn't care to know. There may have been some who were disappointed in themselves that they didn't even try to go because they thought it was going to be horrible.[267]

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[266] Bethany Jay & Cynthia Lynn Lylerly, *Teaching American Slavery*, (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2016).

[267] Mary Francis, interview.

She further rationalized that perhaps the people in her community felt guilty that she had accepted the challenge and they did not. Or maybe they were imagining the worse and could not bear to know what she was experiencing. By the end of the year, she knew Blacks wanted her to do well. The reactions of some Blacks in Mary's community symbolized the tensions and diverse perspectives within the Black community. Du Bois debated Booker T. Washington over the best means for Blacks to go about achieving civil rights and racial equality. Both individuals had the support of Blacks in the community with Washington supporting a more "conciliatory" approach and Du Bois espousing a more integrationist framework.[268] Their ideas were evident during this desegregation period as Blacks sought access to quality schools. Du Bois, himself, seemed conflicted later in life over the merits of segregation once he left the NAACP, "to endure bad schools and wrong education because schools are 'mixed' is a costly, if not fatal, mistake."[269] Yet, the Atlanta 9 forged ahead and changed the APS district.

Tokenism

"The Whites are patting themselves on the backs because nine of the city's fifty thousand negro children are going to integrated schools without any violence."[270]

According to the literature, the term token integration emerged as, "a way to describe deliberate efforts to keep racial integration at a minimum. Token integration has essentially the

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[268] David Blatty, "W.E.B. Du Bois, Booker T. Washington, and the Origins of the Civil Rights Movement," *Biography.com, A&E Networks Television (*April 13,2015). https://www.biography.com/news/web-dubois-vs-booker-t-washington

[269] W.E.B. Du Bois, "Does the negro need separate schools?" *The Journal of Negro Education* 4, no. 3 (1935): 328-335

[270] These words were conveyed during a radio interview with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Karel Kyncl, a radio correspondent from Czechoslavak conducted the interview. The topic of discussion was the progress that southern cities made towards ending segregation. Source: Martin Luther King Jr., "Transforming Token Integration into Good Faith, interview with Karel Kyncl, March 15, 1963. https://www.radio.cz/en/section/archives/transforming-token-integration-into-good-faith-martin-luther-king-talks-to-czechoslovak-radio-1

same goal as massive resistance, it seeks to preserve, in effect, the established pattern of segregation."[271] Tokenism is, "the practice of cherry-picking a handful of societally underrepresented individuals, as a perfunctory effort to appear diverse and representative of the larger society." Most would say the city used the Atlanta 9 as a way to continue its massive resistance to integration, "The formal exercise of freedom of choice was restricted to a small number of highly qualified Black students."[272]The nine docile, albeit effective, students chosen would cause no problems. They would suppress their emotions, and they would make Atlanta look better than it actually was. Even Dr. King weighed in, "yes, I think we must recognize that two or three things are developing which can be dangerous if they are not dealt with. One is a trend toward token integration – that is having one or a few Negroes in a situation and calling it integrated."[273] In other words, Atlanta was getting far too much credit for uniting Black and White students when the city's actions amounted to little more than a "public relations coup."[274] By placing nine students across the city in four different schools, the city was adhering to the legal mandate, which is all that seemed to matter.

When talking to the Atlanta 9 students, I struggled with how to discuss their role as "tokens" in Atlanta's attempt to circumvent true integration. All throughout the literature, "tokenism" in its various contexts, carries negative implications and the evils of token integration

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[271] Kenneth Moreland, *"Token Integration and Beyond."* Southern Regional Council. Anti-Defamation League. B'nai B'rith. June 1963.

[272] Matthew Lassiter, The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South. Politics and Society in *Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2007), 105.

[273] Martin Luther King Jr., "Transforming Token Integration into Good Faith, " radio interview with Karel Kyncl, March 1963.

[274] Frances Freeborn Pauley *"Georgia Women their Lives and Times"* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press), 225.

are well documented, especially in critiques of *Brown v. Board of Education* (1956), where districts like Atlanta, are highlighted for slowly and strategically integrating its school district in order to appease segregationists.

I approached the topic of tokenism with trepidation because I wanted the Atlanta 9 to be seen as more than symbols, pawns, or mementos. I wanted the strength and dignity of their experience to shine through as more than the footnote. I wanted to make sure they got credit for the pressures that come with "representing" the entire Black community, which is essentially what they did.

Ironically, the five students interviewed for this research had no delusions about why they were chosen to integrate APS and being referred to as tokens. "As a university center for more than 50 years, Atlanta has a large pool of high-quality negro leadership. These educated men and women create a different, more acceptable image than White people in most other southern cities see."[275] Regardless of how some saw them, the Atlanta 9 saw the big picture of what they were setting out to accomplish. "If I had to do it all over again, I would do so, without a doubt. This was our chance to participate. We couldn't do what the college students were doing so this was our way to bring change, "declared Thomas.[276] For Mary, regardless of the challenges, it was necessary, because change was needed and they were the ones in the right position at the right time to bring change.[277]

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[275] Helen Fuller. 1958, *New Republic 140 (5): 8-11.*

[276] Welch, interview.

[277] Francis, interview.

The shrewd students knew the political, social and economic factors at stake. As reserved as their demeanors were, their resolve and passion for school equity was just as intense as the more militant students. While some Blacks in their communities disagreed with the Atlanta 9 students' decisions to leave, the students themselves saw this as their form of rebellion and protest. Token integration was a form of demonstration and resistance to inequality that was needed just as much as boycotts, marches, and lunch counter sit-ins.

The students experienced the blessings and curses of their pioneering actions. At times, they were caught between a divided Black community that loved and supported the students and the leaders who resented the NAACP for accepting a one-way integration plan, that placed the burden of segregation on Black children. For those dissenting Black leaders, integration minimized the cultural, social, and historical experiences of Black children. Integration also placed less emphasis on equalization of funding for Black schools, that would have increased teacher pay, professional development, and classroom resources.[278] The quiet integration of APS even warranted comments from Dr. Martin Luther King who felt it was not enough to present the symbolic appearance of integration without a meaningful commitment to justice. Dr. King expressed his discontent with what he termed "negative peace." "The White moderate, who is more devoted to order than to justice, who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension, to a positive peace which is the presences of justice"[279] is a greater liability for Blacks.

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[278] In his essay, "Does he Negro need separate schools," Du Bois argues that the responsibiliety doesn't' lie merely with Whites. Du Bois argued that if Blacks really believes in themselves they would insist also, "he would insist that his teachers be decently paid; that his schools were properly housed and equipped; that his colleges be supplied with scholarship and research funds; and he would be far more interested in the efficiency of these institutions of learning, than in forcing himself into other institutions where he is not wanted. Source: W.E.B. Du Bois, "Does the Negro Need Separate Schools, *The Journal of Negro Education* 4, no. 3 (July 1935): 331

[279] "Martin Luther King, Jr. *Letter from a Birmingham Jail* April 16, 1963

Regardless of any controversy surrounding their transfers, the Atlanta 9 forged ahead and made Atlanta's racial situation better in the process. Many great accomplishments came about because of the Atlanta 9 who built the foundation for later integration efforts. I am reminded of the scholar who once posed the questions:

> Many agree that the implementation of *Brown* could have been better executed, but where then do we start? If integrating the schools with just nine students was the wrong way to carry out the Brown decision, should the NAACP have rejected the Pupil Placement Plan and held out for more? Since we had to start somewhere, where should that have been?[280]

For the Atlanta 9, the answer of where best to start was applying for transfer.

> The optimism of Dr. King, who at times showed contempt for tokenism, seems an appropriate way to end this, "no southern community has really gone all out with a program of desegregation, and this it seems to me is the job ahead, to transform token integration into good faith compliance and integration."

Changing systemic injustice from the inside out, dispelling stereotypes held by others about Black intelligence, and displaying bravery in the face of hostility is how the Atlanta 9 students carried out Dr. King's vision of transformation. Unfortunately, all but one of the students completed the arduous journey.

Theme Four: Personal Sacrifices

"*A Negro parent seeking to assert his child's constitutional rights to attend a desegregated school in some sections of the South must have unlimited courage, resources, time, and energy to*

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[280] Kristen Buras, "*Brown*, Integration Ideals, and Interest Convergence" (lecture, Georgia State University, Atlanta, March 2, 2016).

litigate with the massed power of the state. He must also be prepared to face economic, and, sometimes, physical sanctions."[281] -Law Professor at the University of North Carolina

Political leaders accepted undue credit for Atlanta acting like "the city too busy to hate" during this process, while the students carried the burden of the experiment. "After several more days passed without incident, the journalists left town, the schools returned to normal, and a proud city basked in the afterglow of the national spotlight."[282]

The Atlanta 9 suffered personal losses and made many sacrifices. Much of what they had to say is akin to the experiences of other students that integrated White schools, but there is something unique and special about the Atlanta ordeal. Perhaps it is the fact that their story is little known in the hometown of one of the world's most recognizable and respected figures, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. It may be the shock and honor on participants' faces when they discover that others find their stories priceless and want to learn more about them. I wonder if it was reading about the desegregation of APS as a footnote in other publications but never hearing their sole voices featured. It was likely their humility, which astounded me every time they shared. Perchance, it was seeing the Atlanta 9 consistently minimized as "tokens" in the fight for integrated schools. In fact, they may have been "tokens" but so were Hamilton Holmes, Charlayne Hunter Gault, Rosa Parks, and Barack Obama.

A truly unified school district was never the goal. Keeping Atlanta's schools open, with as little inconvenience as possible for Whites is what the city intended, for Black children there

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[281] Moreland, Kenneth, *Token Desegregation and Beyond*. Atlanta, GA: Southern Regional Council Papers 1944-1968. Reel 213. Robert Woodruff Library. Reel 213.

[282] Lassiter, *Silent Majority*, 99.

was less consideration. They forfeited valuable relationships, school experiences, and extracurricular involvement.

Friends and Community

The pupil placement plan that allowed schools to select a few "token" students and place them strategically throughout the district was the reason for Rosalyn's transfer, over everybody else, including her best friends. For Rosalyn, the greatest burden was the loss of those significant relationships. She initially had difficulty reconciling the fact that she was the only one chosen, especially since the plan was for all of her network of friends to transfer together. After all, they were the reason she applied in the first place, "I missed out on my friends because at Murphy High, there were no friendships to be made. They weren't friendly. I missed out on social things that I would have done being at my own school." Rosalyn knew she was taking on a courageous feat, and it did not take long for her to realize the students were being used by the school system as a way to avoid the full desegregation of schools. Rather than give up, Rosalyn decided to take it all in stride and prove that she was just as smart, talented, and belonged there just as much as anyone.

Senior Class Activities

For Madelyn and Mary, their memories of missing the senior class field trip instantly came to mind during the interviews. The pinnacle of 12 years of school happens as a 12th grade senior, where you earn bragging rights, leadership positions, special privileges, and "Rites of Passage" ceremonies. Both Madelyn and Mary's senior class trips were scheduled to take place at a venue that did not allow Blacks to be admitted. Rather than choose a more welcoming venue, Madelyn and Mary were dissuaded from participating. This was heartbreaking for Mary.

> I was told that it was five or ten dollars if you wanted to go to Calloway Gardens and we were going to picnic there. One day, the principal calls me to his office and tells me that it had come to the attention of the people at Calloway Gardens that there were two Black students in the class and they were notifying him [principal] that they did not allow Negroes and that if I [Mary] insisted on going with the group, they would cancel our reservation. So, the principal told me you can do one or two things. Basically, you can either take your money back and your classmates could still go on and still have the picnic without you or you can insist upon going and nobody would go. It's up to you.

Mary felt it should not have been left up to her. It was a huge weight on her 17-year-old shoulders, having to make a decision that would potentially affect the entire senior class. And, rather than add another burden to her already full life, she opted not to go. Mary disappointedly confessed, "everybody that goes to school, you live for that senior year. You do all these things together, prom, and baccalaureate. That's the epitome. But I missed all of that."[283]

Extracurricular Activities

Similar to senior activities, all of the five students participated in extracurricular activities at their Black schools but had to forego them at their White schools, with the exception of Thomas. Martha had been voted senior class president for the upcoming school year at her former school. She had already brainstormed ideas for her term as senior president, only to give them up when she left. As much as she anticipated continuing her civic school engagements, Martha did not get involved in the student government association at the new school.

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[283] Mary Francis, interview.

Furthermore, joining the band was also not an option for Martha, "I used to be in the band but I didn't even think about being in the band at Murphy, [band] it would not have been feasible, it would've meant harassment. You would have had to get on the bus with them [Whites]. That would've been a whole other issue." For Martha, being a member of the band meant more than playing an instrument. It was about comradery, playing against other schools, and mastering her talent for good music. The loneliness and alienation of playing the clarinet at her new school was not worth the trouble for Martha. "You probably would have had to be all by yourself, which would not have been as much fun as my old school."[284]

The extracurricular activity Mary considered joining, after receiving two personal invitations, was the Junior Civitans. After learning about the prestigious service organization, Mary was honored about this huge opportunity, as it was not available at her former school.

Two invites I received, something saying based on your academic record you have been selected and we're inviting you to become a member. I made an extra effort to get there early to the meeting held before school. But, when I got there I was called to the principal's office. He tells me to have a sit, then he tells me, 'they had been notified that the charter states that there can be no Negroes admitted and so I have to refund you your money.' So he gave me my $3 back and that was it.

Although Mary had grown accustomed to the disappointments and exclusions that came with her decision to transfer, the hurt was evident during the interview. Since there were no activities to be a part of, education became Mary's primary focus. "I couldn't go outside until I

[284] Rosalyn Walton Lees, interview.

finished my homework so while everyone else was having fun I was doing both regular academic work and extra academic work to get ahead."

The One That Left

"I made a mistake…maybe if I was stronger I could just hold out. I'm not meant for this! Some people are, I know. I admire them. Tell them the truth. You can say Donita thought she'd better leave that school, because it was too much. She felt she'd be happier where she was than where she is now…" -Donita Gaines

Three months after APS quietly desegregated its schools, news reporters descended back upon Atlanta to report that Donita Gaines "had for some reason decided to quit, give up a fight that seemingly, by then, had been won."[285] Months earlier, the city bragged about successfully integrating its schools, with little regard to the psychological and emotional well-being of students like her. Apparently, the city's victory was at the expense of at least one of its students, Donita Gaines.

Robert Coles, a child psychiatrist spent years getting to know teachers, children and their parents, both White and Black, during the early years of school desegregation. He studied the impact of desegregation on school children for two years, noting their feelings, fears, and hopes as they integrated. Dr. Coles' research findings underscored the resilience of Black school children, the strength of the Black families they hailed from, and the influence of teachers on the students' adjustment. The Atlanta 9 were a part of Dr. Coles research study. He was called upon to assess the students' readiness and help prepare them for their new environments. In 1961 he wrote:

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[285] Robert Coles, *Lives of Moral Leadership,* (New York: Random House , 2000), 98.

> When the Atlanta school board decided to take only a scattering of Negro children for the initial attempt at desegregation, it had to choose among many aspirants. Despite interviews and a host of psychosocial tests, it would be difficult for any group of educators or psychiatrists to predict the progress of many of these children. [286]

Dr. Coles documented Donita Gaines., who requested to be transferred back to her old high school three months after enrolling at Northside High School. His notes on Donita Gaines read:

> She came from a middle-class family and was an intelligent attractive girl. Her teachers were kindly and of the three Negroes enrolled, she was probably their favorite. Her [White] classmates accepted her with a nervous but friendly notice. Her grades in November 1961, were the highest of those of all the nine Negro children in the four desegregated schools-two A's and three B's, achieved in the toughest school program.[287]

In reading through Dr. Coles' research, three conclusions could immediately be drawn about Donita's experience:

First, Donita's inability to finish the journey had nothing to do with how strong or smart she was. According to Dr. Coles, "Donita did not have a 'psychiatric breakdown' and was not afflicted with any 'medical condition.'"[288] She was smart, confident, and only wanted the

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[286] Robert Coles, "In the South These Children Prophesy," *The Atlantic*, March 1963, 111.

[287] Coles, "In the South,"111.

[288] Coles, "In the South,"101.

opportunities and access afforded other students like her. She did not see herself as inferior to anyone and refused to be treated as such as indicated when she said:

> The negro people are standing up for their rights and the Whites are saying 'Okay, okay we'll let you come be with us, but we won't welcome you, mind you, and we don't want you near us, not as our equals, only looking after us, picking up after us.' 'Sure…we'll give a little ground, but we'll make you pay for it, each one of you.'[289] "I've heard them talk... 'We'll make the goddamn niggers pay for this integration, boy will we!' That's what I heard, in the women's room, not the men's room!"

The second conclusion I drew was, Donita, who shunned the spotlight, appeared to underestimate how she and the other nine would be regarded for integrating APS. She also seemed apprehensive being heralded as a leader, "If you're going to be a leader, and do what's not been done before, you're going to be on display, all the time. That's not for me." Donita did not see herself as a hero or a "civil rights person" and she did not want the stress and responsibility that came with the title.*"*[290]

Donita also did not see it as her responsibility to change people's hearts saying, "I can't 'lead' those White kids to be better, to behave themselves as Jesus would want them to, so I'll go to a place where I can try to 'lead 'myself, to find what's good and what's right in life."[291] Her

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[289] Coles, Moral Leadership, 99.

[290] Coles, Moral Leadership, 99.

[291] Quotes from Atlanta 9 student, Donita Gaines, as told to Robert Coles. Source: Robert Coles, *Lives of Moral Leadership,* (New York: Random House, 2000), cite the page.

words seemed to imply that if she remained at the White school it would only be a matter of time before she would compromise her own sense of self for survival.

> When you start thinking and acting real bad, like the people looking down on you and out to get you, then you know-you're in deep, deep trouble. It's then that you need to figure out, are you ready to stick through it, or are you down to the bottom of the barrel, your strength all gone from you? For me the answer is clear, I've given all I have, and it's not enough!

The third conclusion I drew was that for Donita, changing schools stripped her of her childhood, her community, and the people who nurtured and supported her. The relationships and acceptance within her community were more valuable to Donita than infiltrating a space where others loathed her mere presence. She spoke about the nightmares that came with leaving her home to attend a White school, *"Everyone tells me I'm 'doing good.' They mean I'm adjusting to all the trouble I go through at school; and they tell me I'm 'doing good' because I'm 'leading our people.' But I have nightmares all the time."*[292]

Donita Gaines is deceased and because of her family's decision to remain out of the spotlight, with little public commentary after her decision to return to her Black school, there is limited data on Donita. Even so, her decision seems most fascinating for me because of the questions she left unanswered and because of the inferences that can be made about the impact of the traumatic experience on her life.

Efforts were made to persuade Donita to stay the course but to no avail. Incentives offered were not enough to make up for what she left behind, "they said it would be all right, and

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[292] Coles, Moral Leadership, 100.

I'd get a scholarship to college. You'll be a hero,' they said, 'You'll be a leader, doing the best… for your people.'"[293]

National reporters returned to Atlanta to question Donita's family, only to hear her heartbreaking self-rebuke, "Maybe if I was stronger I could just hold out. I'm not meant for this! Some people are, I know. I admire them… I made a mistake. I'm not a leader."[294] Donita's outcome is evidence of the setbacks that occurred when *Brown v. Board of Education's* integration policy was implemented. Its goal may have been equal opportunity and access, but it came with a price that Donita refused to pay, "I could stick it out, but I don't want to…I like the company of people, my friends. That's what I've decided." After three months of isolation, loneliness, and threats, Donita Gaines returned home, where she was welcomed back with open arms, where she was protected from the media and outsiders, and where she continued to thrive until her death in 2002.

Theme Five: Moral Obligation

"We didn't talk about it all the time and every day but we sorta knew that this was something that we needed to do. We were too young for the sit-ins and freedom rides [that the college students were doing]. This was how we could contribute. It was our opportunity to participate."[295]

-Thomas Welch

This section highlights the moral obligation and the patriotic themes that emerged during the Atlanta 9 narratives. Because of Black America's troubled history in America the term

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[293] Coles, Moral Leadership, 100.

[294] Coles, Moral Leadership, 97.

[295] Welch, interview.

"patriotic" is rarely used to describe Black Americans, regardless of their foundational slave labor that helped build the United States. In discussing patriotism, I don't apply the concept in the way it is normally used[296] because patriotism tends to represent a blind allegiance to the United States where any sort of critique is considered unpatriotic.[297] Michael Eric Dyson points this out, "America has shown little understanding lately of the patriotism that a lot of Black people practice. Black love of country is often far more robust and complicated than the lapel-pin nationalism some citizens swear by."[298] I discuss the actions of the Atlanta 9 as patriotic because by integrating the public schools, they were making the entire country better and challenging society to be a just place for all of its citizens to reside. Dr. King rationalizes his critique of the Vietnam War with this statement, "I criticize America because I love her and because I want to see her stand as the moral example of the world."

Similarly, the students alluded to feeling a moral obligation to make integration a success.[299] Civil Rights icon John Lewis talked about moral obligation when describing his experiences as a 17-year-old engaging in nonviolent protests, "when you see something that his not right, not fair, not just, you have a moral obligation to continue to speak up, to speak out."

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[296] Terrell Star, "Patriotism is for White People" *The Root,* September 25, 2017, https://www.theroot.com/patriotism-is-for-White-people-1818724099.

[297] In Michael Harriot's article, the author asserts that patriotism is usually conceptualized through a White lens were: Beware the people who wrap themselves in the red-White-and-blue cloth of patriotism…They called Martin Luther King Jr. a communist and painted the civil rights movement as un-American. They want comfort, not progress. They are the opposite of patriotic…Aside from creating this economic superpower and protecting it more than anyone else, Black America is the group most responsible for making America live up to the promise of "liberty and justice for all." Source: Michael Harriot, *"Patriotism is for Black People," The Root"* September 27, 2017.

[298] Michael Erick Dyson, "Understanding Black Patriotism," *Time,* April 24, 2008.

[299] Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., "The Causalities of the War in Vietnam" (speech, Los Angeles, CA, February 25, 2967).

For Lewis, moral obligation meant embracing whatever was necessary to bring about justice, including going to jail, "you got arrested the first time, and you felt so free. You felt liberated. You felt like you had crossed over. Despite the violence hurled at him, Lewis and other nonviolent college students in Atlanta and other southern cities did not allow themselves to be discouraged, "You'd be sitting there in an orderly, peaceful, nonviolent fashion and someone would come up and spit on you or put a cigarette out in your hair or down your back, pour hot water, hot coffee, hot chocolate on you." I was compelled to highlight the students' moral obligation because each of them expressed the responsibility they felt for the burden of integration. Failure was not an option for them, as Martha declared, "we couldn't fail because we'd be letting our people down. It was our mission to prove that we were just as smart and just as good as the White students. That was our attitude."[300] Dyson's use of the term "critical patriotism"[301] is an accurate depiction of the Atlanta 9 students who saw their moral obligations as a form of patriotism.

We Had A Responsibility, Regardless

Mary associated her integration experience with reporting daily for a full-time job. "I went to work every day and my job was to make the best grades that I could possibly make."[302] There was little laughter and no interpersonal relationships with other students or adults for her, "The first day of school at Grady basically, I was paid no attention. I was just in the school. I went to class, I did my work and then I left."[303]

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[300] Holmes, interview.

[301] Dyson, "Black Patriotism," 2008.

[302] Francis, interview.

[303] Francis, interview.

Regardless of how they felt, the Atlanta 9 went forward daily and did what they felt they had to do. “At that time, we felt a great responsibility to all Black people. We were all in this. I couldn’t betray those people who were beaten, killed, things I had seen in Selma. I just resigned myself to it.”[304]

For Martha, the community was so protective she rarely told family and friends about the experiences she endured at school because it would only have worried and upset them. Although Martha pledged to be nonviolent and non-confrontational, she knew her family had made no such promises. Therefore, she rarely discussed school conflicts. Mary knew the sacrifice she was making and the bad things that could happen. But once she was accepted, there was no turning back. She had no choice but to go.

We Were Soldiers Walking into Battle

As prepared as they were, the Atlanta 9 students were still walking into situations and places they felt ill-prepared to conquer, "it’s like a soldier goes on the field and he knows he can be shot but you do what you have to do. And that’s how I felt.”[305] But they knew they were not alone because all across the nation there were others. While adults were hesitant to put children on the front lines of the Civil Rights Movement, many youth took it upon themselves to demonstrate by marching, singing, and practicing civil disobedience. “The children were the initiators of their own freedom,” declared Virgil Wood, a lieutenant and close associate of Dr.

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[304] Francis, interview.

[305] Francis, interview.

King.[306] But, as courageous and honorable as their actions were, the road Atlanta 9 students paid the price and everyone did not finish the journey.

The themes that emerged from the interviews are a useful way to summarize the experiences of the Atlanta 9. All that was shared with me somehow relates to cultural wealth, double consciousness, resilience, personal sacrifice, and moral obligation.

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[306] These were Virgil Wood's comments in the PBS documentary while discussing the criticism heaped upon Dr. King for allowing children to be involved in dangerous marches in Birmingham. Wood maintains that the children insisted on being involved. Source: "Birmingham and the Children's March," *Religion and Ethics Weekly, PBS,* (April 26 , 2013).

6 CONCLUSION

Without the oral histories of the lived experiences of the students revealed in this research, we might continue to believe that Atlanta "got it right" when other cities "got it wrong." After the Supreme Court declared school segregation unconstitutional in 1954, it took Atlanta six years to adhere to the mandate. In 1961, the interests of Blacks and Whites converged long enough to symbolically comply with *Brown v. Board of Education's* 1954 order. The nine Black students chosen to integrate APS six months after the court mandate underwent a rigorous application process that included interviews and IQ tests. The city of Atlanta wanted to ensure the integration experiment succeeded for the sake of Atlanta's economic interests. And, the nine students knew there was a lot riding on their actions because of the scrutiny that went into the admissions process and the intense security required for their first day of school. The emotional turmoil and pressure to succeed in their new schools was stressful and affected their young lives.

Many believe the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision was more symbolic than practical because Black students were the ones inconveniently bussed to White schools.[307] In many cases, White students were not moved to Black schools, qualified Black teachers were shipped off to White schools, while unqualified White teachers were moved to Black schools.[308] The curriculum taught in integrated schools minimized the contributions of Blacks and failed to provide the nurturing holistic school experience that many Black children were used to in Black

[307] Derrick A. Bell, "Brown v. Board of Education and the Interest Convergence Dilemma," in *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings that Formed the Movement, (New York: The New Press, 1980).*

[308] Siddle Walker, Their Highest Potential.

schools.[309] Nevertheless, the Atlanta 9 students forged ahead and succeeded despite the sacrifices they endured when they left their home schools to attend White schools. The more realistic narrative for many Black students and their families is considerably more complex and nuanced than the simple narrative of integration disseminated over the years. The literature on school integration underscored (1) the collective agency of the Black community, (2) the unintended consequences of segregated schools, (3) the White flight into suburban areas where Whites built private schools to escape forced integration with Black students, (4) the rise of the Black middle class, and (5) the converging interests of Blacks and Whites.

The interviews revealed similar themes as the literature in addition to other emergent themes explored in this dissertation: community cultural capital, double consciousness, resilience, personal sacrifice, and moral obligation.

The Atlanta 9 students were already smart, strong, and resilient when they arrived at the White schools. They brought their community cultural wealth to the White schools which helped them adjust and excel in their new environments. The resilience nurtured in their Black communities prepared them for the White resistance they encountered when they integrated the White schools. The double consciousness revealed during the interviews provided insight into the challenges of mastering two different worlds when the respondents left their Black worlds in the mornings to attend school in their White world for eight hours. The students recognized their role as token representatives in the APS integration experiment and bravely accepted the challenge. They rejected being labeled trailblazers, rather they saw it as their moral obligation and personal responsibility.

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[309] Raymond Wolters, Burden of Brown: Thirty Years of School Desegregation (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1984).

Summary of the Study

Voluminous research on school desegregation highlight the losses experienced by Blacks during the process, the failures of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision to maintain integrated schools, and the heroism of African Americans and Whites who joined the struggle.[310] The purpose of this study was to explore and document the missing voices of Atlanta's 1961 school desegregation movement by focusing on the nine Black high school students in Atlanta who were at the forefront of integration in Georgia's capital. My aim is to contribute to the historical record and provide a more nuanced analysis of this school integration story. It is important to mark the contributions of these students who were impacted by desegregation mandates. The questions that guided this research were: (1) Why did the students volunteer to racially integrate all-White schools in 1961? (2) What was the impact of integration on the lives of the students?

The study utilized historical research methodology to collect the oral histories of five of the Atlanta 9. Inductive qualitative methods were used to analyze the narratives. The participants in the study were five of the former students who integrated the public schools in Atlanta: Mary Frances, Martha Holmes, Madelyn Nix, Rosalyn Walton Lees, and Thomas Welch. A ten-question interview protocol was developed with the help of the dissertation committee members, after sifting through the previous literature. Data collection, including interviews and archival visits, took place over a period of two years.

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[310] Scott Baker, Paradoxes of Desegregation: African American Struggles for Educational Equity in *Charleston, SC.* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2006); Elizabeth Jacoway, *Turn Away Thy Son: Little Rock, The Crisis That Shocked the Nation.* (Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 2008); Richard Kluger, *Simple justice: The History of Brown v. Board of Education (*New York: Vintage Books, 1975).

Summary of the Results

The students may have been quiet, but they exuded energy and optimism and strength. The Atlanta 9 students were smart, and they knew it. They all hailed from families that valued education and hard work. Overachieving and exceling beyond average expectations was nothing new for the Atlanta 9 participants and they did not expect special treatment. They merely sought the same access to resources as others and they were content remaining in the shadows of more celebrated civil rights figures. When interviewed for the district's 60th anniversary for school integration, the participants downplayed the significant role they played as trailblazers for APS.[311] But the importance of their accomplishment was apparent and there were numerous lessons learned from their narratives, revealing much more than I originally anticipated when I set out to investigate their integration stories.

Surviving the admissions process was difficult, but gaining acceptance was just the beginning of their journey. Surviving school integration was challenging and required a combination of academic, social, cultural, and emotional readiness. Furthermore, their hard-earned intellect helped them to obtain admission to White schools, but the students needed the internal fortitude, vision, optimism, and strength to withstand difficult situations. They had to remain calm and tempered in the face of the intense scrutiny and hostility. Atlanta Public Schools, the school district alma mater of Dr. Martin Luther Jr., sought non-violent students who would embrace his principles, long enough to impress onlookers.

The selection of Mary Francis, Madelyn Nix, Thomas Welch, Rosalyn Walton Lees, and Martha Holmes was deliberate, intentional, and methodical. It had been six years since the

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[311] Atlanta Public Schools Alumni Video. "Remembering the Atlanta 9." Published December 5, 2012. YouTube video, 21:38. Posted December 5, 2012. https://youtu.be/9sDsXkxi2VQ.

Brown v. Board of Education's ruling and the city was depending on the Atlanta 9 to keep the town peaceful, to keep the business community happy, and to keep the federal government from imposing sanctions. The students knew what they needed to do and they succeeded with little recognition. The burden was still heavy because the same demeanor the students exhibited to earn acceptance into the White schools was the same behavior they would exhibit daily to ensure peace during the desegregation process.

Throughout my exploration of the psychological and emotional turmoil experienced by the students, the narratives revealed a more complicated and unique description of the impact of school integration than I had read about in previous literature. Once the national spotlight shifted away from Atlanta's integration experiment, Mary Francis, Madelyn Nix, Thomas Welch, Rosalyn Walton Lees, and Martha Holmes quietly persevered through the school year proving themselves not only capable academically but skillful psychologically and emotionally.

The participants' memories provide priceless revelations summed up with the themes of: community cultural wealth, double consciousness, resilience, tokenism, loss, and moral obligation. Their experiences were a great paradox of loss and gain, courage and fear, independence and loneliness. The students figured out how to apply their different identities to different situations with different people at the right times, and they accomplished this without compromising who they essentially were, without turning their backs on their communities and without dismissing their proud upbringings.

The participants' resilience helped them survive moments of hostility and humiliation inflicted by peers and adults. Without the ability to rebound when ignored and isolated by others, the remaining Atlanta 9 students might not have survived the integration experiment. Donita

Gaines, described by Thomas Welch as brilliant,[312] by all accounts, made the attempt, but in the end she chose not to live in the middle of the two worlds Du Bois puts forth. For Donita, whom the five participants described as undeniably smart, strong, and capable, the price of integration was more than she chose to pay. The personal sacrifices and loss of her Black school and community, showing up at school scrutinized and regarded as an inferior token hated by many, and living a double life isolated from the life she loved and left behind was too much. Fortunately, and unfortunately, Donita's narrative, albeit absent from this study, makes the sacrifices of the five participants present for the study, all the more intriguing and necessary.

The rationale for highlighting race and racism in this research is because race was at the center of school desegregation and in order to fully understand the students' experiences, one must understand racial identity as a process that the students had to navigate their way through after they were chosen. Critical Race Theory's claim that racism is an endemic part of society, with schools being no exception, was a huge part of my decision to use this framework in my research with the Atlanta 9. The Atlanta 9 students were conscious of the racial stereotypes that separated them socially, economically, and politically from their peers before entering the White schools and they braced themselves accordingly. The tensions created by race continued to plague them throughout the school year, resulting in isolation and loneliness but they persevered.

Another CRT tenet emerging from this research is Derrick Bell's interest convergence framework.[313] This tenet is the claim that society is not naturally inclined to eradicate racism because too many powerful people benefit from it. The story of the Atlanta 9 represents the

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[312] Thomas Welch, interview.

[313] Derrick Bell, Richard Delgao, Jean Stefancic. *The Derrick Bell Reader* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 34.

notion of converging interests through Atlanta's initial resistance to integrated schools, which shifted to acceptance, only when it benefitted the city to do so. Atlanta had run out of options and was forced to comply with the court order for the sake of its reputation and its economic interests. It was in Atlanta's best interest to desegregate[314] rather than close the public schools. But the school district would only accept a token number of students who could pass academic and psychological tests and interviews. Atlanta would "integrate" a few outstanding students into a few high schools and thus comply. Atlanta would do it "their" way, but only after learning from the mistakes made by other cities.

School desegregation and the struggle for equal access is well documented for cities like Little Rock, Memphis, Roanoke, and Prince George's County, Virginia. One of the emergent findings from the study was the resources and time Atlanta spent researching other cities. The city of Atlanta paid particular attention to Little Rock and New Orleans, as a frame of reference for estimating the impact of school integration.[315] In Little Rock, the city adopted a gradual integration plan similar to Atlanta's that began with the high schools. In 1957, nine Black students entered Central High School, which was formerly an all-White school. The desegregation of Central High resulted in violent riots in the city. In response, Arkansas Governor Arval Faubus angrily blocked entry to Central High School, citing the need to protect

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[314] For the Atlanta district "desegregate" is defined as, Applying the current definition of "desegregated" (more than 10% minority race students enrolled). Source: Paul West, et. al. *School Desegregation in Metro Atlanta, 1954-1973*. Atlanta, GA: Research Atlanta, 1973. Accessed February 1, 2018.

[315] A fact sheet for the group OASIS read as follows: "Atlanta is not venturing into unchartered territory when it admits a few Negro students to its White high school this fall. The trail has already been blazed by such southern cities as Nashville, Louisville, and Baltimore. A look at their experience is reassuring (Fact Sheet for OASIS discussion leaders, Folder 6 or 17).

the African American students from harm as the reason.[316] The unrest was so massive the city tried unsuccessfully to suspend its desegregation order. The Little Rock 9 persevered amidst physical threats and harassment.[317] The federal government, with orders from President Dwight Eisenhower, was called in to ensure the students' safety, much to the dismay of the Arkansas governor who responded, "We are now an occupied territory." National guards remained at Central High the entire school year to maintain peace.

Planning leaders in Atlanta noted the impact of racial tensions on the stability of Little Rock and used it to dissuade Atlanta from reacting similarly: "Because of its school crisis, Little Rock lost, at lowest estimates, five new industrial plants worth a million dollars."[318] Atlanta's response to these incidents was to "Let us display restraint, good manners, and thoughtfulness, proving to the rest of the world, and more important, to ourselves that we are civilized people."[319]

Three years later in 1960, New Orleans was on its way to becoming a progressive southern city when the city's image was shattered after four Black elementary students enrolled at previously all-White schools.[320] The national media reported on the local backlash that

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[316] LA Times Staff Writer, "Orval Faubus: Goverver not Blocked School Desegregation," LA Times, Dec. 15, 1994. http://articles.latimes.com/1994-12-15/news/mn-9162_1_orval-faubus

[317] National Park Service. Us Department of the Interior. Little Central High School National Historic Site. "The 1957 Crisis at Central High." Accessed October 5, 2018. https://www.nps.gov/chsc/planyourvisit/upload/SitebulletinCrisis.pdf

[318] The Little Rock Chamber of Commerce attributed the halt in Little Rock's industrial growth to "racial tensions and uncertainty in connection with public schools." OASIS (Organizations Assisting Schools in September), "Fact Sheet for OASIS Discussion Leaders," *Desegregated Discussion Sheets*. May-August 1961 Box 374. Folder 8 of 17. Kennan Research Center Archives. Atlanta History Center.

[319] OASIS, "A Guide for the Presentation of the Subject: How will desegregation Affect Our Atlanta Public Schools?" *Background: A Handbook for Reporters* (Atlanta, GA: Robert W. Woodruff Archives Research Center).

[320] David Stephen Bennett, The Televised Revolution "Progressive" Television Coverage of the 1960 New Orleans School Desegregation Crisis Author(s): Source: Louisiana Historical Association, *Louisiana History: The*

showed violent White mobs blocking school entrances, Ruby Bridges and other Black first graders being spat upon, and death threats being hurled at them. Segregationists in New Orleans resisted school integration with attempts to close schools down, deny resources, and withdraw school accreditation for schools determined to desegregate. Similar to Little Rock, Black students integrating the schools were escorted by federal marshals to ensure their safety. Atlanta watched and noted how New Orleans dealt with its integration crisis in hopes of avoiding similar mistakes, "while the Little Rock and New Orleans might better be buried forever they do serve…as a basis for study and prevention of similar incidents."[321]

Importance of this Study

This research is important for several reasons. As stated throughout the dissertation, the Atlanta 9 story is largely unknown and deserves to be shared. The story is a part of the local history of Atlanta and deserves a place in the city's historical narrative. The fact that current Atlanta students are unaware of APS's controversial history is a disservice to the youth and underestimates the power of local history.

Second, this research is significant because it shows the versality and diversity of Blacks, who are far from monolithic. Blacks make up various socio-economic levels, embrace divergent viewpoints on topics such as integration, and vary in their opinions about the best way to gain equality. In 1961, Atlanta was an empowering place for African Americans who were surrounded by prestigious Black colleges and universities (HBCU's), multiple Black churches,

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Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association, Vol. 58, No. 3 (Summer 2017), pp. 339-365. Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/26290915

[321] Preliminary Statistical Report of Little Rock and New Orleans Business progress subsequent to the School Difficulties. August 196. Prepared for Ivan Allen Jr. Building and Economic Research Department. Atlanta, GA. Folder MSS 374. Folder 3 of 7. Atlanta History Center.

several Black media outlets, and numerous Black businesses.[322] No other city boasted this type of progress amongst Blacks in one central location. Likewise, the vast experiences and intellect within the Black community guaranteed there would be some disagreement.

Lastly, this research is valuable because it underscores the power that young people and schools played in the evolution of society as well as the need for intergenerational and intercultural relationships. The Atlanta 9 and youth across the South organized and risked their lives to take on structures that adults could not fight alone. While at the same time, the students may have been the ones on the front lines, but an entire village of teachers, community members, grassroots organizers, and professional people supported the Atlanta 9 and set the stage for the students to take on this courageous task. The Atlanta 9 story demonstrates that nothing happens in a vacuum and that if we rely solely on the "The City Too Busy to Hate" narrative, key players, like the Atlanta 9, will be marginalized.

Implications for Further Research

In committing myself to this research, I hope the stories will not just add to the literature but that my analysis will showcase the need for more thoughtful ways of integrating students and promoting educational equity. In the same way that segregation is harmful, integration done poorly can be equally as harmful. People looking back at the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision argue that if integration had taken place more thoughtfully, it would have benefitted more students and communities.[323] Fifty-five years after the Atlanta 9 integrated Atlanta, many schools are still segregated, and a disproportionate number of African American

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[322] Maurice Hobson. (2017). The legend of the Black mecca: Politics and class in the making of modern *Atlanta*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press)

[323] Jack Balkin, "*What Brown Should Have Said*," (New York: New York University Press, 2002).

students lag behind their White counterparts academically. Thus, the experiences of the Atlanta 9 are insightful and demonstrate the importance of attending to the social, mental, and emotional needs of the students rather than obsessing over symbolic court victories. The school experiences of the Atlanta 9 reveal the success and failure of our schools, neighborhoods, and the entire society. These lessons can help inform educational policy and pedagogy today.

Research on the Atlanta 9 places the spotlight on the power of youth activism. Seven months after the integration of the University of Georgia, nine high school students managed to accomplish a feat that adults in Atlanta had not been able to attain. As a matter of fact, the desegregation of Atlanta's schools was soon followed by the integration of Rich's Department Store, the desegregation of the Fox Theater, as well as several other public spaces the following year.[324] The Atlanta 9 may not have been the direct cause of subsequent desegregation victories in Atlanta but the brave role of these youth in the larger movement for civil rights cannot be underestimated.

The preparation of the students was apparent during the interviews. Once the Atlanta 9 transferred to the White schools, their experiences demonstrated that racial justice is more than merely placing Black and White students together in the same classroom. Attention needed to be paid to the cultural, social, emotional, and psychological needs of the students. The Black students left behind their nurturing teachers, families, and communities to integrate into a White culture that resisted their very existence. The students knew the dangers they would face. Mary

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[324] "On March 7, 1961, student leaders King and Sullivan were summoned to a downtown meeting, where they learned that the city's White and Black leaders had brokered a deal to desegregate the city's lunch counters. Under the arrangement, desegregation would occur the following fall, following the court-ordered integration of local schools. Although they objected to the delay and felt betrayed by their elders in the Black community, King and Sullivan ultimately consented to the settlement." Source: Edward Hatfield, *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, " Civil Rights in Modern Georgia Since 1945."

stated, “when the call came out telling us that they were interested in integrating the schools we already knew what was going on in the country. I had seen the news and I knew of the beatings and what happened to others.”[325] But regardless of the challenges before them there was no turning back for Madelyn Nix, Mary Francis, Rosalyn Walton Lees, Martha Francis, and Thomas Welch. They had no reason to believe they were not good enough or smart enough to survive and master the flames in the proverbial “burning house.” Their cultural backgrounds and family upbringings prepared them academically, psychologically, and socially.

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[325] Francis, interview.

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