REDLINING AND ITS INFLUENCE ON EDUCATIONAL

OPPORTUNITIES IN THE SCHOOL SYSTEM:

A COLLABORATIVE AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHY

by

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REDLINING AND ITS INFLUENCE ON EDUCATIONAL
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Abstract

Why is there a waiting list at the public school "across town?" Using a family's home
address to determine a student's school placement mimics redlining tactics in real estate and
limits educational accessibility. Critical Race Theory (CRT) provides a platform to challenge
systems that perpetuate inequities that ultimately impact the educational experiences of specific
races (Bell, 1995). Although research exploring the inequalities existing in the school system are
plentiful, the conversation surrounding the impact one's home address has on the decision
making process of families is often overlooked. A multi-generational critical auto-ethnography
of my own family presents authentic data as it relates to Black families' experiences with
educational redlining in Oakland, California. Inquiries were made to uncover what motivates
parents to participate in the open enrollment process, even if the options to meet the needs of
specific children are not available. An auto-ethnographic component provides additional insight
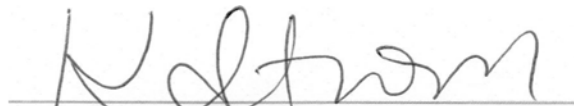into the generational impact educational redlining has on families.

California State University, East Bay
Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership for Social Justice
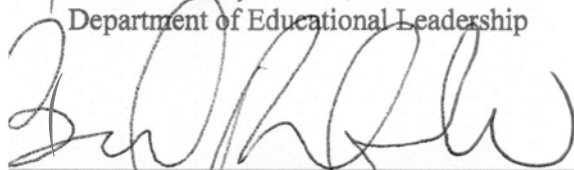

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CHAPTER 1

REDLINING AND ITS INFLUENCE ON EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES IN

THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

*"I loved my classes. We were exposed to everything. You know, theater, ballet,*

*listen to different types of music. But at my homeboy's high school, it's not like that. They*

*don't have trips to go see these Broadway plays, and they don't read the things we are*

*reading, they didn't know what I was talking about when I was like, yo Shakespeare is*

*dope. They didn't have the same experiences we had. Then I started thinking... that our*

*school…. that I went to… is mostly for white kids and rich minorities. So I started going,*

*damn man, I would have been a totally different person had I not been exposed to those*

*things". Tupac Shakur* - Lazin (2005)

**Problem Statement**

Because our educational system has developed school placement practices for students

that may negatively impact the value of their education, many families find themselves on a

waiting list to get into the public school "across town." According to Jackson and Noguera

(2013), inequitable social practices in American history represents the foundation for America's

active contribution to *educational redlining*. Educational redlining, as I use it here, refers to the

use of a mapping system that utilizes a parent's home address to determine students' school site

placement, regardless of the environmental risks associated with impoverished areas. Subsequently, residential relocation is often determined by economic status. Accessing housing near quality schools can be challenging, but gaining access to those schools with an inner city address is systemically impossible without the permission of the school district (Holzman, 2012). In this way, educational redlining restricts traditional educational opportunities for students, particularly Black children, in inner city communities. Redlining in real estate is foundational to educational redlining and may serve as a gateway for most privatized systems in this country.

**Say It Loud**

Merriam - Webster dictionary defined African American as an American who has African and especially black African ancestors (Merriam-Webster Incorporated, 2015). However, the continent of Africa was named after the Roman General, Scipio Africanus (Caprotti, 2009). Furthermore, America was said to be named after either Amerigo Vespucci (Goodchild, 2007) or Richard Amerike (Broome, 2002). Amerigo was a Florentine navigator who was credited with having had a substantial role in "discovering" the New World (Caprotti, 2009) and Amerike was a British merchant who was said to have commissioned an explorer that unexpectedly "discovered" America during a fishing expedition (Broome, 2002). Neither man was Black. Identifying myself as an African American would represent my acceptance as a double colonized human being who happens to be Black. For that reason, Black, as I use it here, refers to people with American citizenship whose ancestors were stolen from the continent known as Africa and brought to America to be enslaved for more than 150 years; a people who, despite the many atrocities perpetuated against them, continue to move forward triumphantly.

Black people in the United States have been classified by many names including but not limited to Negro, Afro-Americans, Blacks, and African American. The beauty and pride of being Black was reinforced in which gave me a sense of connectedness to the greatness within me. As such, African Americans will be referred to as Black people throughout this document as this is a story about the power of linking historic cultural experiences to the fortitude of Black people in the United States as we continue to overcome the inequities of systemic barriers.

**Context**

Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) is in the middle of a mass restructuring effort that includes an upsurge in charter and option schools to provide families with a variety of educational possibilities within their own neighborhoods (Hopkins, 2013). This restructuring is a response to a district policy that requires parents to obtain written consent from the district to place their child in a school outside of their immediate neighborhood. In an attempt to battle these discriminatory practices, brief periods of time are allocated annually for open enrollment (Hopkins, 2013), but this approach only provides resolve for a few families while remaining families are confined to the inequities caused by redlining. OUSD's reorganization process includes trying to establish equitable educational experiences for students throughout the district by offering options during the regular and open enrollment period. Open enrollment gives parents the opportunity to enter their children in a school outside of their attendance zone. This involves parents entering their children into a lottery system to access a more accomplished school located in another attendance zone. The open enrollment period may be necessary because OUSD continues to utilize a family's home address to determine a student's initial

school site placement which not only mirrors redlining strategies in real estate but also limits the resources accessible to some students within the district.

According to Yinger (1986), mortgage lenders in the 1960's utilized questionable tactics to deny creditworthy applicant's access to home loans in particular neighborhoods by utilizing a map to draw red lines around neighborhoods designated as White only neighborhoods. The Fair Housing Act of 1968 was introduced into law as courts deemed the practice of real estate redlining to be illegal (Laws & Living, 1964). For the purpose of this study, educational redlining is defined as – the school district practice of denying families access to a preferred public school site, even when the student's assigned school, based on home address, is located in an impoverished and/or dangerous environment and the services offered within the assigned school are substandard compared to those located in more affluent neighborhoods within the same district.

Although OUSD's partnership with charter schools as an options for school site placement may attempt to address the issue of accessibility, programs currently offered in Oakland, CA fail to meet the needs of Black students. While the open enrollment process includes the "option" of enrolling in a charter school, non-traditional schools often have an admissions process similar to entering a private institution as many charters are financially supported by private entities. Studies demonstrate that vouchers and the privatization of public education by corporations are part of a nationwide agenda that negatively impacts the economically underprivileged and children of color, particularly Black children (Lipman & Hursh, 2007; Pedroni, 2007; Guggenheim, 2010). According to Kozol (1991), families who are not victorious in the lottery are required to have their children educated in the site located near their home, regardless of the educational opportunities afforded to the students. Furthermore,

inner city school campuses are often dilapidated and located in unsafe areas that provide limited opportunities for advancement within the community (Kozol, 1991; Masten & Coatsworth (1998). Wilkinson (1996) suggests the unique nature of Black culture in America must be recognized in order to create solutions to inequitable student placement practices; ignoring the needs of Black people can be detrimental to the health of the Black people and consequently, the entire country.

## Purpose of the Study

By the time Black children enter 4th grade in America, 58% are considered functionally illiterate (Sackler, 2010). Moreover, traditional public school systems' repeated failures have inspired thousands of parents to flee the system every year by entering their children in a charter school lottery system that only provides a few students with a chance at a better education. Although student placement in Oakland, California and surrounding Bay Area cities is not determined by vouchers, the concept of entering students into a lottery for acceptance into a school outside of one's own attendance zone is all too familiar. The lottery process only accommodates a select few requiring parents to submit or strategize in the hopes of accessing the seemingly inaccessible. Kozol (1991) suggested that subversive actions, such as utilizing the home address of a family member who lives near the desired school site, have been historically utilized by inner city communities to combat the inequitable strategies imposed in educational redlining practices. This study was designed to explore redlining practices in education that occur in Oakland, California, and its impact on the educational opportunities of one family, in an attempt to better understand the decision-making process parents undergo when tackling issues of educational redlining in the school system.

This study will add value to the rich body of literature regarding educational inequities because it utilized a multi-generational perspective of a Black family. Such a perspective can provide additional insight into the way redlining in real estate paved the way for educational redlining, which continues to have devastating effects on the educational opportunities and experiences offered to Black children living in inner city communities. These experiences also provide insight as it relates to parents' perception of school choice, the reality of real estate and school site placement, and the impact limited educational resources and opportunities have on the educational experience of children living in inner city communities, specifically Black children. Although this research study focused on examining the reality of real estate as it relates to student site placement practices, future research may include an in-depth examination of such factors as school choice, resource accessibility, safety, and an increase in privatized public educational facilities that do not meet the needs of Black children.

To better understand the lived experiences of participants, this multi-generational auto-ethnographic research study utilized interviews and observations to gather desired data. I examined the phenomenon of educational redlining from my own personal experiences in conjunction with the perspective of my own family's experience of being alienated or shuffled through the public education system. I analyzed these data sources with various explanations of educational redlining and with supplemental documents from schools in Oakland, CA (such as an existing parent handbook of "options" that may have created a culture of traditional public schools providing open enrollment periods rooted in the illusion of choice).

This study was framed by critical race theory (CRT), which provides educators and researchers with a framework to critically analyze society and culture as it relates to ethnic groups, regulations, and supremacy in attempt to create inclusive institutional practices. Public

school districts may be failing to incorporate concepts of critical race theory into daily practice, leaving participants feeling disenfranchised within the educational system. CRT provides an educational model for researchers to utilize when attempting to better understand the impact differential treatment has on race and socio-economic status. This framework may be crucial to understanding the deterioration of the educational experience for Black people in America.

**Research Questions**

The following questions guided this study:

1. How does accessibility to housing/real estate affect the educational opportunities of three generations of a Black family raising children in Oakland, California?

2. How has student placement practices in Oakland Unified School District impacted the residential stability of three generations of one Oakland-based Black family?

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

**Review of the Literature**

The first section of this chapter examines the impact current student placement practices has on a family's ability to access desired educational opportunities when their socio-economic status does not allow them to reside within the boundaries of the most desirable schools in the city of Oakland, CA. The integration of charter school programs as options within the public school system will also be examined. While most parents would like their children to attend school in the immediate neighborhood, parents tend to prioritize safety above the convenience of public school site location which often results in parents entering children into a lottery to access preferred schools. Furthermore, parents tend to want the resources at their children's school to be plentiful and for students to be immersed in additional educational opportunities such as field trip experiences. This section is followed by a review of the historical context of redlining in real estate as a precursor of educational redlining in public education.

**School Boundaries**

School boundaries are represented by imaginary lines that determine which residents can access the schools within the fictional border. School boundaries promote segregation which negatively impacts students in inner city communities as boundaries reduce accessibility to public school sites (Bischoff, 2008). Mahoney (1995) acknowledged that Whites often view Blacks as an undesirable and unemployable element within the community. Wealth allows some Bay Area residents to preserve the inequitable practice of creating boundaries which limits

accessibility to desired schools for most inner city children. Socio-economic status often prevents Blacks from residing in certain prosperous neighborhoods which reinforces educational redlining (Mahoney, 1995; Jackson & Noguera, 2013; Orr, 2003). White's tend to be more pleased with their neighborhood school and seek educational opportunities outside of their own school boundaries less often than others (Tenbusch, 1993).

OUSD, like many school districts, operates under the choice plan. The school choice plan is designed to allow students to request three school sites outside of their attendance zone (Hopkins, 2013). Districts tend to provide limited descriptions of public school sites. Traditional public high schools in Oakland, CA include, but are not limited to, Skyline High School and Oakland Technical High School, located in affluent areas of the city as well as Oakland High School and Fremont High School, located in impoverished areas. Hopkins (2013) highlights the student placement "options" by providing descriptions of the individual schools.  The opening sentence in each descriptive statement speaks to the emphasis placed on physical location and the expectations of students who attend schools in specific areas of the city.

Hopkins (2013) includes such descriptions of the traditional high schools. Skyline High School is described as "a comprehensive public high school located on a forested campus in the Oakland hills" (p. 126). The description of Oakland High School highlights the school as "The goal of Oakland High School is to provide an excellent education to all students in a safe environment so that each student has a foundation for pursuing personal and social growth and high academic achievement" (p.123). Oakland Technical High School is described "In a peaceful and respectful environment, all Tech students will acquire the skills needed to be productive citizens and lifelong learners" (p. 124). The description of Fremont High School highlights the campus environment as "Fremont High School has been transformed into a vibrant and nurturing

school which maximizes the potentials of all our students in achieving academic, social, and personal excellence" (p.118).

The description of schools located in affluent areas highlight the quality of the environment as well as the high expectations of all students while the descriptions of schools located in impoverished areas highlight the schools safety and the students' potential. Hopkins (2013) also includes explanations for the small schools that exist within OUSD's traditional schools which provide specialized educational opportunities for students with high grade point averages. These specialized programs often create a segregated environment within the traditional school setting.

Although, the Coleman Report of 1966 suggested that the injustices plaguing inner city communities directly affect student's ability to thrive educationally as well as socially, regardless of the conditions of the school (Armor, 1972), substandard schools often lack the essential resources that often contribute to students ability to flourish which seems to create an upsurge of families attempting to enroll in the schools "across town". The relationship between educational redlining and the opportunities afforded to some students to advance over others may be overlooked or reduced, because propaganda often introduces concerns surrounding redlining as either non-existent or as an inner city problem that "those people" have to solve, as opposed to a problem affecting the entire population (Holzman, 2012). Moreover, uprooting students so that they can be educated in areas that are more affluent has historically failed to address the societal woes affecting the communities where students actually live (Komro, Flay, Biglan, & Promise Neighborhoods Research Consortium, 2011). While moving students out of their own neighborhoods to obtain an "equitable" education has negative outcomes that reinforce redlining practices, Wilson (2009) suggests that this fact has failed to persuade district policy makers to

develop strategies that would lead to change. Districts that currently participate in redlining practices reinforce the perception that schools in more affluent areas focus on preparing all students for college and/or career, opposed to ensuring that all sites have the resources to provide equitable conditions for all students.

**The Role of Charter Schools**

Carnoy (1997) described the privatization of public education as a system designed to offset inequitable school experiences by providing students with vouchers that guaranteed their placement in higher performing privatized institutions. Researchers also acknowledge that the privatization of public education reinforces neoliberalism by increasing the partnerships between politicians, affluent members of society, and major corporations (Lipman & Hursh, 2007). Nevertheless, many school districts authorize charter schools to operate within the school district's territory to give families additional site placement options (Hopkins, 2013). Unfortunately, charter schools in Oakland, CA do not participate in the traditional school districts open enrollment process as each charter school has its own forms and registration procedures (Hopkins, 2013). Furthermore, the California State Department of Education (2016) stated that charter schools have the option of receiving direct funding, as opposed to having funds distributed by the school district in accordance with Education Code (EC) Section 47605 (k)(1),. By doing so, charter schools have more control over the type of curricular and extra-curricular activities emphasized at their site. As such, allowing charter schools to operate independently of the school district may be moving educational practices toward privatization. In other words, the open enrollment process may subject families to policies and practices that are strikingly similar to that of privatized programs, as both submit to a lottery system that inevitably denies a significant number of families access to the school site of their choice.

While many parents are aware of the open enrollment process, they tend to be unclear about school site options (Tenbusch, 1993). Parents willingly participating in an open enrollment process that may fail to meet the needs of their children. Kozol (1991) submitted that families living in inner city communities desire and encourage improvements within their neighborhood schools. Unfortunately, a parent's desire to attain the best for their child often overrides collective concerns and efforts to do something about the unacceptable conditions plaguing schools in inner city neighborhoods (Kozol, 1991). While Carnoy (1997) contended that charter schools bring positive attention to poor quality schools, charter school policies and practices are often individualized which may allow sites to fortify exclusionary practices. As Miron, Urschel, Mathis, and Tornquist (2010) argued privatized programs reinforce segregation, often resulting in a lack of diversity within the schools. In the same way, charter schools tend to underserve Black students. Consequently, parents interested in having their student placed at a traditional public school outside of their immediate neighborhood often find that the "options" process is daunting. As a result, parents who are able to do so often choose to pay the amount equivalent to a second mortgage in order to send their children to private schools (Orr, 2003).

Kozol (1991) stated that rundown schools and children that attend them suffer because the fight for equity in inner city schools focuses on transferring students to schools outside of the neighborhood, as opposed to transforming the schools within the community.  Furthermore, some charter schools, in Oakland, California, focus on ways to effectively educate the increasing number of English language learner students in K-12 schools (Haas & Huang, 2010), but minimal emphasis is placed on meeting the needs of Black children. Without a movement for educational equality, large populations of parents will continue to embrace the fight to participate in the open enrollment process to obtain space in, what is perceived to be a "good" school.

**Transportation and Missed Educational Opportunities**

Modern day busing strategies are designed to transport inner city students to their desired "option" school. Hopkins (2013) highlights the partnership OUSD has with the A.C. Transit public bus system to transport students to and from school. Although transporting students to and from school appears beneficial, the amount of time students spend being transported can create additional physical demands including fatigue which causes students to have a difficult time focusing on academics (Dean, 2006). Extra-curricular experiences are also continually impacted by issues surrounding transportation. According to Farmer, Knapp, and Benton (2007), providing children with educational opportunities, which do not occur in the classroom, preserves knowledge. Field trip experiences promote comprehension in core subject areas (Nabors, Edwards, & Murray, 2009) but accessibility often determines outcomes.

Teachers must properly prepare for field trips (Nabors, Edwards, & Murray, 2009). Parent vehicles also permit teachers to organize field trips further from the school site giving students the opportunity to experience the broad world around them opposed to only being able to visit local attractions. For example, stay-at-home parents in affluent areas often have minivans or SUV's to assist in transporting students to and from field trips while students in impoverished areas are transported via the public bus system. As a result, students from affluent areas are able to access the additional time needed to be immersed in the educational opportunities the field trip site offers while students from impoverished areas arrive late and leave early resulting in missed opportunities. Students should be able to explore the world as a method of enhancing educational experiences (Farmer, Knapp, & Benton, 2007). District leaders should provide sustainable approaches to deliver equitable opportunities for students regardless of the neighborhood in which they reside.

While considering the physical location of public schools within the same district, it is important to acknowledge the inequitable advantages some students have over others due to the external resources affluent families are able to make to enhance the educational experiences of the children at particular sites (Orr, 2003). These external resources include utilizing community wealth to access private funding, equipment, as well as an ample pool of parent volunteers (Orr, 2003). Higher socio-economic statuses (SES's) afford some families the ability to opt to have a stay-at-home parent. Students benefit from parent volunteers in the classroom because their presence reduces the adult: child ratio (Reynolds, Temple, Robertson, & Mann, 2002). Low adult: child ratios afford teachers the ability to plan field trip experiences outside of their students' immediate neighborhoods.

**Theoretical Framework: Critical Race Theory**

Critical Race Theory (CRT), based on the work of Bell (1995), contends that race, power, and privilege greatly contribute to the discriminatory practices existing between races (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). CRT provides a lens to analyze the ways in which long-established laws play a chief role in the generational poverty plaguing the Black community including the conditions of educational facilities offered within predominately Black neighborhoods. Established during the Civil Rights Movement, CRT was designed to examine the connection between the ways well-established laws validate racism (Bell, 1995). According to Jones-Hall (2013), CRT scholars commonly identify with five main viewpoints. These include (1) racism occurs on a regular basis (2) the educational system and other societal systems are vital to the preservation of racism (3)

counter-storytelling combats racism and other methods of oppression (4) principle of interest

convergence and (5) the seriousness of intersectionality.

Ladson-Billings (1998) defined Critical Race Theory (CRT) as an academic and social

tool significant in the effort to analyze and reform America's racially dominant, often vicious,

and biased educational system.  The historic discriminatory practice of redlining in real estate

appears to have resurfaced in public schools in the form of educational redlining. Brooks (1994)

has defined CRT as a collection of analytical positions against the existing legal directive from a

race-based perspective. Injecting critical race theory into our current educational practices may

generate authentic data. Data can provide a deeper understanding of the lived experiences,

factual history, and physical locale of Black children and the influence these factors have on the

educational opportunities presented in the public education system (Bell, 1987).

Bell (1987) suggested that America was devised and predicated on the racist concept of

property ownership being designated for all citizens (White males) in an effort to maintain power

over and deny access to non-White people, mainly Black people who were also considered

property. Preferential treatment based on race has a historical basis in American society, which

continues to impede on equitable experiences and accessibility within the public education

system (Ladson-Billings, 1998). The historic concept of citizenship in America may be currently

supported within the educational system as school districts still utilizes property addresses to

determine public school site placement. Critical race theory may have the potential to bring

pertinent social issues to the forefront which may alter the approach taken by schools districts,

superintendents and teachers regarding effective ways to educate children in general and Black

children specifically. This research study focused on three of the five tenets of CRT, as described

by DeCuir and Dixson (2004), including whiteness as property, interest convergence, and counter-storytelling.

**Whiteness as Property**

"Whiteness as property" is a key tenet of CRT. Since racism has been determined to be a permanent fixture in American society, Whiteness has been classified as a property interest (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). While the Declaration of Independence professed that "All men are created equal", this declaration did not include Black people, as America's cast system categorized Black people as property (Ladson-Billings, 1998). The original Declaration of Independence, drafted by Thomas Jefferson, read "We hold these truths to be sacred and undeniable" but that was later adjusted by Benjamin Franklin to read "We hold these truths to be self-evident". This small but substantial adjustment in text potentially transformed the rights of human beings from inalienable to determinable (Time Magazine, 2012) which resulted in categorizing Black people as property and subsequently denying Blacks access to property ownership. Statements and ideas that are then written into law have historically reinforced the concept of whiteness as property as a privilege only attainable by White people (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1998).

Whiteness as property may also include fortifying a caste system. Beginning in 1893, a census referred to as the Dawes Rolls was conducted to catalogue people's racial background in order to govern which Native American's would receive land allotments and other reimbursements (Nasheed, 2011). According to Sturm (1998), many enslaved Africans were of verifiable Native American descent which qualified them for land allotments and other benefits but slavery prevented an entire people from accessing compensations. To add insult to injury, a

separate list known as the Freedmen Roll was assembled in 1896 to deny Blacks from property and other benefits they would inherit based on lineage (Nasheed, 2011).

The Kern-Clifton Roll later granted a few Black people property, but laws surrounding property taxes and linage legitimacy caused many to lose their land to the government and affluent White people (Sturm, 1998). Unwritten ordinances afforded some Whites the privilege of purchasing the title of "Native American" for five dollars to access the property and benefits allotted to people of Native American descent; the people practicing this injustice were commonly referred to as the Five Dollar Indian (Nasheed, 2011). Consequently, accessing property and benefits designed for Native Americans and Black people of Native American descent allowed White people to capitalize on lifelong benefits including tax exemptions, land allotments, and college education grants. Securing property ownership at the expense of Black people and other people of color became the commodity utilized for the educational and social advancement of White people (Bonacich, 1976). Although desegregation resulted in the opportunity of homeownership for some Black families, maintaining the property value of White neighborhoods was accomplished by directing Black families to inner city neighborhoods and denying Black families access to communities occupied by White people (Ondrich, Ross, & Yinger, 2003).

Educational redlining may be a symptom of the regular occurrence of redlining practices in real estate. The National Fair Housing Alliance (2014) stated that inequitable real estate practices, or redlining, during the last century have resulted in the segregation of most Black people that has probably permanently impacted the housing patterns in the United States. Yet, *Brown v. Board of Education (1954, 1955)* examined the state of America's public school system and concluded that segregation was a violation of civil rights (*Brown v. Board of Educ.*, 1954).

Educational redlining practices in Oakland, CA serves as an example of affluent areas utilizing whiteness as property to control accessibility into schools where students benefit from concentrated resources.

The City of Oakland, CA is a diverse community that has extremely impoverished neighborhoods existing in very close proximity to particularly affluent neighborhoods. The separation of these socio-economic groups or, the "redline," is Highway 13, which divides the two distinct areas commonly referred to by locals as the hills and the flatlands. Montclair and Rockridge are wealthy neighborhoods in "the hills" of Oakland, CA that have been categorized as their own districts. Although schools in affluent neighborhoods are a part of the Oakland Unified School District, schools located in the flatlands are often substandard compared to those located in wealthier neighborhoods. According to Haskins (1998), substandard conditions exist in inner city schools, even within the same district, because taxes support schools and the citizens in impoverished communities pay fewer taxes.

The reality of the city of Piedmont, California, a separate governmental entity surrounded by Oakland, is yet another clear example of how historic redlining practices were established in order to maintain the status quo. According to Mihm (2007), a man named Don Luis Peralta possessed 14,330 acres of land in the early 1800's in the East Bay area of Oakland, California. By 1907, more strategic efforts were being made to exist separately within the city of Oakland by the 118 White men who owned property in the downtown Oakland area presently known as Piedmont.  By the 1920's, the area was known as the "City of Millionaires" because of all the wealth that was being generated in that centralized location (Mihm, 2007). The city of Piedmont is a 1.8 square mile area that was established as a charter city in the middle of Oakland, California, allowing the "city" to maintain a separate school district.  Some of the property

owners of Piedmont, CA in the early 1900's include such virile names as Don Luis Peralta, Jack London, and James Gamble (president of Western Union Telegraph). These names currently represent the City of Oakland community college system (Peralta Colleges), the downtown entertainment plaza (Jack London Square), as well as a main street that spans from Oakland to Berkeley (Telegraph Avenue).

The history of East Oakland, California provides further insight into systemic redlining practices in the city. Self (2003) highlighted the civil, financial, and spatial changes that occurred in the inner city neighborhoods of Oakland, California between 1945 and the late 1970's as the postwar industrial era which resulted in a migration of Black people who moved from southern states to this Northern California community. The abundance of factory work offered in East Oakland attracted many Black people to this thriving community (Self, 2003). For example, according to the Pipestone Family Site (2013), the Chevrolet plant opened in 1916 in the heart of East Oakland and it was accessible from 73rd Avenue, Bancroft Avenue, Church Street, and Foothill Blvd. East Oakland, California became a major contributor to the production of vehicles during the 1930's (Self, 2003).  As a result, residents who qualified as working-class moved to *the flatlands* while the town's business, middle, and upper class residents moved to *the hills*. Furthermore, many individuals residing in the flatlands rented property from affluent residents living in the hills, thereby creating a plantation-like environment (Self, 2003).

West Oakland was a thriving community with large Victorian style homes (Hull & James, 2007). Unfortunately, the community experienced devastation on October 17, 1989 when the Loma Prieta earthquake crumbled the cypress freeway which ran through West Oakland (Housner, & Thiel, 1990). The interstate was leveled and later rebuilt in downtown Oakland. The destruction impacting West Oakland caused many businesses to permanently close their doors

while others relocated (Nolen-Hoeksema, & Morrow, 1991). As many fled, the housing in West Oakland became affordable prompting many Black families to rent large single family homes in the area.

Significant changes became apparent in Oakland in the early 90's when former mayor Jerry Brown purchased a loft in the old Sears building in downtown Oakland. Shortly after, structural modifications began to occur within the immediate neighborhood. Small businesses started to occupy the store fronts and charter schools commandeered the small buildings in the area. Then an influx of technology companies in the Bay Area resulted in property rate hikes for both renters and buyers in Oakland. As housing became scarce in the Silicon Valley and San Francisco, the ethnic population in West Oakland began to change drastically. By the early 2000's, West Oakland's proximity to San Francisco resulted in rental properties becoming less affordable and often unattainable transforming the once Black community of renters into a White community of buyers (Cervero, Kang, & Shively, 2009). The gentrification of the city inevitably reduced the cultural diversity in the schools but it did not reduce the amount of crime in the city. As of today, only a few of my family members live in Oakland. The opportunity to purchase sizable homes in safer cities who have already established community services eventually outweighed many families desire to remain in Oakland, California.

Redlining practices have not gone uncontested over the decades. For example, Seale (1991) stated that the Black Panther Party for Self Defense, also known as the Black Panther Party (BPP), organized in Oakland, California during the late 1960's as a way to practice self-reliance and fight against the social injustices plaguing the city. Seale (1991) also suggested that the Black Panther Party's Ten Point Plan was designed to fight against the unfair treatment of Black people by demanding inalienable rights as American citizens. The BBP practiced self-

reliance by developing community programs such as the Breakfast Program which provided healthy meals to children before heading to school (Delgado, 2002). Churchill and Vander Wall (2002) highlighted that the Federal Bureau of Investigation, headed by J. Edgar Hoover, determined it feasible to mandate the neutralization of the BBP, a strategy designed to undermined efforts of self-reliance in the Black community.

When factories began to close, development efforts were shifted away from the community of East Oakland. By 1970, the GM vehicle plant that once provided thousands of jobs to residents became a retail shopping center known as Eastmont Mall (McClintock, 2008). As a result, residents' former means of income became a source of commerce for business owners who drew profit from the community but seldom employed its residents (McClintock, 2008). By the early 1990's, Eastmont Mall had been transformed into a social services center, known as the Eastmont Town Center, featuring a welfare office, a medical clinic, a library, a WIC approved mini mart, a police station, a few retail stores, and several fast food restaurants.

The socio-economic inequities that plague Oakland manifest in the educational opportunities presented to the children residing in this community. Once the Supreme Court deemed segregation unacceptable, underprivileged White people began to rally against allowing Black people entrance into *their* public schools in an attempt to maintain control over the quality public school domain in which they deemed belonged specifically to them (Bell, 1980). By upholding whiteness as property within the public school sector, poor Whites were able to reinforce social, racial and economic rankings apparent and accepted in American society. Bell (1980) states that economically disadvantaged Whites felt they had been abandoned and deceived by affluent Whites who had the responsibility and ability to maintain the status quo. As a result of poorer White's feeling disenfranchised by the onset of available labor workers at the

end of slavery, many underprivileged Whites unionized to prevent Blacks from procuring

sustainable employment (Nasheed, 2011). Further resistance to public school integration and

equal employment opportunities resulted in segregated neighborhoods in a post-segregated

society (Mosteller & Moyihan, 1972).

Denying parents the right to choose the school that would best meet the needs of their

children is regularly practiced in America. According to *Milliken v. Bradley* (1974), the District

Court judged public schools in the city of Detroit, MI as being in an ethnic state of disharmony.

Consequently, the court concluded that redrawing lines of adjacent suburban school districts to

attain racial stability within Detroit public schools would be equitable. Although the court made

this determination, integrating public schools was unsuccessful because it was not supported by

influential White members of the Detroit, Michigan community (Bell, 1980). The District Courts

deemed it inconceivable to redraw the lines of integrated school systems to realize ethnic balance

in a segregated school system without committing some type of inter-district violation (Milliken

v. Bradley, 1974).

**Interest Convergence**

Interest convergence is another tenet of CRT which suggests that White people generally

do not become proactive in racial justice issues unless they will benefit from getting involved.

The issue of interest convergence is historically rooted in the racial divide created during the

enslavement of African people by White people but has more economic implications in modern

day society. For example, the educational redlining practices that occur in Oakland, California

may be a result of a lack of community interest to address the needs of Black children residing in

the inner city. According to Ladson-Billings (1998), White people were the primary beneficiaries

of civil rights laws, including property ownership. Although the city of Oakland is a diverse

town, poor neighborhoods continue to exist in very close proximity to predominantly wealthy neighborhoods. Yet the deplorable conditions existing in most public schools in Oakland did not impact students attending Oakland Tech and Skyline High School's ability to access higher educational opportunities (Rockridge Patch, 2013). As Oakland Tech is located near the prosperous chartered city of Piedmont and Skyline High School is located in an affluent neighborhood in the Oakland hills, this article suggested that as long as students are doing well in affluent areas of the community, there is no need to be concerned about the educational success, or lack thereof, of the rest of the residents in the community. The Piedmont Unified School District has three elementary schools, one middle school, and two high schools. However, the physical location of Piedmont Avenue Elementary School falls outside of the city of Piedmont's school boundaries which qualifies the school as an OUSD school. As a result, a large number of the student body are children who reside in East and West Oakland.

Black families in America have been most negatively impacted by historic attempts of Whites to maintain power and control over Black people (Lynn & Dixson, 2013). Nonetheless, establishing interest convergence should not be equated with Black people expecting White people to be the economic saviors of poor communities. On the contrary, Black people and other people of color must begin to recognize and actively utilize the power of the community to enact change. Until Black people utilize their economic power base to influence change, White people will continue to disregard the ways in which the interests of Black people converge with their own (Ladson-Billings, 1998).

Utilizing a student's home address to determine initial school site placement may be a form of educational redlining often ignored by residents in affluent neighborhoods because restricting school placement to one's own neighborhood secures placement for children residing

in wealthy areas of the city while minimizing placement accessibility for inner city students. Delgado and Stefancic (2012) suggested that educational success in our society is determined by *economic-outlook*; accessing a "quality" education is a right granted to those who have the financial ability to own or rent property in economically thriving neighborhoods. One's economic-outlook may also influence generational practices as it relates to explaining the importance of property ownership as a means of educational accessibility. For example, economically stable families may explain the profitability of purchasing property and the benefits of accessing community facilities such as parks and schools while economically deprived families may explain the frugality of applying for Section-8 which inevitably means minimizing one's ability to establish economic-outlook. Bell (1995) outlined the ways in which Black people historically resorted to capitalizing on their fair skin, to pass as White, in order to obtain higher economic returns and catapult Black families to a new economic-outlook. According to Delgado and Stefancic (2012), practicing racial tolerance only began to tackle flagrant forms of racism such as mortgage redlining but the larger implications of economic racism were overlooked.

Interest convergence tends to only exist when affluent residents are able to profit from inner city communities by the creation of substandard housing and educational facilities. According to Elliott and Pais (2006), Hurricane Katrina ravished the Gulf Coast in August 2005 leaving an overwhelming number of poor people, particularly Black people in impoverished communities. By 2006, a majority of veteran teachers in New Orleans were fired and the public schools restructured to include an overwhelming amount of charter schools. Buras (2011) suggested that the city's charter school movement is driven by White entrepreneurs seeking to

capitalize by strategically targeting schools and neighborhoods primarily occupied by Black people.

A similar situation exists in California. According to Hoxby (2004) there were 199 charter schools in the State of California in 2003. With 1,130 charter schools currently operating in the state California, the California Charter Schools Association (2013) confirmed that California has the highest number of charter schools in the country. As of 2014, the city of Oakland, California has 38 authorized charter schools. Approximately five of the thirty-eight sites have Black children from the community enrolled at their site. Similarly to the historic event of White property owners establishing Piedmont, CA as a charter city within Oakland, public charter schools have the ability to develop specialized programs with criteria that limits accessibility.

Charter schools operating in primarily Latino areas experience increased proficiency in reading and math because schools receive additional funding for students that have been categorized as English Language Learners (ELLs) (Hoxby, 2004). Unfortunately, the educational experience of Black children is too often limited to general and special education programs as there is no category allowing schools to obtain additional funds to enhance proficiency in reading and math for Black children (Rickford, 2006). Furthermore, charter schools with predominately Black students tend to focus on disciplinary efforts as the primary strategy to enhance proficiency (Aguirre & Johnson, 2005). The lack of specified programs designed to enhance the educational experience of Black children may speak to families continual search for educational options that meet the needs of their children. The considerable amount of research exploring matters surrounding the inequitable conditions of public school sites excludes a dialogue surrounding the impact one's home address has on the decision making process of Black families

as it relates to traditional vs. charter schools. Current research does not analyze what motivates parents to move their children away from school sites perceived to have issues particularly when parents do not have confidence in the educational systems ability to provide equitable educational experiences for all children.

**Counter-Storytelling**

Most information is recounted from a standpoint governed by the majority (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). The practice of *counter-storytelling*, a third tenet of CRT, provides a voice to marginalized groups so their stories are presented in an accurate manner (Jones-Hall, 2013). Love (2004) suggested that majoritarian stories highlight the experiences of people from the perspective of the dominant culture, supplemented by attitudes that validate actions taken to maintain overall control. According to Solorzano and Yosso (2002), utilizing "standard procedures" is a majoritarian method that provides the perception of neutrality while covertly making assumptions according to stereotypes. For example, the media often displays disbelief and creates a sense of urgency when reporting on crimes committed in affluent neighborhoods while conveying fear and a need for increased policing when crimes are committed in low income neighborhoods (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). The media also tends to depict inner city communities, including the public schools, as undesirable. Counter-storytelling may give society the opportunity to candidly comprehend the totality of redlining and its influence on educational opportunities in a school system, particularly for Black children. Recounting my own experiences as well as those of other family members provides insight into the physical migration taking place as a result of the impact educational redlining has had on educational opportunities within our neighborhoods. I further expand on this practice in the next section.

# CHAPTER 3

# METHODS

This qualitative research study examined redlining and its influence on educational opportunities in the school system, specifically exploring the factors causing a mass migration of my family out of Oakland, CA in search of better opportunities for their children. This research sought to investigate what drives parents to participate in the open enrollment process if options to meet the needs of specific children are not available. This research will contribute to insight relating to parental concerns regarding OUSD's current student placement practices, the conditions of neighborhood schools, as well as the options parents consider when their child is denied access to desired schools. Finally, this research will illuminate the collaborative strategies utilized by parents to optimize educational prospects for their children.

## Methodology

This qualitative research study utilized qualitative methods with an emphasis on critical auto-ethnographic strategies to examine the link between educational redlining within the school system in Oakland, California, the educational advantages some students experience over their peers including exposure to various curricular and extra-curricular experience, and the continued migration of Black people. This was accomplished through observations and interviews as well as by documenting personal experiences as a former student and current parent of a student enrolled in OUSD as well as a resident of Oakland, California.

Polkinghorne (2005) defined qualitative research as the process of asking people for information that will speak to their lived experience in a quest to make a record of authentic human experiences. A qualitative research study allowed me to communicate with my family members about their experiences with educational redlining while making connections between our experiences and the migration of family to other cities. In particular, I used critical ethnography because it is a design aimed at advocating for the liberation of factions of society that are often overlooked (Creswell, 2012). Furthermore, critical ethnographers concentrate on empowering participants while remaining self-aware and front-loading personal biases and values (Creswell, 2012). Incorporating my own involvements allowed me to establish transparency while developing a repertoire of family member experiences that speak to the influence redlining has had on our educational opportunities as well as the impact variations in economic outlook has had on our family unit.

Madison (2011) defined ethnographic research as the process of interacting with participants in their own environment before immediately interpreting and recording their lived experiences, from the perspective of the researcher, and then sharing the outcomes. Utilizing a critical ethnographic approach may provide a profound understanding as it relates to the impact educational redlining practices has on learning opportunities for children who reside in inner city communities.  The history of Oakland, California was utilized to capture the social constructs surrounding current practices. My examination of student placement practices in Oakland, CA over an extended period of time included reviewing policies that regulate educational accessibility based on property address as well as the ways redlining practices in education continues to reinforce the separate but equal mentality of the pre-civil rights era.

**Sample Population and Selection Criteria**

American history includes the marginalization of women in general and Black women specifically. I was the primary participant of this study as an auto-ethnography has the potential of providing the reader with the authentic perspective of my experiences as a Black woman who attended OUSD schools as well as my experiences as a parent of Black children enrolled in OUSD schools. My own family members were also participants in this study because our collective experiences with educational redlining illustrates the dismantling of our extended family unit as individuals seek better educational opportunities for their nuclear family unit. This multi-generational exploration of both sides of my family lends authentic voices to the lived experiences of Black people in America who migrated from the South to find "better opportunities" for their children in Oakland, CA. Moreover, having analyzed family members with varied economic statuses provides insight as it relates to the continuous migration of Black people in the Bay Area. To demonstrate the long history of educational redlining practices in Oakland, California, the testimonials of three generations of my own family were included in this study. Family members who attended a public school in Oakland, California and other Bay Area cities between the years of 1960 – 2015 were utilized to capture the academic and extra-curricular similarities and differences students are exposed to within and outside of OUSD.

This study was designed to gather and analyze the perspectives of eight participants; seven of which attended a public school in Oakland, California over three generations. Additional data was collected from those participants who left Oakland, CA in search of quality educational opportunities for their children. Family members who agreed to participate in this research study come from households with varied financial standings, ranging from lower-

middle class to middle class incomes. Obtaining the viewpoints of family members who attended an Oakland public school between the years of 1960 through 2015 provides genuine opinions regarding the educational process generations of Black people have endured in order for their children to be granted access into higher achieving schools. Demographic information was determined by the location of the school as well as the home address of each participant to highlight the intersection between neighborhoods and redlining practices.

The primary ethnic background in my family is Black. However, there is some cultural diversity in my family as my father has been married three times in addition to having my oldest brother in high school. Although he never married my oldest brother's mom, my father made sure to spend quality time with all of his children, as a family. Moreover, we were raised to consider each other as full blooded siblings and never refer to one another as half or step siblings. My father's first wife (my mother) is Black. My mother had two children with my father (my second oldest brother and I). My mother later remarried and had another child (my younger brother). My father's second wife is Filipino. She had three children (my older sister, the oldest of my younger sisters and the youngest of my older brothers). His current wife is Mexican. She had two children (my younger sisters). On a larger scale, my mother's parents had four children and my father's parents had nine children. Collectively, I have 8 siblings and 20 first cousins. My oldest sibling is currently 46 years old and my youngest sibling is currently 18 years old. I am currently 39 years old. I am married to a Black man and we have two sons. Thus, examining the experiences of my diverse family provides insight into the overall impact student placement practices in OUSD has had over a 55 year period.

My father and Aunty T represented the first generation (Gen1) on my father's side which includes their parents and seven siblings. My mother and Uncle F spoke for the first generation

on my mother's side which includes their parents and two siblings. My Cousin D, my younger

Sister J, and I (Gen2) served as spokesman for the second generation of our family. My Cousin

D and Sister J spoke for the second generation on my father's side which includes our siblings

and cousins. I represented for the second generation on my mother's side which includes my

sibling and cousins. My youngest Brother B (Gen3) spoke on behalf of the third generation on

my mother's side which includes my children and younger cousins (under 30 years old). My

younger Sister A (Gen3) spoke on behalf of the third generation on my father's side which

includes my youngest sister, our nieces, nephews, and younger cousins (under 25 years old).

**Setting**

My mother was raised in the Oakland hills and my father was raised in the flatlands of

Oakland, CA. Although both sides of my family demonstrated work ethic and commitment to

family, the physical differences between the flatlands and the hills made me aware of the

advantages and disadvantages one's socio-economic status has on housing options and equitable

educational accessibility for Black children. Both sides of my family migrated from the South to

California in search of better opportunities for their children. Regardless of the differences in

socio-economic status, both sides of my family hold high expectations of success for all

members of the family which makes accepting substandard educational options unacceptable.

Relocating from the South to Oakland, California and then to various parts of Northern

and Southern California represents a pattern of migration experienced by my family, over the

past 55 years, in search of better living conditions and educational opportunities. Regrettably, my

father's mother sold her home in East Oakland, which served as the extended family hub, and

move to Stockton, California in the early 2000's. And although my grandmother on my mother's

side maintained ownership of her Oakland hills home after the passing of my grandfather, she

moved to San Ramon to be closer to one of her children and young grandchildren. As of 2015,

only three of my family members, including myself, reside in Oakland, California as the

remaining family moved to such areas as Stockton, Sacramento, Antioch, San Ramon, Hayward

and Los Angeles, California. This study focused on the details surrounding participants'

experiences within OUSD as well as motives surrounding the choice not to purchase homes nor

have their children attend public schools in Oakland, California, particularly when participants

continued to work in Oakland.

## Data Sources and Instruments

Although family members who attended public school in Oakland, California were the

focus of this research, obtaining insight from family members from surrounding cities highlights

inequities that negatively impact students in all districts, the need for further analysis regarding

systemic restructuring, as well as authentic commentary from Black people regarding ways to

change educational redlining practices to increase educational opportunities for Black children.

Observations, questionnaires, and interviews are essential components in producing a complete

and genuine research study (Sagoe, 2012). Observations were conducted at designated field sites

to accumulate notes that represent the regular activities and accurately depict the demeanor of

participants as they maneuver daily situations that impact their lives (Creswell, 2012). Collecting

questionnaires provided me with initial documentation needed to make record of each

participant's history as residents of Oakland, CA. (Creswell, 2012). Questionnaires were utilized

to establish individual participants' willingness to share their experiences with educational redlining in public education. Obtaining video and/or photographs of participants during face-to-face interviews allowed me to capture visual ethnography by incorporating authentic viewpoints and facial expressions (Creswell, 2012). Visual images were collected to depict the dramatic differences between the conditions of immediate environments surrounding the schools least desired by parents compared to the schools parents attempt to access.

Due to the rich first hand experiences my own family possesses as residents of Oakland and students of OUSD sites, 8 semi-structured interviews were conducted with three generations of my own family. Interviews were semi-structured in nature as some inquiries were designed to obtain specific information related to educational redlining (Creswell, 2012). Furthermore, specific questions detailed evidence of generational experiences with educational redlining and continuous search for better opportunities. Interviews took place in the homes of the eight participants. Observations also took place in each participants home to further examine their immediate neighborhoods which included shadowing participants as they transported their children to and from school. Conducting observations also provided me with the opportunity to further examine the impact homeownership has on educational opportunities as school boundaries reduce accessibility for families who own homes in particular neighborhoods. Interviews included questions (by generation) that aimed to understand:

1. What drives parents to participate in the open enrollment process, even if options to meet the needs of their children are not available?

2. Why do parent's request their children be placed at schools outside of their own neighborhood?

3. What qualities do the requested schools possess that the child's assigned neighborhood schools do not?

4. What are the drastic differences between the resources present in inner city school sites compared to schools located in affluent neighborhoods within the same district?

5. Why do parents consider or disregard charter school placement for their children?

Gathering the generational educational experiences of my own family members, who attended school at an OUSD site as well as schools in surrounding cities, provided insight into the impact redlining practices has had on educational opportunities for people of color, particularly Black people. As research often focuses on the experience of Black men, auto-ethnographic research serves to provide a different perspective of the Black experience in America (Hurtado, 1989). Another key data source included observations. Specifically, I examined the link between educational redlining and educational opportunities by participating in 3 *"go-alongs"*. "Go- alongs" have been defined as joining people on their regular outings in order to observe the behaviors of participants in familiar settings (Kusenbach, 2003).  Kusenbach (2003) submitted that ethnographic researchers who participate in "go- alongs" are more likely to capture the authentic experiences of research participants. Furthermore, "go-alongs" allow researchers to develop a clearer understanding of the constructs of individual participants. Participating in go-alongs allowed me to observe the variations in the physical appearance of and opportunities within school sites compared to the current residential statuses of family members.

Go-alongs allowed me to collect ethnographic field notes to provide insight from a multi-generational historic perspective of our current educational system as well as strategies to combat inequities plaguing the system. Gathering authentic data from Bay Area residents from

various walks of life provides an authentic account of strategies adopted by parents who have maneuvered the OUSD school system in an effort to ensure their children receive a quality education. As visual documentation has grown increasingly popular in textbooks over the last fifteen years (Levy, 2011), incorporating images depicting our realities may potentially reach and impact a larger audience. This study was initiated by me documenting my own experiences with OUSD, as a student and as a parent in a timeline format. The questionnaires were distributed to participants via email. Interviews and observations were conducted once participants had been contacted and permission was obtained for their participation.

**Analysis and Reporting**

Collected data was analyzed 1) to better understand the impact educational redlining has on student placement opportunities and 2) to recognize the experiences and subsequent migration of nuclear family units within my extended family. The primary analytic strategy used for data collection was coding. Coding is defined as words or short phrases that accurately capture the spirit of written or visual data (Saldaña, 2012). Initial coding included analyzing patterns within videos, interview transcripts, participant observation field notes, photographs, and similar data. Analyzing data resulted in the following emerging themes: school choice, academics, teachers, school as community, surrounding environments, family migration, and charter/private schools. Once emerging themes were established, interview transcripts were color coded by theme. I also included codes for the type of schools being discussed by location. Secondary coding included examining larger sections of data which may contain the initial words or phrases (Saldaña, 2012).

Once data had been collected and coded, a critical appraisal of the information was conducted to identify central themes. Central themes include safety, community, and accountability. Initial concepts were organized into central themes with codes identified by various underlined colors. I also member checked all data by revisiting participants to ensure the information being presented accurately represents their lived experiences (Creswell, 2012). Then I compared and contrasted our lived experiences as a family with educational redlining as a historical structure. I also triangulated the themes in the observations conducted with those found in interviews while noting any variations as well as asking participants to explain these changes. This was accomplished through analytic memo writing. Finally, I selected quotes from collected data that is most illustrative of the research findings.

## Limitations

The research site, family's homes, constitutes a limitation as many research participants received part of their education in Oakland before transferring to a new district seeking better opportunities. Due to the recent economic crisis, a massive gentrification effort in Oakland, California may have resulted in an upsurge of Black families receiving home loans to move to rural areas outside of the Bay Area. The significant relocation of many participants limited my ability to conduct observations with some of them. Objectivity may be considered a limitation as an auto-ethnography establishes that the researcher has personally experienced the phenomena being researched. Fairness was culminated by gathering multiple perspectives from family members from all walks of life. Although limitations exist, this obstacle speaks to the problem impacting Black families throughout the Bay Area and across America.

**CHAPTER 4**

**A DREAM DEFERRED**

"I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character." I Have A Dream – Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. August 28, 1963

Social scientists have overwhelmingly acknowledged that racism, as a national cultural frame (a communal construct of truth), has been damaging to Black people in the United States as a group (Wilson, 2009). I begin this chapter with a chronologically organized narrative account of the impact accessibility to housing has had on the educational opportunities of a Black family raising children in Oakland, California, as well as the influence student placement practices in Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) has on the residential stability of three generations of one Oakland-based family. This narrative illustrates the strategic efforts undertaken by one Black family to migrate through the system to access equitable educational opportunities for Black children. I then describe key themes of safety, accountability, and community that emerged from my analysis. This family discussed the tribulations of accessing housing and schools in safe neighborhoods. Further discourse established the expectations this family has for themselves while holding school districts accountable for the learning opportunities experienced by Black children.  These interrelated aspects highlight the lack of choice a vast majority if Black parents of all socio-economic backgrounds have as a result of a district policy that reinforces educational redlining and, ultimately, reduces learning opportunities for Black children.

**A Black Child's Early Education**

When I was a child, my mother utilized footage associated with the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s to educate me and my brother about the historically uninterrupted plight of Black people in the United States. We were made aware of the social injustices perpetuated against our people at the hands of individuals and organizations in the U.S. We were also exposed to positive aspects of Blackness, as it was too often omitted in mainstream media and from the reading materials provided in public schools. For example, the negative images of Black men often illustrated by the media were irrelevant to us because we were surrounded by positive Black men. While we lived exclusively with our mother during our elementary school years, our father remained present and available to us at all times. His example of self-reliance and commitment to family gave me a sense of security as a child.

Our parents exposed us to and reflected the beauty, strength, and perseverance of Black people. Our mother empowered us with the knowledge that Black people came from greatness. She would say, "We are the descendants of kings and queens not slaves…nor primates." These introductory lessons taught me to be proud of being Black—that it was a blessing, not a curse. My mother's concerted effort to culturally educate us prepared me for the harsh realities I would face, mainly in school, for being a Black child in the U.S. I would receive my first cultural examination in preschool.

**Preschool – The Racial Boundary**

**Property Lines and Color Lines**

In 1979, according to my mother, she purchased a home about an hour outside of Los Angeles, CA in "a very quiet area of people who did not look like me" (Interview, December 18, 2015). My preschool and elementary school years took place in Southern California during an era of civil unrest, which was reflected in the lack of diversity in the affluent community my mother chose to live in, and was also mirrored within the schools we attended. Being the only Black family in this suburban community was a direct result of the aggressive real estate redlining practices which occurred in retaliation to desegregation. These inequitable real estate practices adversely impacted our educational experiences, as my mother explained that her children "were the only children of color in the classroom. That's good and it's bad because they had challenges around that" (Interview, December 18, 2015). In other words, while she had gained access to a more affluent community and corresponding schools, she also recognized that the lack of diversity within the school community would be an obstacle for us, her Black children.

As I entered my preschool classroom, I could have never imagined the conversation that awaited me. There I was, a three year old Black female with fair skin and sandy blonde hair entering the preschool environment to begin my educational journey, only to be chastised for existing. "What color are you?" asked one of the teachers. I responded, "I'm Black." My mother had already established my value as a young Black child, so I was proud to make that announcement when I was asked. However, the teacher was horrified by my response. In reply, she stood me in front of a mirror and asked me again, "What color are you?" I repeated my

response, which infuriated her. As a result, she grabbed me by my ear and told me to stand in the corner until I was ready to tell her that I was White. I stood in that corner for the rest of the day and sang a James Brown song to myself: "Say it loud. I'm Black and I'm proud!"

When my mother picked me up, she just smiled and took me home. Instead of transferring me to another school, she bought the school play equipment and art supplies as well as verbal suggestions of ways to make the educational experience better for all children. While she could have displayed hostility toward the teacher, she chose to meet the educator with the intellectual strength of a Black woman who had the patience to demonstrate professionalism in a hostile environment. I learned three valuable lessons that day: 1) the color of my skin would impact my educational experiences; 2) everyone must be accountable for their own actions; and 3) it is important to be proactive, not reactive, when dealing with negative situations. The long practice of real estate redlining had made my presence in this predominantly White community foreign, and the realities of racism in the U.S. resulted in the preschool teacher feeling entitled to question my ethnicity and penalize me because she was uncomfortable educating a fair-skinned Black child.

## Exodus: Genesis

### Migrating West: Welcome to Oakland, CA

My grandparents, on both sides, migrated to California from the South in search of better opportunities for their families.  My father recounted his own experience with racism in the U.S. as he explained that, when he was born in 1952, "racial tension was really high, especially in the South." "Growing up as a child hearing the 'N' word," my father shared that "fearing for your

life" was a reality for Black people residing in the U.S. at the time. This reality resulted in the initiation of our family's migration to a new state as his parents (my paternal grandparents) decided to "move us here to California because they had family members there and they thought it would be a better opportunity" (Dad, Interview, December 17, 2015). While many journeyed to California, some of the family on my father's side opted to stay in the South. On the other hand, a few of my mother's relatives remained in Arkansas in order to stay close to my great-grandfather, who owned property in the state and pastored a church in his community, but most of the family migrated to Southern and Northern California. Likewise, my mother's parents chose to leave the South to join my grandfather's brother and his wife in Oakland, California.

All of my grandparents had dreams of improving their living conditions by moving into safe communities where jobs were plentiful and their young children could receive a quality education. Speaking of the economic opportunity, Dad reflected,

"Well, not only did they have that but they also had Gerbers and they had Granny Goose, PG & E, I think Kilpatrick's. There was a spot on East 14th that had a big plant. I mean, you, you could get a job anywhere, if you just went out and presented yourself in a reasonable manner, you had some sense about yourself, and a desire to work, without an education…. you could. If you wanted to go to school, you could do that, too, because they had all kind of junior colleges available with less criteria than what they have today" (Interview, December 17, 2015).

My grandparents, on my dad's side, raised nine children in Oakland, CA. My grandparents, on my mom's side, raised four children in Oakland, CA. Both sets recognized that this small town yielded opportunities for their children to receive a quality education and obtain jobs that would result in self-sufficiency. The factories, retail stores, grocery stores, parks, and

the multiplicity of educational opportunities yielded a safer environment for my grandparents'

children to be cultivated.

**Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) (Gen1) – New surroundings**

My dad described a sense of wonder as he began to observe the differences between his

hometown in the Deep South and his new town on the west coast. He stated,

> Moving to Oakland from 64' all through high school, Oakland was a beautiful place.
>
> They brought us to land of plenty.  That's what we felt. That Oakland
>
> experience…moving from New Orleans, Louisiana to Oakland, California…two different
>
> worlds (Interview, December 17, 2015).

East Oakland's thriving Black community gave my dad a sense of pride and belonging in a

country rooted in hate and discrimination. My father recalled his early experiences as a middle

school student in OUSD, attending Havenscourt: "When I first came to California, Havenscourt

really had a major influence on me because I had an industrial arts class that I remember vividly.

It influenced me to want to do something with my life" (Interview, December 14, 2015). While

my parents grew up in different parts of the city, Oakland was a developing community which

yielded economic stability for its citizens. As a result, both sets of grandparents were able to

purchase homes in Oakland, California. My father's parents purchased a home in the flatlands of

East Oakland while my mother's parents purchased a home in the Oakland Hills.

Although the city was becoming more diverse, real estate redlining practices slowed

down the progression of Black families moving to particular neighborhoods (Ondrich, Ross, &

Yinger, 2003).  Real estate agents participated by redlining affluent neighborhoods as

communities non-accessible to Black people (Benston, 1979). My grandfather on my mother's

side established his own real estate agency as a strategy to gain access to real estate listing White realtors refused Black people. Consequently, my mother's parents were one of the first Black families to move to an Oakland Hills community on a private road called Lochard Street. Because of the lack of diversity in their neighborhood, my mother and her sisters were "the only Black girls in the entire elementary school" (Mom, Interview, December 18, 2015). Similarly, my father's parents were "the third Black family to buy on that street" (Aunty T, Interview, December 18, 2015) when they bought their home. The General Motors factory was centrally located in East Oakland at 73$^{rd}$ Avenue and MacArthur, but my mother's strict upbringing disconnected her from many aspects of life as it existed in the flatland areas of East Oakland. She recalled, "We were actually in Oakland but we lived in a very secluded environment. We did not know that factories even existed" (Mom, Interview, December 18, 2015). See Photo 1 through 5, below, for evidence of Interstate 580 separating the Oakland Hills and the flatlands; highlighting the neighborhood where my mother was raised. My mother and her siblings were rarely unsupervised because my grandparents were concerned with the incidences of perpetual violence and police brutality committed against Black people in Oakland, California.

*Photo 1*



*Photo 2*

Base of the Oakland Hills

*Photo 3*



Highway 580 between the Flatlands and the Hills in East Oakland

*Photo 4*

East Oakland – The Flatlands

*Photo 5*

As more Black families began to move into the flatlands of Oakland, more White families headed to the Hills. While well-off Black families moved to the East Oakland Hills during the 1970s, White families began to populate other socio-economically exclusive neighborhoods located above Highway 580 freeway, such as Monclair, Rockridge, and Piedmont. As the residential divide normalized, educational redlining developed into policy, and inequitable school resource allocation practices became more apparent. For example, funding needed to hire teachers of color and improve classroom conditions was deflected to improve the educational opportunities for children of color (Johnson, Boyden, & Pittz, 2001).

Furthermore, police officers continued utilizing intimidation tactics to regulate the movements of Black people by harassing those who ventured into predominately White neighborhoods. Inequitable community and educational opportunities motivated Black families to seek opportunities in surrounding neighborhoods (Marx & Archer, 1971). My dad reflected,

"Oakland was less confrontational years ago. It was a beautiful place to live. It was a lot

of love. It was a lot of love. Lot of music. Lot of new things sprung up out of Oakland

during that time. You know. Even with the revolutionary thing with the Black Panther

movement. I can go on and on about some things. But on the educational side, they even

had an influence with that too because they knew that to give minorities an equal

opportunity, you had to give them an equal chance." (Interview, December 17, 2015)

Black people began to organize as they began to recognize the socio-economic and racial

divide created two realities for the residents of Oakland, and this divide would adversely affect

our children's education experiences as well as the resources available in their surrounding

environment. As a response to these racially-related disparities, the Black Panther Party (BBP)

introduced community programs in the late 1960s to offset the inequities that plagued the inner

city of Oakland, CA.  For example, the BBP offered breakfast to school children as well as

health services, legal advice, and physical protection from police brutality. The FBI at the time

was headed by J. Edgar Hoover, who considered Black people to be a mentally inferior race of

people.  Under his leadership, the FBI coordinated illegal tactics to eliminate the BBP (Jeffries,

Dyson, & Jones, 2010), authorizing the neutralization of BBP activities through the flooding of

heroin and cocaine into the Black community (Harris, 2005).

The actions of the FBI inevitably adversely affected the educational experience of

children residing in the flatlands of Oakland, CA. As my father put it, "We always know what

the FBI and the so-called trains that was left over there on the tracks with the drugs. In the 70s,

they just kind of start tearing it up. And that was bad for us" (Interview, December 17, 2015).

See Photo 6 through 8, below, for evidence of the lack of opportunity surrounding inner city

neighborhoods; highlighting the area where my father was raised. Issues of poverty, drugs, and

crime are too often overlooked by people residing in the Oakland Hills and other affluent

neighborhoods because redlining protects their children from be subjected to the same element of

danger that most children in inner city neighborhoods experience getting to and from school

daily. The wealth and power consolidated in Oakland's affluent neighborhood schools

perpetuates socio-economic exclusivity while purposefully ignoring the issues plaguing schools

in the flatlands to minimize educational accessibility.



*Photo 6*

*Photo 7*



*Photo 8*

**Gen1 Leaves Oakland, CA**

While I was born and received a large portion of my education in Oakland, California, both of my parents chose to leave Oakland at various points in my life in search of better employment, housing, and schooling opportunities for their families. My father moved out of Oakland, California in the early 1980s, returned in the early 1990s, and permanently left the city a few years later. He explained that the final move was in response to an incident that compromised his family's safety:

> "I always wanted to provide some kind of security, stability, live in a neighborhood of choice. The area I lived in some crime took place, even I was victim of crime. And my wife being pregnant, so I wanted to get us out of that because I had daughters. And I wanted to get my daughters, I felt, in a different environment like I had been accustomed to. So I had moved out to Contra Costa before and this time I moved further out because when I tried to purchase a home the size of the homes and the value wasn't there for me" (Dad, interview, December 17, 2015).

Based on the housing market at the time, remaining in Oakland would have diminished my dad's opportunity to purchase a home that could accommodate his growing family. While my dad's home in Oakland was only five minutes away from his place of employment, he refused to enroll my younger sisters into a school district where they were unsafe walking home. The surrounding neighborhood had proven to be dangerous, but educational redlining still would mean that my father's home address would dictate my sisters' school placement in this dangerous neighborhood. As a result, he moved.

When I attempted to better understand my mother's decision to leave Oakland, she explained that she chose to leave in the late 1970s to pursue higher education. My mom reflected,

> "When I started nursing school, I had a three-year-old and a five-year-old. San Francisco State University, at that time, did not have students with children so all of the housing opportunities there were primarily for single people going to school. I did not want my children in an environment where they did not have other children to play with, in a city that I was not familiar with, so I chose to move to Southern California" (Interview, December 18, 2015).

While moving out of Oakland meant leaving home, it also meant creating additional opportunities for herself and her family.

My Uncle F left home to attend college and then returned to Oakland, California. He lived with my grandparents, on my mother's side, on Lochard Street. The Lochard house is special to me because it served as a place of refuge. In this house, I had enlightening personal conversations with my grandfather, while sometimes enjoying my grandmother's blueberry peach cobbler and/or a bowl of vanilla ice cream. All the while, my Uncle F would be reading the entire newspaper or correctly answering most of the questions on Jeopardy. After courting the young lady who lived around the corner, they were married and moved to a condo in the Oakland Hills to start their family. I would later find out that my parents were married in the Lochard house, which made me proud that our family had established roots in the community by maintaining ownership of property that was later used to commence the union that resulted in the creation of my life. The living examples, photos, and stories depicting the adoration and strength of those who came before me resonated in the way I perceived myself and the world around me

and gave me the fortitude to comprehend the tribulations that would arise throughout my educational journey.

My Aunt T moved out of Oakland when I was a little girl. She explained that she had her first daughter in 1978 and then, worried about the safety of her child, chose to relocate.

"Well [I] chose to move out of Oakland. I had my first daughter in 1978. And in 80', there was a shooting around where I lived. And I said, that was it for me because I want my child to be able to go outside and play and I feel comfortable. I felt comfortable in Oakland but it wasn't my comfort anymore. I had to be responsible for somebody else's. So I wanted her to be able to go outside and play and do the things that I did growing up as a kid. And felt good about going outside and, you know, I didn't grow up in a bad area. And where I lived, I didn't think was a bad area. But I wasn't going to take a chance with the gift that God gave me, to see if her number would be on that bullet. So I left" (Aunty T, Interview, December 18, 2015).

During my younger years, my Sister J and I spent a lot of time playing at the neighborhood playground when we visited my Aunty T and cousins. Conversely, when we were visiting my grandmother's house on Brookdale in the Oakland flatlands, we were required to stay on the block where her house was located when we played outside. This variation demonstrates that our parents had grown up in a different Oakland than the one that was available to my generation. Our Oakland had become less safe for children to thrive, and the physical violence in our immediate environment had become detrimental to our survival. Oakland saw an increase in crime in the 1980s because some inner city youth resorted to committing additional crimes to acquire the large profits offered by drug sales (Freeman, 1991). As a result, our safety was compromised.

Despite the issues occurring in the surrounding neighborhoods, we felt a sense of security on my grandmother's street because the interaction between the adults on her block created a nurturing community environment for the children. My father's younger sister, Cousin D's mom, lived directly across the street from my grandmother. Unfortunately, the surrounding environment had been heavily impacted by the destruction of drugs, and my cousin described becoming numb to the criminal elements within the community as he headed to and from school every day. Yet, he also recognized that ignoring the deleterious conditions did not make him safe from them. He started to curse at the ridiculous amount of negativity in the surrounding community as he described his walk to school. "Yeah, I was in elementary school. Sshhh, about five different liquor stores, drugs, a whole bunch of crackheads all the time, always people hanging out. I mean, just growing up in the neighborhood it became like nothing" (Cousin D, Interview, December 18, 2015). Unfortunately, the school policy dictated that my cousin had to attend the site within his school boundary based on his parent's home address without concern for how the conditions of the immediate area compromised his safety every day.

My Cousin D described his assigned school's immediate environment as one that contained several liquor stores. In fact, liquor stores and/or corner markets appear on just about every corner in East Oakland on Foothill Boulevard from 22nd Avenue to 73rd Avenue. Yet, there are no grocery stores near this stretch of Foothill. This mirrors the rest of the flatlands part of the city--there is a disproportionate number of liquor stores and/or corner markets within inner city public school boundaries in Oakland, CA compared to what exists immediately surrounding public schools in affluent neighborhoods. Furthermore, the public school lunches available to students are far from desirable, so liquor stores and/or corner markets, in addition to fast food locations and taco trucks, became the primary source of immediately accessible and affordable

food in East Oakland (McClintock, 2008). These establishments often have a three-student

maximum in-store rule due to the number of children that line up before and after school to buy

candy and sugary drinks.  Consequently, my cousins consistently crossed paths with the drug

dealers, alcoholics, and drug addicts that occupied the storefronts. See Photo 9 through 13,

below, for evidence of numerous number liquor stores and markets serving school children in

inner city neighborhoods; highlighting stores on Foothill Blvd.
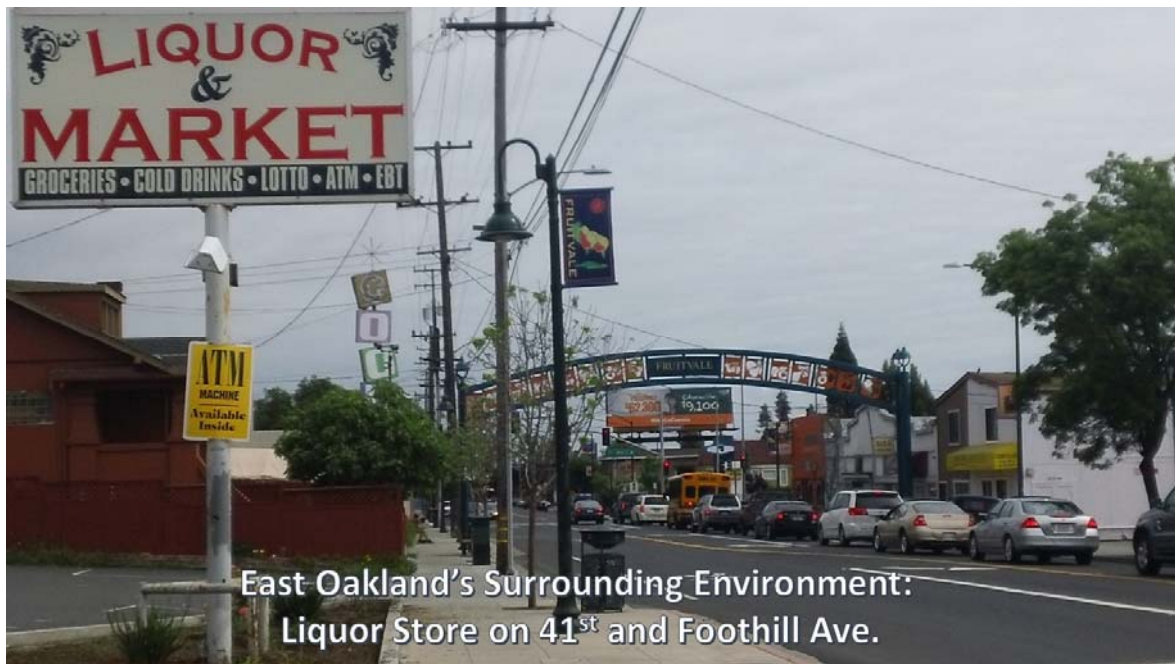


*Photo 9*
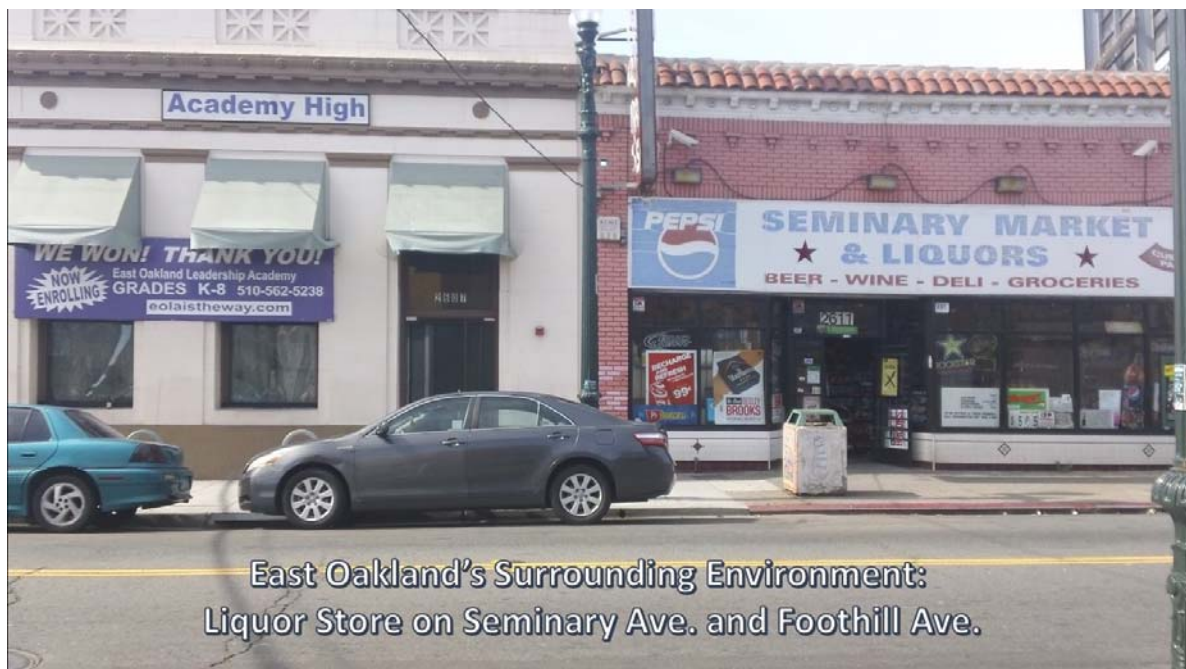
*Photo 10*



*Photo 11*

*Photo 12*



*Photo 13*

To access schools in safer neighborhoods, we could initiate a student transfer. However, the student placement transfer process is so daunting. For example, OUSD requires

families submit proof of address to the student placement office to access school sites during regular enrollment (Hopkins, 2013). Moreover, the student placement office utilizes a prioritization system for admitting students into schools outside of their attendance zone. Students who live outside a neighborhoods boundaries receive the lowest priority for admittance (Hopkins, 2013). As a result, we were often forced to make arrangements with family members whose address allowed us to attend school in a different part of town or in a neighboring city. Using a family members' address widened the school access pool for us, while preventing the student placement office from denying us access to the school of our choice. My Cousin D described my aunt's strategy to help him get into a safer school as follows:, "My mom had to get the PG&E [bill] at my auntie's address because we needed a form of address with the parent's name for you to go, uh, for that address to enroll into the school" (Cousin D, Interview, December 18, 2015).

**Exodus: Bearing**

**(Gen2) Welcome Back to Oakland, CA**

I began attending Oakland Unified School District schools in the ninth grade. We moved to East Oakland's Burkhalter Park neighborhood. Based on our address, I should have attended King Estates or Frick Middle School, but my mother made sure that I was accepted at Montera, which was located in the Oakland Hills. My mom described the tactic she utilized to secure my space at Montera as follows:, "So I got my mother, sorry to say but it's true, who worked for the school district and had a high ranking position, um, to make a few phone calls along with my godmother who was a professor of sociology at Cal Berkeley who also made some calls and we were able to get my children into the school of choice" (Interview, December 18, 2015). She

would not accept Frick Middle School because it was located on Foothill Boulevard in East Oakland and she was concerned about the number of liquor stores in the area, as well as the frequency of children hit by speeding cars and/or shot. My mother also denied placement at King Estates because I took the bus to and from school and she was concerned about my becoming a victim to the element of crime existing in the surrounding area. Despite her concerns, I still spent a great deal of time at my cousin's school and house in the flatlands of East Oakland. My cousin attended Bret Harte Middle School and lived around the corner from my paternal grandmother. I enjoyed being there because I could easily visit other family members.

At fourteen, I met the love of my life. He happened to live a couple of blocks from my grandmother and two of my aunts, so I began to spend most of my time around the 55th and Brookdale Avenue area. That summer I continued to spend most of my free time in the flatlands of East Oakland near Frick. While certain parts of East Oakland were extremely dangerous, Eastmont Mall, built on the site of the old GM plant, was a popular location for young people to gather at the time. Soul Beat, a Black owned television station across the street from the mall, hosted a talent show at the mall every weekend and owned a movie theater in the mall. Soul Beat provided jobs in the community and a pre-internet platform for business owners to market themselves. The mall also had a Black Muslim Bakery, which offered healthy food options in a neighborhood surrounded by fast food restaurants and convenient stores. This part of Oakland also had several thriving Black businesses operating alongside mainstream companies like Mervyn's and Foot Locker. The presence of these local companies and youth activities gave students something productive to do after school and on the weekends.

We moved to the Oakland Hills' Temescal neighborhood at the end of my summer break in 1991. My mother wanted to move to this hillside neighborhood because the home was

surrounded by trees, near a lake and a park, and was convenient to the thriving Monclair business district, which included a library, two major grocery stores, and streets lined with prosperous businesses and healthier food choices. While this neighborhood was not riddled with liquor stores and drug addicts, many residents had separatist attitudes, which materialized in the racist comments I would often be subjected to as I waited for the bus to get to school. Living in affluent communities made me less concerned about getting shot, but made me more aware of the hate crimes predicated against Black people in this community.

**Drastic Life Changes**

I was a sophomore at Skyline High School, located in the Oakland Hills, when our home burned down in the Oakland Hills fire on October 19, 1991. My mother was nine months pregnant with my baby Brother B at the time. The fire completely ravished our home, leaving nothing. Many homeowners received large amounts of money from their homeowner's insurance policies to rebuild their homes, and the Montclair Village business district also received a facelift, which allowed the area to sustain economic stability to support renovating the local elementary school.

My mother was renting the home we lived in, so there was no insurance policy for her to collect. Our belongings were simply gone, so we moved into my grandparents' Lochard house immediately, which was close to Skyline High School. Our stay with them was short-lived because my mother, newborn baby Brother B, and I moved to the Lake Merritt area in Oakland. Nevertheless, I continued attending Skyline because its closed campus and hilltop location made for a safer learning environment. My mother's strategically avoided the student placement office by maintaining the Lochard property as our home address. Since the district had my

grandparents' address on file, no red flags were raised regarding our actual residence, which was outside of Skyline's attendance zone.

**A Teen Mom Attending OUSD Schools**

My sweet sixteen was a life changing day! On, my sixteenth birthday—September 29, 1992--I got my driver's license and found out I was pregnant with our first child. I was a junior at Skyline High School at the time, but once I became too big to fit in the desks, I transferred to Oakland Technical High School, located in North Oakland. Oakland Tech offered a program that provided a small school environment and a self-paced curriculum for pregnant girls. While the program was beneficial for me, I recall being reminded of the treatment of Black people under Jim Crow Laws, because pregnant students participating in this program were kept segregated from other students. We were required to enter through the rear of the school and did not have access to the campus outside of the allotted classroom space. Nevertheless, I took the opportunity to double my workload so that I could graduate early. Ironically, I did not need to go to the student placement office to receive that transfer. While normally school transfers are difficult to obtain, particularly mid-year, in this case Skyline High School was eager to send the pregnant girl away, so my physical condition incentivized the school to expedite the transfer to minimize my presence on this traditional school campus.

The next year was the most difficult year of high school for me because I returned to Skyline to complete my senior year with a three-month old baby. Luckily, I had accumulated enough credits at Oakland Tech to leave high school at noon every day. Nevertheless, the days were difficult due to the lack of staff/teacher/student/family relationships, which are critical to the educational experience (Crosnoe, Johnson, & Elder, 2004). As a former high school student and current high school teacher, I found that some teachers tend to marginalize student voice by

abusing the power of punitive actions to negatively impact the student learning process. Skyline was great because of its physical location, my friends, and the few great teachers but high school often felt like an obstacle in my life. For example, on my first day of English class, our teacher said, "I used to work in Africa. I do not like Black people so stay out of my way and I will stay out of yours." That statement was a precursor of the neglect and ridicule the teacher would inflict on particular students throughout the school year. Our parents always encouraged us to use our voice for socially just reasons. My mom recognized this as she recalled my experiences in school. She reflected, "I have children who have an opinion. I have children who ask questions. I have children who challenge the authority in a good way, for what is being presented to them. They are unique children" (Interview, December 18, 2015). Subsequently, one day, I felt an overwhelming responsibility to speak up regarding the manner in which my English teacher treated specific students. As a result of my report, she denied me access to her class for the remaining school year, and I was forced to attend night school at Castlemont High School to earn the English credit needed for graduation. Night classes were also offered at Oakland Tech, but because the waiting list for that site was so long, I had to travel across town to attend Castlemont.

Castlemont is located in a deep East Oakland inner city neighborhood. There were drastic differences in the resources existing in schools in the flatlands compared to schools located in the Hills and other affluent areas. The alarming number of liquor stores and motels in close proximity to Castlemont High School made the immediate environment unsafe for students, but prime for criminal activity. I also noticed that the school buildings and the books were not as well-maintained as what we were offered at Skyline. In our conversations, Cousin D also described the differences in resources at flatlands schools compared to the Oakland Hills: "Fremont, we didn't have nothing. Skyline and Tech, they had all the different stuff. Fremont,

we didn't have no--our books was scandalous! We had to check them out, put our name in the book, but, the stamps on there was like from 90'! I'm like this book was used by Kim Johnson in 90'--and we still learning from this book five years later" (Interview, December 18, 2015). Biased resource distribution practices in OUSD manifested in the inadequate materials being offered to students who attend schools in the lower income areas.

**An Education for a New Generation (Gen3): Welcome to Oakland, CA**

I graduated from high school in 1994. I continued to volunteer at our son's preschool until I was offered a job, where I found my passion for working with children. About a year later, I began working as an art teacher at a public school located near Oakland's Lake Merritt. My Brother B was a kindergartner there at the time. Working at my younger brother's school was a strategy used to ensure he had an advocate on campus. I also worked for a company for approximately two years that provided before and after school care for school-aged children who lived in the Oakland Hills and surrounding affluent neighborhoods. While the pay was minimal, I was able to bring our son to work with me once he had become old enough to participate in the program. While working in the schools located in the Oakland Hills, the parents of Black children would often ask me to "look out" for their kids because they did not feel that the school had their children's best interests at heart, but rather, often dismissed them as problem children. As a result of my checking in on them, Black children on campus began to look to me for educational and emotional support. Parents were rightfully concerned about the ways in which their children were being alienated and then reprimanded. Black children were too often disciplined for behaviors that were acceptable for White children.

Our first son started school at Allendale Elementary School in 1998, located in the flatland area of East Oakland, CA. Our eldest son attended Allendale from kindergarten through

the second grade. Fortunately, we lived across the street from the backside of the campus. Our

close proximity to the school allowed our son to attend Allendale without visiting the student

placement office because we lived within the school boundary. I loved many aspects of

Allendale Elementary, including the fact that his kindergarten and first grade teachers were

Black males who were able to maintain order within their classrooms without compromising the

students' learning experience or social growth. However, after working at public elementary

schools in the Oakland Hills for a few years, I noticed that field trips were less likely to occur at

schools located in flatland neighborhoods. This was the case at my son's school as well as those

my cousins attended. When discussing the lack of field trip experiences at the elementary school

he attended in the flatlands, Cousin D reflected, "We did things, for our school, like, we did

performances and stuff at our school but on a field trip--no. I can't remember going on, nope--

not one" (Interview, December 18, 2015). For field trips at my son's inner city public school, we

had to take public transportation, which meant rushing students through the field trip experience

to get them back to school before the final bell. On the other hand, students who went to school

in the Oakland Hills were transported by private vehicles, which maximized the time they spent

at the actual field trip location. I also began to notice the inequities in the resources offered

within the schools where I worked in the Oakland Hills, compared to the resources available in

flatland schools, like Allendale, where our son attended. For example, the schools in the Hills

had computers with Internet service in most of the classrooms, while the schools in the flatlands

did not have computers at all. As previously noted, the public schools in the Hills offered a

variety of field trips. For example, students in wealthier communities used private transportation

to venture to locations unattainable to students who depend on public transportation. These

discrepancies provide further evidence of the differences in educational experiences offered to students within the same school district.

Unfortunately, field trips in affluent neighborhoods often failed to align with our hobbies, passions, college, or career aspirations. My Brother B reflected,

"When I was going to public school, you got to do a lot more of the, field trips were actually, you know, inspirational to, you know, find your own way. Not, you know, you need to be a marine biologist so we are going to go to Monterey Bay to go like collect some sea shells (laughter). I don't care about no sea shells, you feel me" (Interview, December 18, 2015).

His public versus private school experience further illustrates our frustration as we attempt to find a site that meets the individual and cultural needs of our children. While the private schools my Brother B attended did not offer the type of educational experiences he desired, they did provide safety: he "never really worried about you know, getting shot going to school" (Brother B, Interview, December 18, 2015). School choice for Black students often entails selecting a site that either lacks cultural diversity or choosing one that is culturally rich, but lacks resources. My Sister J reflected on these choices:

"It's a 50/50 [choice]. You know, we left a neighborhood to try to give them different views. But when you come to a different view, you're forgotten about in other aspects. You know. Black history month in these areas, they talk about Don Cornelius" (Interview, December 20, 2015).

Denying us the opportunity to enroll our children in school sites whose resources are plentiful, offers cultural diversity amongst the students and staff, and includes culturally relevant curriculum further exhibits the systemic abuse of educational redlining. As such, we often find

ourselves forced to choose sites that either offer culturally significant coursework or sites that have the means to expose students to extensive curricular and extra-curricular activities-but not both.

While kindergarten and first grade went wonderfully, our older son's second grade teacher left school midyear, resulting in substitute teachers being placed in the classroom for the rest of the year. We removed our child from Allendale following an interaction he had with one of those substitute teachers. Our son had begun taking the bus to school in the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, and one day he was a few minutes late. The substitute teacher told him to "go home and get a note from his parents" to explain why he was late, speaking with such intensity our son attempted to leave school to take a bus back home to retrieve a note from me. I immediately removed our eldest son from the school and we began the process of transferring him to Carl B. Munch Elementary School, which is located in the Oakland Hills above the 13 freeway near Merritt Community College.

Accessing Carl B. Munch required a visit to the student placement office. When I entered the office, I noticed a large map on the wall dividing neighborhoods by zones, and chunking neighborhoods by home address. As I looked at the map, I thought about my time spent working at schools in the Oakland Hills, as compared to the time our child spent in a flatland school. I noticed a pattern of hierarchy within the public school district relating to the conditions of the school buildings and surrounding neighborhoods, as well as the variations in curricular and extra-curricular activities and resources. Oakland is divided by the freeway system. Homes in the Oakland Hills, located above Highway 13, are more exclusive than the homes in the Oakland Hills, above Interstate 580. Additionally, homes above Interstate 580 are more elite than homes below the Interstate 580. Houses situated below Interstate 580 are considered to be less

exclusive. The schools with adequate facilities were zoned above the 580 freeway, and schools beyond Highway 13 were even nicer. As such, accessing space at a school located below the 580 freeway was less of a hassle than it was to get into one located above the Highway 13. It was at that moment that I realized that our home address limited our ability to access particular public schools within the school district. See Photo 14, below, for evidence of income dissimilarities creating an upper echelon of housing in Oakland, California.
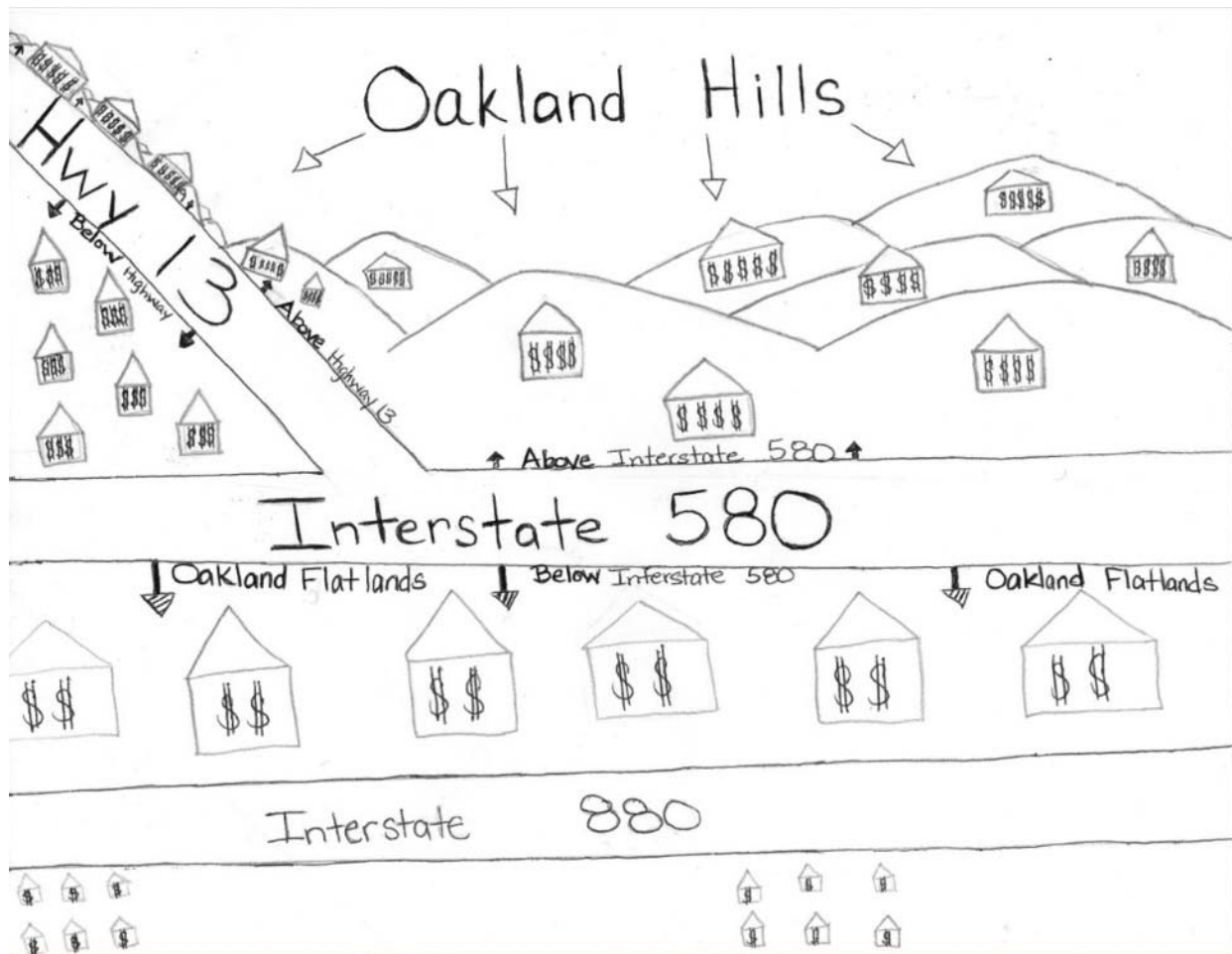


*Photo 14*

**Exodus: Propagation**

The absence of educational and employment opportunities plaguing East Oakland in the early 2000s resulted in an increase in crime in the community. According to Wilson and Riley (2004), violence prevention programs offering job and educational opportunities reduce violent criminal behavior. While the murder rate remained consistent during 2000 – 2001, there was 66 murders in East Oakland in 2003 (Wilson & Riley, 2004). Tragically, a significant number of those murdered were unemployed (McClintock, 2008).

My grandmother was enticed by a mortgage company's offer to provide her with a loan to purchase a large new home in Stockton for the same price as a small older home in an unsafe neighborhood in Oakland, so she moved. My Aunty T reflected,

"My mom sold her house in, maybe, 2000, 2002, something like that. It was always a quiet safe area, but she started to feel uncomfortable and wanted to sell a home that she had raised all her children in, basically, and move to Stockton" (Interview, December 18, 2015).

Once my grandmother, on my father's side, sold her house on 55th and Brookdale, many family members chose to do the same. While the move appeared to be the best decision, the migration had consequences for our family as we began to see each other less frequently. Speaking to the loss of close relationships with our cousins, my Sister A reflected,

"So growing up, I was super close with all of my cousins. We were about, you know, three plus years apart but still we would still see each other regularly. Hang out regularly. And then once, um, the shift happened, so we moved to Antioch, some of them moved,

some of them stayed in Oakland or moved to Stockton and then the gap [between us] just became huge" (Interview, December 17, 2015).

While the homes outside of Oakland were larger, newer, and cheaper, gaining access to a property address in a safe neighborhood with quality schools was a major factor in my family members' choice to move out of Oakland.

After the passing of my grandfather, on my mother's side, my grandmother moved to Dublin, approximately 25 miles from Oakland, and my Uncle F moved his family into the Lochard house. While he rode the bus to school as a child, he acknowledged that he did not allow his children to do so. Instead, either he or his wife would transport their kids to school because the larger community was not as safe as their residential neighborhood. Describing the unescapable obstacles that endanger many children in Oakland as they make their way to and from school every day, he explained,

> "The challenges are everywhere. And I think that challenges…don't end. You got challenges to get to school. You got challenges in terms of…violence and what's happening around you…getting to school. Kids have to be able to be sheltered from a lot of the things that are happening in their environment as much as you can. And at least ushered to a point where they can be in school and be focused…not be hungry and not be worrying about their safety in order to get into a space where they can learn" (Uncle F, Interview, December 19, 2015).

While my Uncle F drove his kids to and from school daily, he also made it clear that he was not completely opposed to my cousins confronting some of the challenges of the surrounding community because he recognized that he could not always be there to protect them from negative aspects of life. Instead of completely sheltering my cousins from the harsh realities of

the flatlands, my Uncle F educated his children by sharing stories about potential dangers in order to mentally prepare them to handle themselves if any of the situations he described ever arose.

Transporting our own children across town became more necessary as the conditions of East Oakland declined. For example, Eastmont Mall had become Eastmont Town Center, where most of the Black owned businesses in the mall had been replaced with social service and wellness offices, a warehouse style grocery store and several fast food locations. Soul Beat was gone, and Mervyn's had become the Eastmont Police Station. See Photo 15 through 18, below, for evidence of the former mall being converted into social service offices, a warehouse style grocery store and a police station, as well as Photo 19 through 22, below, for evidence of numerous abandoned businesses including the littered streets in front of a former school that served predominately Black students.

My Brother B expressed amazement by the changes to Eastmont Mall because he "wasn't expecting to see that they completely revamped the whole Eastmont Mall/106th" (Brother B, Interview, December 18, 2015). Yet, he thought that "Eastmont is beautiful" (Brother B, Interview, December 18, 2015), which is a feeling shared by many in my Brother B's generation because they experienced a dilapidated Eastmont Mall, so any change appeared to be an improvement. As he further reflected on the abundance of liquor stores, but lack of grocery stores, in the flatlands of East Oakland, he stated: "I mean that was crazy to me. They actually have a grocery store" (Brother B, Interview, December 18, 2015). His astonishment came from the reality that he always wondered where people who resided in the flatlands of East Oakland "were getting their groceries from before that" (Brother B, Interview, December 18, 2015).

*Photo 15*



*Photo 16*

*Photo 17*



*Photo 18*

*Photo 19*



*Photo 20*

*Photo 21*



*Photo 22*

Our younger son started kindergarten and our older son started junior high school in 2004. We were very nervous but eager about our younger son starting kindergarten at Allendale Elementary. We were willing to give Allendale another try because our older son had a great time there during kindergarten, first and fifth grade, plus a family member was working on campus, so we felt he had the support he needed at all times. His kindergarten year went wonderfully—his kindergarten teacher was organized and enthused about teaching, which made most children excited about learning. The combination made for a structured environment and a safe place for our son to learn. On the other hand, choosing the appropriate junior high school for our older son took much consideration. As the parents of Black males growing up in Oakland, California, it was mandatory for us to be selective about the junior high school our son would attend as there are very few campuses located in safe neighborhoods. We considered several safety-related statistics of the surrounding community, including the number of young Black men murdered in the area, the consistency of criminal related activities within the area, the frequency of children being ran down by speeding cars and the instances of police brutality against young Black men within the immediate area. This is an unearned privilege affluent residents and many White people amass by not having their children be subjected to these elements when going to school. Finally, we chose to place our first child near Lake Merritt at Westlake Jr. High School. We visited the student placement office again and submitted a request to have our eldest son placed at Westlake. Because the site was across town, the waiting process was agonizing, because we needed a definitive answer in order to make plans for our son's transport to and from school. He was accepted and our eldest child attended Westlake during his 6th grade year and continued for the first half of his 7th grade year.

2005-2006 was the beginning of another chaotic school year for my children. Our younger son was starting first grade at Allendale and our eldest son continued at Westlake Jr. High School. The year started out well for both of our children, but things quickly changed on October 12, 2005, when our younger son's life was threatened by two older students during recess. Two older students approached our son, one of them pulled a knife out, and threatened to stab our son if he tried to stop them from cutting the line. The next morning, I visited the school to discuss the matter with the principal. He questioned the students. One of them denied the incident ever occurred, the other student responded "Stop lying, you know you pulled that knife on him." The principal was shocked at the confession, but promised he would keep the boys in the office until their parents picked them up.

Discontent with the school's inability to protect our child, I returned to the school during the students lunch hour. As I entered the cafeteria, I could see our youngest son's classmates eating together, but he was nowhere to be found. I began to scan the room when I made eye contact with the principal who quickly looked in a certain direction. I followed his gaze, only to see the two boys who had threatened our child sitting in the cafeteria eating like nothing had ever happened. To add insult to injury, I found our child eating his lunch alone in the classroom with the teacher. When I asked him what happened, he informed me that he had seen the older students on the playground during first recess and his "heart was beating so fast because I thought they were going to kill me." Our younger son was removed from Allendale that day. As parents, we were absolutely frustrated with OUSDs inability to hire faculty who were dedicated to providing a safe learning environment for all children. Once I got over the initial shock of the entire situation, I headed to the school district's administrative building and filed a Level 1 complaint against the principal on October 13, 2005. A few email correspondence followed as

the Executive Officer attempted to minimize the incident by stating that the matter had been adequately resolved, but my feedback was much appreciated. Our eldest son was also removed after a violent fight occurred on his school campus.

Until this point, I had only been in the student placement office during the open enrollment period, so this visit was very different. As I sat in the waiting room, I read a brochure titled Parents' Rights (Chapter 864, Statutes of 1998 Education Code Sections 51100-51102). A section of the brochure was titled 'Safe School Environment' and it stated that "Parents have the right and are entitled to the assurance of a safe and supportive learning environment for their child." I had completely run out of patience as it related to OUSD's dismissal of the plight we found ourselves in as a result of an injustice perpetuated by some men and woman employed by the district. Our younger son still had not returned to a classroom and we had completely lost confidence in the public school district's ability to protect our children in any capacity. That is when we made the decision that we would no longer be asking the school district for permission for anything related to our children. It was not only the school district's job to provide students with educational opportunities that would result in success beyond the classroom, but it was also the district's duty to ensure every child was able to do so in a safe environment. It was our responsibility to make sure that the staff at the individual school sites and the district officials were doing their job.

I was determined that our younger child would be placed at Joaquin Miller Elementary and our eldest at Montera. These schools are located next door to one another near the Montclair Village business district in the Oakland Hills. The very location of these sites and proximity to one another makes these schools highly sought after, but extremely hard to access for those who do not live in the schools' zoned areas. My prior teaching experience also made me aware of the

additional resources allocated to these sites by private donors. When the supervisor offered to place our children at Sankofa Elementary School, located on the North Oakland/Berkeley border, I refused placement and began to take matters into my own hands. Describing her similar experiences combatting the decisions of the school district to access school sites and/or resources to better prepare her children for the future, my Sister J explained,

> "I just go directly to the school district. And I'll write letters. And I appear. And I show there every day until I get my child into the school that they need to be in to have a better opportunity and a better education. I don't care about numbers and quotas and where I live. It's about my child" (Interview, December 20, 2015).

I went home and began to do my research on educational placements as it related to inter/intra district transfers. Becoming familiar with student placement practices allowed me to strategically bypass policies that prevented us from accessing highly sought-after school sites. I needed to ensure that I had been given accurate information from the student placement office. I then looked into the requirements for a safety transfer, and once I had educated myself on the process, I headed to the police department on November 23, 2005 to file a report regarding what had occurred at Allendale Elementary. I gathered the police report, a statistical report highlighting occurrences of crime around the school suggested by the student placement office compared to the school we were demanding, as well as the knowledge of space availability, and I returned to the student placement office to file safety transfers for our children. Our younger son was promptly enrolled at Joaquin Miller and our eldest at Montera. The rest of the school year went smoothly for both of our children.

The difficulties of the transfer process I experienced while preparing documents to defend my children's rights to move freely throughout this educational system we call public

demonstrates the systematic abuse of educational redlining. We were so accustomed to inequitable student placement policies that I began to research school site placement availability in order to gather the required documentation before submitting my request to the student placement office to ensure our children could not be denied. The continuous need for us to advocate for our children's right to access schools outside of our attendance zone so that they could be educated in a safe environment is tragic and according to Ed. Code (Chapter 864, Statutes of 1998 Education Code Sections 51100-51102)., illegal.

In January 2006, with the open enrollment period fast approaching, our eldest child and I started visiting the various option high schools throughout the city. Option or charter schools were becoming very popular in Oakland during this time. We visited multiple schools that we decided against due to the dangers of the neighborhood, the lack of adequate facilities, and/or the lack of diversity. Then we visited MetWest High School, located near Lake Merritt and across the street from Laney community college. While the physical condition of the school building needed work, it was an ethnically diverse learning community that offered students' small class sizes, internship experiences, college classes, a rigorous curriculum, a supportive staff, and field trip experiences.

Now that we had weighed our options, it was time for another visit to the student placement office. This visit was to request placement at MetWest High School. The student placement options form gives parents and guardians space to select other schools as alternative placement options. We did not include other schools because we did not feel there to be any other option at that point. My Uncle F and his wife were also researching local private and charter schools at the time, and had chosen to place two of their children in public school and the

other two went to private and charter schools including Kipp Academy, St. Leo's Catholic, Zion Lutheran and Bishop O'Dowd High School. My Uncle F reflected,

> "We chose Kipp because we felt, versus private, they were doing all of the same fundamentals academically. From a socio-economic standpoint, all of the children she was learning with, they're all striving, they're all smart but they're not necessarily all well to do and come from affluent families. So it gives you a mix of the type of children she was in school with. And I think that was very valuable" (Interview, December 19, 2015).

My Uncle F and his wife's placement decision was based on the fact the Lochard house address granted them access to the public high school of their choice, which eliminated their need to apply at the student placement office. Furthermore, the public high school had the resources needed to educate their son with special needs. In addition to my cousin receiving a partial scholarship to attend, the private school was conveniently located near their home. See Photo 23, below, for evidence the gated private school with exclusive means of transportation, located in East Oakland, at the base of the Oakland Hills.

*Photo 23*

Uncle F suggested that being "across town--all the way" did not deter them from selecting Kipp Academy, located in West Oakland, because this charter school had national statistical data supporting its student success rate (Interview, December 19, 2015).

> "They had a really good process and program from which they do nationwide. The statistics that show how the kids were able to achieve that went on to high school and college helped us make a decision to go to that specific school" (Uncle F, Interview, December 19, 2015).

Like my Uncle F, we have no problem transporting our child entirely across town if that means that they are going to receive the best possible education. Being confined to schools within our immediate area based on our home address averts us from accessing school sites that meet the educational needs of our children in a safe atmosphere.

By February 2006, our younger son was adjusting to his new elementary school very well. While our eldest son struggled a bit academically at first, he was enjoying is new environment. That all changed on Valentine's Day when he was assaulted by his science teacher. I received a phone call from our eldest son on the morning of February 14, 2006. He informed me that his science teacher had yelled at him before grabbing him with force, turning him around, and punching him in the face. When I arrived, a school official and the reporting teacher verified the incident had occurred and informed me that student testimonies were being gathered. The next morning, I returned to the police department and filed yet another police report related to a crime that had been committed against one of our children on an OUSD school campus. Then I revisited the school district's administrative offices to file a Level 1 complaint against the science teacher for assaulting our son. Documenting incidents as they occurred was a strategy used to hold district officials accountable for the manner in which our concerns were handled. I felt it was important to hold the teacher accountable for his actions because if the situation was reversed, my son would have been expelled, possibly arrested, and his school record would have been permanently tarnished for that type of behavior. The double standard was intolerable, so I sprang into action by initiating the complaint.

The Human Resource Division of OUSD attempted to shuffle me through the system, but I never wavered in my quest for justice. I continued to file complaints until I received a reply. The response letter stated that the district found, based on their investigation, that our son had not been punched by the science teacher, but that he had been grabbed in an inappropriate manner. They felt the appropriate corrective action was to terminate the teacher and hold a staff meeting that focused on best practices. I filed another complaint on April 12, 2006 and then revisited the assistant principal who had read me several statements suggesting my child had been punched by

the science teacher. I hid a tape recorder in my purse and proceeded to ask her to summarize what had occurred between the teacher and my son on Feb. 14, 2006.

While I knew that the recording would not be admissible in court, I was not going to allow the district to dismiss or alter what had occurred on that campus. After capturing the statement on audio recording, I returned to the Executive Officers office and demanded that the finding be altered to reflect the facts. The final letter, dated May 5, 2006, stated that the district would neither confirm nor deny that the events took place despite the statements from the reporting teacher, the other students, or the audio recording. The school district avoided being held accountable for the inappropriate actions of a teacher employed by the district by utilizing specific language that minimized the district's liability. In response, I contacted the Commission on Teacher Credentialing and registered a complaint against the teacher and filed a restraining order against the science teacher to ensure that there would be consequences if he ever came in contact with our son again. Creating a paper trail eliminated the district's ability to deny that the injustice had occurred while eradicating the dangerous presence the teacher brought to the classroom.

The next year, our younger son continued at Joaquin Miller and our eldest was accepted at MetWest High School. Our eldest son had some challenges while attending this school, but the school itself was wonderful.  We were initially impressed with the small class sizes and academic rigor which allowed the students to focus on their individual career aspirations as a part of the curriculum. Furthermore, each student is assigned an advisor; who visits each student's home to engage the family in order to better meet the whole needs of each individual student. Unfortunately, the undesirable elements that existed outside of the school resulted in his being transferred within the first two months of school. The first incident occurred on September

25, 2007. Our eldest son arrived to school in slacks, a dress shirt, a tie, and dress shoes because he had an interview with a potential internship site. The school provided him with an off-grounds pass so that he could travel to his interview via public transportation.

I had just started a new job as a high school teacher in Hayward, CA, when I received a call from our eldest child, who been picked up by police from the bus stop for suspicion of truancy. The police thought my son's off-grounds school pass was fake and they transported our older son to the truancy office in West Oakland near the Acorn projects. Once the truancy office verified he was in-route to his interview, they released him from the truancy office without any means of transportation.  I had to guide him through the often-dangerous streets of West Oakland to take public transportation to his interview.  He never made it, and I filed a complaint against the officers on October 6, 2007.

The second incident occurred just three days later. Our eldest son and another classmate stood at the bus stop waiting to be transported to their internship locations when two young men approached them, pulled out a handgun, checked our son's pockets for valuables and robbed the other boy for his cellphone. The police report found that the assailants were students from a nearby continuation school. We filed a police report and then headed to the student placement office for a safety transfer. Both of the events demonstrate our inability, as parents, to go to work and feel secure in the fact that our children would not be harmed by criminal activity and/or the police as they attempt to get their education. Incidences of this nature diminish our children's ability to be educated in a safe school environment.

**Another Fight with the Student Placement Office**

Our home address was a major factor every time an incident occurred at our children's schools. We live on a beautiful street in East Oakland, and most of our neighbors have been here

for 20-30 plus years. Although it is a family friendly block, the surrounding neighborhood isn't always safe. Some of the kids were even in our daycare. Unfortunately, the district's school boundary policy limited us to the schools in our immediate neighborhood. As homeowners, we did not have the option of changing our address, but we had the will to fight for our children in order to access the educational opportunities all students should receive. The formulation of school boundaries made it difficult for us to choose the most appropriate school for our children without first obtaining the permission of others. As such, I walked into the student placement office with my police report in hand because I would not be bound by a repudiated policy.

Being prepared with required documentation before entering the student placement office gave me the leverage needed to access schools of our choice. I entered that office secure in the fact that our eldest son would be transferred to Skyline High School. This is a closed campus school located in a wooded area of the Oakland Hills. I signed in and immediately asked to speak with a supervisor because I refused to be passed off or disregarded. Asking for a supervisor was a strategy used to circumvent employees who did not have the authority to grant our children admission into the schools our choice. The supervisor informed me that there was not any space for our older son at Skyline, but that we should consider Fremont High School, because its campus had been divided into three small schools.

With intrigue, we visited Fremont High School, only to find out that one of the schools housed the Black students, another housed the Latino students, and the final school housed the remaining student body. Furthermore, the students were not allowed to enter areas designated as the other school's space. Fremont is also an open-campus school located across the street from an often-closed public pool, a library, two gas stations, two liquor stores, and an abandoned fenced lot. See Photo 24 through 27, below, for evidence the unhealthy food sources and police

presence surrounding Fremont High School. Moreover, the principal assigned to the campus for

Black students had a teenage daughter who attended Skyline. I took my new-found knowledge

and headed back to the student placement office. With persistence and knowledge of policy on

my side, our eldest son was accepted at Skyline High School. In addition to being unsatisfied

with Fremont's curricular structure and the inadequate physical condition of the surrounding

community, I determined that the principal's decision to place her own child at a site other than

the one where she worked was a great indicator of the lack of educational rigor taking place at

this particular site.



*Photo 24*

*Photo 25*



*Photo 26*

*Photo 27*

While charter schools in Oakland began to emerge in 2006, the closure of many public

school sites resulted in an upsurge of new charter schools to replace them. OUSD was in the

process of "phasing out schools who were presumed unproductive (Vasudeva, Darling-

Hammond, Newton, & Montgomery, 2009) and apparently public school sites that served high

populations of Black children fit the criteria. Public school students attending those slated to be

closed were reassigned to other nearby schools, resulting in parents overflowing the student

placement office in search of acceptable alternatives. Charter schools became the only option for

parents who 1) could not afford private school, 2) refused to have their children enrolled within

the school boundaries, and 3) could not obtain a district approved transfer. When discussing her

choices of public versus charter for her own children and her preference for charter schools for

her grandson, my Aunty T reflected,

"My first daughter went to school in Oakland. She attended a Catholic school. But with them being two years apart and I was a single mom and I couldn't afford to send them both. I had to pull her and put her back into the Hayward school system. And it worked out okay. I'm kind of leaning towards a charter school because they focus more on where that child is opposed to the grade he's [her grandson] in" (Interview, December 18, 2015).

Although we chose traditional public school sites, we began to pay attention to the charter schools. While we recognized that the charter school sites lacked cultural diversity, we were interested in the small class sizes and curricular structure which often focused on learning opportunities based on student's individual education and career goals. Nevertheless, cultural diversity is extremely important so we decided to monitor the progress of Met West High School's option/charter school environment as a future potential site for our younger son. See Photo 28 through 30, below, for evidence a former public school, located in an Oakland Hills neighborhood with predominately Black residents, that has been converted to a charter school catering to predominately White students.

Public School Converted to Charter School

East Oakland – The Hills (near Lochard St.)

*Photo 28*



The Charter School's Surrounding Environment: Homes

East Oakland - The Hills
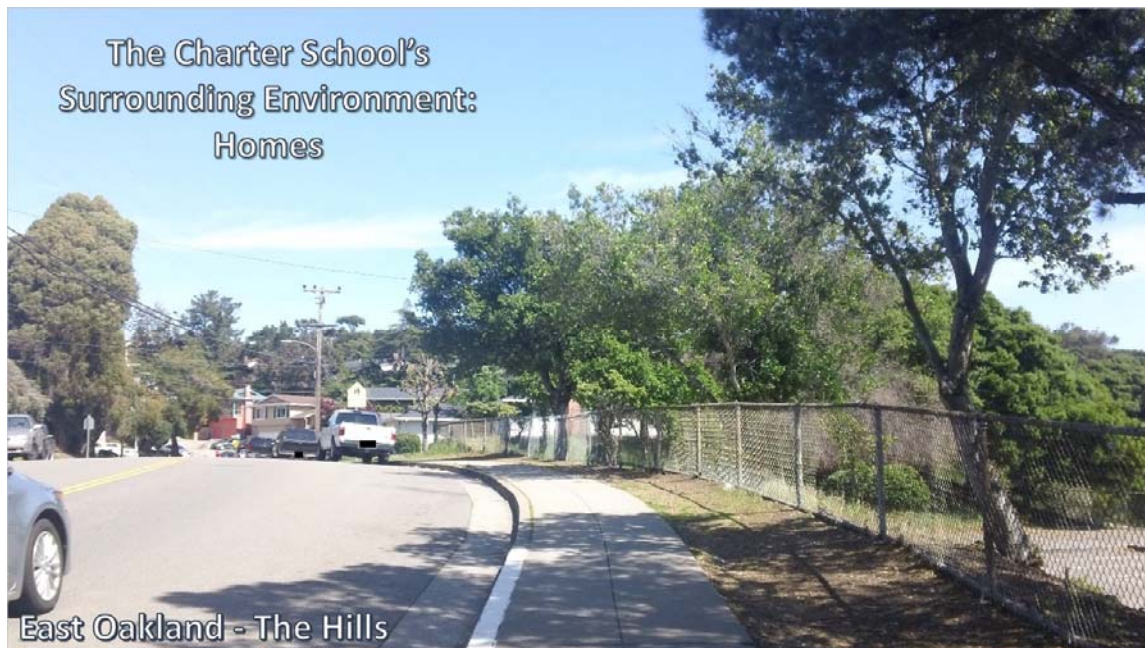
*Photo 29*

*Photo 30*

**By January 2010,** our younger child was in his last year of elementary school. He had amazing teachers every year, except one who yelled at the class as a method of teaching, causing my son to shut down and his grades to suffer. I began to spend more time at the school that year, and because parents volunteered on a regular basis and held fundraisers to provide additional extra-curricular activities for the students, my being on campus was not questioned. Our younger son flourished artistically, adapted socially, and succeeded academically while attending Joaquin Miller. The fact that he began to flourish educationally outside of his attendance zone is the reason our advocacy efforts are so important. We could not allow the district to utilize our home address to deny our children access to sites that could provide them with life changing educational experiences.

Unfortunately, our home address was a major factor when it came time for our children to be promoted from elementary to junior high school and again as they entered high school. Despite the negative experience our older son had during his first year at Montera, we chose to

send our younger son there because the school was under new administration and his friends would be going to Montera. We submitted an open enrollment application for Montera Jr High School on January 7, 2010. We received a letter on March 4, 2010 informing us that our younger son had been accepted at Montera Jr. High School. Our eldest son, on the other hand, spent a year and a half at Skyline High School before asking to be transferred back to MetWest. He wanted to leave Skyline because the class sizes were too large, his grades were suffering, and besides the sports programs, there were limited opportunities for educational or career advancement.

In addition, many of the teachers at Skyline had lost interest in the educational process. As a result, I began visiting the school on a regular basis. I held many conversations with his teachers so I was taken aback when one of them requested a parent-teacher conference only to pull out the file of another student. Instead of catching her mistake, she began discussing that student's academic failures. The teacher was so overwhelmed with the number of students in her class, she had lost track of who they were individually. We removed him from Skyline High School and reenrolled him at MetWest. While he had previous safety issues during his time enrolled at MetWest, their small school environment was more conducive to learning then what was being offered at Skyline at the time. Our eldest son graduated from MetWest High School in June 2011.

In January of 2013, It was time for another visit to the student placement office to choose our younger son's high school. Describing the manner in which parents choose sites for their children, my Sister A explained, "One person can say one good thing [or] one bad thing and it spreads like wild fire" (Interview, December 17, 2015). My Brother B's advice to our younger son was to"…figure out what you're good at and go to school for that. Don't waste your time

going to college and learning history, astrology and, calculus and all this other stuff--you want to be a computer engineer, like, go to school for computer engineering" (Interview, December 18, 2015).

When discussing school options with our son and the parents of our son's friends, they agreed that Oakland Technical High School's small school academies taught students 21st century skills on a traditional high school campus, creating specialized programs with small class sizes. We were still a bit leery about sending our younger son to Oakland Technical High School because it was an open-campus school, which came with safety implications. However, we submitted the open enrollment application on January 2, 2013 with Oakland Technical High School as the only option, but he was initially denied placement. We filed an appeal on March 15, 2013 based on his previous experiences within OUSD schools, making it clear that if our son was not enrolled in the school of our choice, we would move him to another district. Giving the student placement office an ultimatum was a tactic used to access school sites outside of our attendance zone.

When attempting to enroll our younger son into Oakland Technical High School, I learned that the student placement office imposes an order of hierarchy for school site enrollment based on home address. The ranking system imposed by the school district is yet another example of systemic abuse in the educational system. Therefore, educational redlining practices supported the denial of our initial transfer application. Student enrollment policies dictate that first priority is to be given to incoming sibling student applicants who 1) have the same address 2) the same parent/ guardian and 3) a sibling currently enrolled in the school. Our son did not meet that criteria because he did not have any siblings attending the school. Incoming neighborhood student applicants whose home address placed them within the school boundaries,

received second priority. Our son did not meet that criteria either because our home address was outside of the attendance zone. Third priority was given to the general population which included all students who lived outside of the schools attendance zone. While he met that criteria, the policy made our son's initial admittance low priority because he did not fall in the upper tiers of the criterion. Our knowledge of the safety transfer option was the only reason our son was accepted at Oakland Tech on appeal. Despite the overwhelming nature of the enrollment process, we were determined to gain access to the site of our choice.

That August, our younger son entered the ninth grade at Oakland Technical High School. Within the first few weeks of school, he had been transferred to three different math classes as the school attempted to balance the classrooms. Then he began to complain about the lack of learning occurring in his classrooms due to the amount of time teachers were spending on disciplinary issues, particularly in the classrooms where the teachers were new to the teaching profession. I visited the school to discuss our younger son's concerns with the assistant principal/counselor. The AP/counselor addressed the schedule changes, but couldn't offer a solution for the teacher's inability to control the classroom. Our younger son's grades began to decline during his ninth grade year but his desire to enter the Computer Academy kept him semi-focused. While we were far from impressed by the academic structure being presented in the first few weeks of our son's ninth grade year, we wanted him to continue at this site because of the possibilities for career advancement as a result of participating in the Computer Academy.

Our son entered the tenth grade in August 2014. He came home extremely excited about his classes, particularly his history class. He explained that his teacher, Mr. MP, had an authentic style of teaching that captivated the entire class. Unfortunately, our son was not very eager about the Computer Academy's computer equipment. When we entered the Computer Academy

classroom on back-to-school night, we were a bit shocked by the antiquated computers that were being used and the teacher's inability to adjust the focus on the overhead projector. We were also unhappy with the structure of the academies. The small school concept divided the students by interest without offering the resources necessary to developing specific skills. Moreover, many of the teachers were still spending too much time on class management issues. Then Mr. MP was promoted. While he stayed on campus, he was no longer the tenth grade history teacher. His replacement was unable to capture the students' attention, as he was more concerned with enforcing the dress code than he was in educating and bonding with students, and did not have the ability to maintain the classroom community that Mr. MP had established. With out-of-date technology in the Computer Academy and disengage classroom teachers, our younger son began to view Oakland Technical High School as a youth housing facility rather than an institute of learning.

**Here We Go Again – Battling the Student Placement Office**

Our younger son asked to be taken out of the Oakland Technical High School with only two and a half months left in the school year after the safety concerns began. In one instance, an unauthorized adult came on campus with the intentions of assaulting a student, and in another, a classmate was murdered in a case of mistaken identity. Based on my knowledge of student placement policies, I obtained a police report, citing that our son did not feel safe in the school environment. Then I headed to MetWest High School to inquire about space availability, because our eldest son graduated from the school and the staff is fairly consistent. I entered the student placement office with all of the required documentation in hand only to be told that the policy had changed. This modified school policy allowed school officials to abuse the system by manipulating admission requirements to further hinder accessibility to desired school sites.

While the student placement office was authorized to research school availability, they were now required to send applicants to the administrative offices to obtain an administrator's signature before a safety transfer could be issued. Furthermore, when schools are flagged with a safety issue, the principal now has the right to determine if the issue is valid, regardless of a police report. The principal determined our concerns were invalid. Once again, our request was denied.

The next step was to revisit the administrative offices and demand answers, and despite being told multiple reasons my son could not transfer, including that we had not submitted a police report, I revisited that office every day until our son was admitted into MetWest High School. Tapping into my own prior knowledge of the system was a strategy used to debate information being presented by the school district. Although we had satisfied our responsibilities, our home address prevented us from simply enrolling our younger son in MetWest because we did not live in the attendance zone. Educational redlining had once again infiltrated our quest to choose quality schools for our children because our home address continued to be the primary factor in our being denied access to educational opportunities that would best meet the needs of our children.

Our younger son will graduate from high school next year, ending our long journey maneuvering through the inequities that exist within the public school system in Oakland, CA. While this concludes our expedition, the perpetuation of educational redlining will persist as the historic realities of whiteness as property permeates housing patterns affording affluent neighborhoods to turn a blind eye because as long as their interests are protected there is no need to converge.

**The Significance of Safety, Accountability, Community**

The purpose of this section is to provide an overview of the impact safety, accountability, and community has on the decision-making process of three-generations of my family. Safety refers to the security factors parents consider when 1) choosing housing, 2) establishing means of transportation for their children to and from school, 3) factoring the resources available at school sites based on community wealth, 4) determining the presence of violence, unhealthy substances, and homelessness near their children's school, 5) selecting appropriate recreational activities for their children, 6) frequenting local retail and grocery stores, if present, as well as, 7) the impact cultural and economic changes in Oakland will have on their children's educational experience. Accountability refers to the level of responsibility assumed by adults to ensure students have 1) qualified teachers, 2) classrooms with low teacher turnover rates, 3) learning experiences with minimal discipline issues, 4) a school community that offers diversity, 5) sufficient parent participation, 6) appropriate means of transportation to support field trip experiences, 7) funding support from local businesses, and 8) positive examples of staff/teacher/student/family relationships. Finally, community refers to the school systems (public, charter, and private) ability to provide 1) school buildings and equipment in sound condition, 2) rigorous curriculum that supports educational advancements, 3) extra-curricular activities that accounts for the interests of all students, 4) quality classroom materials such as books and computers. Safety, accountability, and community not only determined the neighborhoods my family chose to live, but these factors dictated the schools we would accept and the level of advocacy needed to protect our children during their educational journey.

**Safety**

While Cornell and Mayer (2010) acknowledged that a sense of school safety is key to student learning, it is important to recognize how socio-economic status, housing patterns, choice schools and current student placement practices impacts educational opportunities. The inequities that exist within the public school system often resulted in parents advocating for their children by refusing placement at sites located within their designated school boundaries due to the confinement of being required to have their children educated in substandard conditions that have the potential of impairing their children's educational experience and overall well-being.

One's home address should not coincide with the level of safety or quality that exists at school sites within the same district. Furthermore, being Black in the U.S. should not determine the quality of services received from public servants. Unfortunately, racism in the U.S. impedes our ability to discover communities absent of prejudice. Socio-economic status and homeownership often influences the type of advocacy parents provide to ensure their children are exposed to the best possible educational experience. As a result, we are continually in search of schools that will support the specific academic needs of our Black children without scorning them or stagnating their overall development. Additionally, we expect to be able to move freely throughout this country without being harassed or treated with indifference. For example, my experiences as a fair skinned Black female have been very different from my husband's experiences as brown skinned Black male. I developed a deeper awareness of these differences as it became necessary for me to drive at night to reduce the incidences of being pulled over by the police. Racism permeates every aspect of life in the U.S. requiring us, the parents of two young Black males, to mentally prepare our children for the inequities they will experience

within the system—educational and justice. Largely, as Black people, we are never truly safe in the U.S.

A safe learning environment guarantees that the school site's surrounding environment included resources that yield community wealth to be used to create additional educational and career opportunities. Recreational facilities, parks, grocery stores, banks, and other thriving small businesses are community services that produce employment opportunities within the community resulting in a more secure environment surrounding school sites. An overwhelming number of undesirable businesses such as liquor stores, check cashing locations, and fast food restaurants paired with the absence of community services impedes employment opportunities within the community which increases the presence of criminal activity in close proximity to neighborhood schools. When describing the changes in community services in East Oakland, my Aunty T reflected,

I remember Eastmont Mall was like Oakland's first mall. And we had major stores there. Macy's, JC Penny's and everybody would go there. We had a movie theater. We would go there and we felt safe. But now it's not a, it's a mall but it's not a mall! It's a substation for a police department. It's a social services. Different things. I mean they have some good things in there but the whole dynamics of Oakland has changed (Interview, December 18, 2015).

The absence of community services results in additional challenges as we attempt to safely transport our children to and from school. When describing the surrounding environment of the schools in Oakland's flatlands, my Sister J reflected,

City life. You know, a million and ten people walking around. You see, homeless people. Just everything because it is not the suburbs. It was not tree-lined streets. It was

the city. It was cars and people and activity and any and everything you could imagine (Interview, December 20, 2015).

The realities of city life negatively impact residents in the flatlands more than those who reside in the Hills because affluent neighborhoods are better maintained.

**Bullet holes and potholes.** During my research, I observed my youngest sister as she drove to her high school in Antioch, CA. I noticed the tree lined sidewalks, residential areas with nearby community services, and evenly paved streets. Then I reflected on two major obstacles in our youngest son's commute: 1) bullet holes and 2) potholes. According to Sheppard (1999) the murder rate in Oakland is substantial and usually involves a firearm. Regrettably, stray bullets must land somewhere. One rainy day, the back window of my car was shot out while I transported our son to his elementary school. Instead of arriving to school and work on time, we spent the rest of the morning waiting for a mechanic to repair the damages. Moreover, the negative experience prompted me to drive a different but longer route to our son's school. Our younger son drives to school now, with me as his passenger. His journey to school includes maneuvering around numerous large potholes on every street throughout the city. Literally speaking, it's imperative that he keeps his eyes on the road. Bullet holes and potholes have contributed to the perilous commute to and from school.

The lack of community services also creates an unsafe environment for children and limits school choice within particular school zones resulting in a high attendance of parents during the regular and open enrollment period. Parents continue to participate in the regular and open enrollment period in order to find a quality school in a neighborhood absent of violence. Violence creates safety concerns which often result in parents 1) rearranging their work schedule to be available to transport their children to and from school or 2) requesting placement at a site

in a different attendance zone so their children can a) walk to a family member's home or b) access community services. Describing the reason why parents flock to the student placement office, my Sister J reflected, "You know, you want to believe that your kid doesn't have to worry about getting shot when they're walking to school" (Interview, December 20, 2015). Submitting an application outside of one's attendance zone is often a strategy utilized to access schools in neighborhoods with community services that support curricular and extra-curricular development in a safe environment.

Assuring the safety of one's children is an intrinsic instinct possessed by most parents. As such, creating a secure environment often includes but is not limited to establishing a residence with a home address that grants access to quality neighborhood schools. While one's socio-economic status may hinder their ability to purchase a home, renting a home gives residence the freedom of moving into other attendance zones, but eliminates their ability to establish long-term community ties or access the financial incentives of homeownership. Furthermore, property status does not preclude parents from needing to advocate for their children in order for them to receive equitable educational opportunities and experiences, while ensuring their emotional well-being is not compromised by the bigoted attitudes of some adults.

**Sirens or Serene.** Despite the increasing number of family members leaving Oakland, we are still impacted by the fact that Black children are disproportionately disciplined at school, murdered in the surrounding community, and negatively impacted by police interactions. Multiple security guards existing within and around a school campus as well as the presence of police officers within the community is often viewed as a method of maintaining a safe environment. Unfortunately, Black people in the U.S. are regularly mistreated by individuals and organizations authorized to protect us creating a hindrance in the well-being of our children as

we continue to be subjugated in the education system. As such, we have become accustomed to conversing with other families to determine which schools are safe for our children to attend as well as measures that will be taken if the school site fails to meet expectations.

The experiences my father had as a parent were very different from my mother's experiences because they had two separate addresses. In this study, I wanted to approach my mother and father in the same way because they are both my parents, but I could not because the challenges they faced with the educational system were very different. While my father always lived close enough for me to easily reach, the increase in crime in Oakland and rising costs of housing prompted him to migrate further away from Oakland over the years. This resulted in his living in neighborhoods where his children could attend the local schools because the surrounding community had less criminal activity.

My mother, on the other hand, finished nursing school in LA, established her nursing career, and then moved us back to Oakland where we lived in various locations until I graduated from high school. After losing our home in the Oakland Hills fire in 1992, my mother moved us to a safe neighborhood near Lake Merritt, but we did not attend the assigned school because there was an abundance of Asian gang activity within and surrounding the school site and being Black would not protect me from being shot during a gang fight. While the assigned school's campus was nice, my parents understood the significance carefully selecting schools had on our safety.

Being strategic in selecting schools sites has been an integral part of our family's journey. We have had to become experts on student placement policies. Our acquired knowledge has been tactically implemented to gain access to particular school sites by 1) utilizing the home address of other family members by converting utility bills into our names to access schools outside of

our attendance zone, 2) obtaining police reports to access the school site of our choice, 3) visiting the administrative offices to demand placement until placement is received, and 4) writing letters to the State of California's Education Department.

My mother (Gen1), Aunt T (Gen1), and Sister J (Gen2) all spoke of advocating for their children in order to ensure they were granted access to the school sites of their choice. When describing the way teacher's interpreted my cousin's talkativeness as unruly, my Aunty T explained,

> "Once I kind of stayed on the teachers and, you know, "she talks a lot", we had to go through that. And I had to explain to them, it's not because she is a bad kid. She's finished with her work and she's bored. So you have to give her something else. If you guys think that I'm just one of those parents, try it, try it for a month. Give her third grade work in the second grade" (Interview, December 18, 2015).

Recounting the steps taken to combat the school's punitive reaction to our intellectual ability to surpass our peers by quickly and correctly completing classroom assignments, my mom explained,

> My daughter in particular, I remember was eight years old and the teacher was having her to be a co-teacher…and then complained that she was bored and would get up and walk around and talk. Well she's bored because your education is boring. So I had to go to the school district. I had to go to the principals. I had to make sure my children got the testing they deserved. And as it turns out, of course, they were G.A.T.E. children. Gifted and Talented children" (Interview, December 18, 2015).

Detailing the level of advocacy necessary to ensure my youngest nephew's safety, my Sister J described an occasion when she had to "write…I had to deal with the State of California school board in Sacramento because the school district did some foul things for him. I fought and I won because my children are the most important thing" (Interview, December 20, 2015). Chastising Black students for being more intelligent than their peers creates an unsafe hostile environment for Black students both in the classroom and on the playground.

Advocacy is an attribute we all have in common. We all have felt the urgency to do what is necessary to make sure our children have the liberty to access educational opportunities giving them the freedom to advance their economic outlook as they pursue happiness. My father (Gen1) made a statement that made me think about my happiness as a middle school and high school student: he felt that his children were happier when they attended school in Concord. That holds true for me because I (Gen2) found my lifelong friends while in Concord and I always used my relationship with those friends as a gage for what true friendship really looked like. He also said we were less confrontational--I did not have as many physical altercations in Concord or in other cities as I did when I was a student in Oakland. As a student in Oakland, I remember telling my father about the many conflicts and he asking me if I wanted to transfer schools. As my parents taught me to stand tall and never run from a challenge, I chose to build physical and mental strength by obtaining a gym membership to better prepare me for the fights that would come. The school environment in Oakland too often resulted in me preparing for fights in school instead of preparing for tests or job interviews. My focus, as a student, was not on the curriculum the school provided because I had to ensure that I did not become prey on the battlefield.

The level of advocacy required by parents in order to protect their children from an unstructured un-unified school district is extremely problematic. Yet, I recognize that the

struggles I experienced in school prepared me with the knowledge needed to continue to advocate for my own children, the children in my family, and any child I observe being diminished by the educational system. The lack of concern for the health and safety of our children displayed by OUSD is disconcerting, but also explains the extensive waiting list to enter schools in more affluent communities. We, like many other parents, flock to the student placement office for the chance to enroll our child in a school site in a safer attendance zone. This is distressing given that, according to Chapter 864, Statutes of 1998, parents have the right and are entitled to the assurance of a safe and supportive learning environment for their child. As such, our rights and the rights of so many other inner cities families are violated every day and have been for decades.

**Accountability**

Adults are accountable for developing an educational structure that supports equitable learning opportunities for all children. While relationships between individual students and educators are essential to the success of the student, the connection between school and home are equally important. Unfortunately, the existence of high turnover rates in staff and administration, the lack of diversity as it relates to the staff, student body, and curriculum, and the regularity of discipline issues within the school site further degrades these relationships. Teacher/student disengagement ultimately impacted student turnover rates, which limited on-site parent involvement and the financial support of local businesses. The absence of stability eliminates a consistent urgency to hold everyone accountable for the damage educational redlining has on children.

When researching school sites as a community, we found that resources were more abundant at schools that received donations from thriving local businesses. While discussing the

funding schools generate from local businesses, my Uncle F reflected on community

accountability,

> "When you have smaller communities in the suburbs, for instance, and they're building a
> lot of homes. That leads itself to get a lot of tax dollars in where the city can route that to
> new schools, new facilities, etcetera. When you have an older environment, like Oakland,
> you don't have a lot of those same resources coming in. I think that all schools are
> primarily underfunded. That's why it takes being adopted by private businesses, parents,
> small businesses in the area that help subsidize what the children aren't getting. It takes a
> village so you'll find that the schools are better and doing better in where you have a
> more village approach. So Oakland, it's interesting, they've gone open enrollment,
> voucher, lines in terms of your address. I think they have tried a myriad of different ways
> and I don't think that anyone has come up with maybe, the answer so to speak"
> (Interview, December 19, 2015).

Although OUSD schools are largely underfunded, newly developed or remodeled

neighborhoods, such as Montclair, have access to additional tax dollars for local schools. Schools

can utilize supplemental funds to ensure classrooms have ample supplies and staff. Being

accountable for the educational opportunities experienced by students includes but is not limited

to ensuring the school environment is reputable. Establishing safe well-maintained school sites

with sufficient materials and professional staff generates school pride. The connectivity of a

school environment often encourages parents and local businesses to support the schools efforts,

generating additional means of support including monetary.

Teachers seem to play a significant role in the perceived stability of a school

environment. It became very apparent how important consistent relationships between teachers

and families are as I spoke with my Sister A (Gen3). She stated that she had the same teachers throughout her educational journey and that my other younger siblings, nieces, and nephews were able to experience that same stability as they all had the same teachers. When I reflect on my own education and that of my children, we did not have that same consistency of teachers. To compensate for the lack of stability amongst the staff, my cousin Don (Gen2) and I both choose to enroll our children in schools where our family members were employed during our children's first years of school. When discussing the significance of appointing someone on campus to be in charge of his daughter's well-being, my Cousin D described his decision to move her out of Oakland. He reflected,

> "I still worked in Oakland but lived in San Leandro. So…Hayward because her grandma worked at the school that she was going to. So we chose that school. It wasn't really because of the curriculum and all that… we knew somebody that was there on the campus with her" (Interview, December 18, 2015).

Tactically selecting schools that had a family member on-site provided us with a sense of stability while creating a means of holding our children accountable for their own behavior and academic achievements.

This strategic selection of schools sites is an overarching theme in our family's journey. Actually, my entire career pathway began with a need to be available to my children and youngest Brother, B (Gen3). I worked at our first son's school during his early years and I operated a preschool to be available to our younger son until he started elementary. Once he started elementary school, his aunt's presence at the site allowed us to have accountability as well as hold others accountable for our children's educational growth. Having a family member

on campus became less important as our children got older but teachers continued to be a substantial factor in our decision to enroll or remove our children from school sites.

It is the school district's responsibility to hire rational teachers with the scholastic qualifications to teach children. As such, we made sure the school district followed protocol to remove our older son's science teacher from the school when he physically assaulted our son. We also reported the science teacher to the California Commission on Teaching Credentials to ensure that the commission would revoke his temporary credential therefore removing his ability to bounce from school site to school site. The lack of qualifications possessed by teachers who are either new to the profession or hold temporary credentials appeared to be a factor in the presence of major disciplinary issues existing in our children's classrooms.

In addition, there seemed to be an absence of longevity for teachers who were unable to manage their classrooms. Our children have experienced less than stable classroom environments as a result of high teacher turnover rates. The experience our older son had with his junior high school science teacher and the interaction our younger son had with his elementary school principal reinforced our certainty that adults are responsible for the educational well-being of children. Furthermore, adults must be held accountable for their actions in the same manner in which we hold children culpable for their behavior.

I am in awe of the fact the most of our children's negative experiences were at the hands of adults responsible for educating and/or protecting them. We sent our children to school to be educated, not to be mistreated and minimally instructed due to disciplinary issues arising regularly. My children were fortunate because my teaching schedule permitted me to be available to them when needed. While I personally entered the field with a passion to educate, the bureaucracy surrounding discipline structures and curriculum irregularities appears to make

some teachers lose interest in the process. My experience as a student, a parent, and a teacher has taught me that indifferent teachers negatively impact children's learning experiences. As an educator, I recognize that teachers are overworked and extremely underpaid often resulting in burnout and/or a loss in interest to educate. So I believe that those administrators and teachers who are not committed to changing student lives should enter a different profession as children are our future not stocks on Wall Street to be traded to the highest bidder.

As I reflect on our decision to remain in Oakland and have our children educated by the public school system here, I contemplate whether the path chosen was the best path possible. My reconsideration is driven by my desire to have had the same elements of safety and stability for my children as family members that left Oakland. On the other hand, my mother and Sister J's interpretation of the absence of Black history in their children's neighborhood schools makes them reconsider their decision to leave Oakland. We have consistently been subjected to schools who fail to uphold their responsibility to incorporate culturally relevant experiences for the student they serve. My mom and sister both spoke about their duty to become more involved in their children's educational experience to facilitate such things as the Black History month celebration. My Sister J described becoming more involved in the goings-on of her children's schools when she recognized an absence of appropriate ethnic acknowledgements. Likewise, my mom communicated a desire to increase her classroom involvement to support her children's socio-emotional development by educating the school community about our heritage.

My mom also modeled parental accountability by contributing to our educational experiences by offering to transport students to and from field trip locations. When recounting her experiences as a parent volunteer in classrooms outside of Oakland, my mom reflected,

"The parents were very active. I was a classroom mom. I was the field trip mom. I would

come in and teach Black history annually. I had more of an influence on my children's

education. The field trips were more exciting. We were able to take our children to places

that we would not have had the opportunity in the community environment. Yeah, they

went to the opera" (Interview, December 18, 2015).

While my mom's suburban home address granted us access to school sites that expanded

our field trip possibilities, real estate redlining practices diminished cultural diversity within the

affluent community in which we lived. Subsequently, educational redlining reduced multiplicity

amongst the student body, staff and families, which minimized cultural awareness and enhanced

cultural intolerance.

Our fortitude to hold everyone accountable for our children's learning opportunities is

driven by our dissatisfaction with the schools inability to meet the needs of Black children which

adversely impacts our children's educational experiences. My younger Brother B elaborated on

this feeling as he discussed his experience as a Catholic school student. He conveyed a message

of social awkwardness as very few of his peers looked like him or had common interests which

gave him the feeling like his "real" friends came from other schools. B also suggested that his

passion for following his own path was smothered with classes that didn't meet his needs. Our

collective experiences suggest that the deficiencies in school diversity and the absence of

relationships between school and home negatively impact student outcomes.

**Community**

Many of my family members chose to uproot their nuclear family as a part of an exodus

historically utilized to search for better opportunities. The deviation in socio-economic stability

in Oakland enticed members of my family to accept home loans for property in cities with

existing community services. By moving out of Oakland, my family members were able to secure home addresses that granted them admittance to school sites with sufficient classroom resources like up-to-date textbooks and technology. The price and size of the homes in Antioch, Stockton, and Sacramento permitted my extended family to establish roots for their nuclear families in neighborhoods that experienced less violence. Migrating to safer communities permitting their children to concentrate on advancing academically instead of focusing on maintaining their physical and socio-emotional well-being.

While we remained in Oakland, we were still determined to access schools that allowed our children to focus on academic success. We began to further explore the charter and private schools in our community. The admissions policies, curricular focus, and physical location of many charter schools initially deterred us from enrolling our children in this type of setting. The admissions' application deadlines were not in sync with the student placement office's regular and open enrollment deadlines which often minimized accessibility. Additionally, we were not comfortable with the curricular emphasis on developing students with English as a Second Language (ESL) existing at many charter schools. Moreover, the physical locations of some of the charter schools were inconveniently situated in unsafe neighborhoods and/or across town. Nevertheless, our children were eventually removed from the overpopulated traditional school setting and enrolled in a charter school environment with smaller class sizes.

Once they entered the crowded high school environment, charter schools became more appealing because many are structured to include college classes as a part of their high school schedule. Furthermore, MetWest High School's partnership with the community college, located across the street from the high school, increased their access to educational resources. A collaborative effort between the high school and community college resulted in our children's

ability to advance academically. Private schools offered similar opportunities as the charter schools, at a cost. Private schools use of socioeconomic status creates exclusive practices which often determines the possibility for admittance. Though we considered private school, we were unwilling to pay tuition fees to access an environment that could not guarantee academic success.

We want our children to attend schools (public, private, or charter) that operate as a unit or village which means having adults committed to offering various opportunities for educational advancement for every child residing in that village regardless of home address. These sites must include but are not limited to providing students with properly maintained school buildings, necessary resources, and smaller or well-organized classes, and most importantly, educational rigor and extra-curricular activities that appeal to all students. When describing his quest to find a school with academic objectivity, my Uncle F reflected, "A good education and it really depends upon, again, the teachers at that specific school. For us, it was always, again, the grade, the curriculum, the teacher, and what was being learned specifically at that school and in that classroom at that time" (Interview, December 19, 2015). I found that those of us who attended schools in Oakland attended more schools than family members that live outside of Oakland. My family's migration patterns are directly connected to our unwillingness to stand idle while our children receive substandard educational opportunities.

Developing community is not limited to the school building and the edifications that transpire there, but reflected in opportunities created for students and their families to improve their economic outlook. The conditions of school buildings, as well as the quality of the equipment utilized by students, have shaped our decisions to apply for sites outside of our attendance zone. Nevertheless, a school with a rigorous curricular structure qualifies the school

for consideration regardless of the conditions of the building. When describing his decision to place his youngest daughter at Kipp Academy in West Oakland, despite the conditions of the buildings and surrounding community, my Uncle F reflected,

> "The school grounds aren't fantastic. It wasn't about the campus or even necessarily the computers or science center because they didn't have those type of facilities. It was more about the academic preparation. They had really good teachers" (Interview, December 19, 2016).

We also found that our children were more focused academically when they attended sites that offered extra-curricular activities. Furthermore, our children developed concrete relationships with their peers and teachers by participating in activities in the community. For example, MetWest High School has an annual camping trip to strengthen the relationships between their students and staff. Freshman and seniors are grouped for the first trip and sophomores and juniors are grouped for the second trip. The structured extra-curricular activities offered during the school camping trip benefits student and staff connectivity. Once they return to the school site, students are paired to establish peer mentors to guide them as they enter the community to obtain internships.

A successful school community embodies kinship. For example, we attended an event on January 14, 2016 during which several moments cultivated community connectivity. One such moment occurred when most of the attendees were seated and the principal gave a heart-felt speech about the direction of the school. His passion for the educational possibilities existing within our school community drove him to tear up during the speech. His very being exuded school pride as he spoke of community and the accomplishments the students and staff had made to successfully host the event. Furthermore, students showcased their knowledge, aspirations,

and talents while actively connecting with every parent, not just their own. Parents had the opportunity to connect with each other, with mentors, and reconnect with teachers. While this event was mandatory, requiring attendance at a single event has the potential of increasing student confidence while developing parent and mentor participation, and enhancing staff buy-in. Win, win.

Whether we migrate from state to state, city to city, or school site to school site, we continue to journey in search of better educational opportunities for our children. We have all made tremendous sacrifices to give our children the best possible chance at being successful in life. When public schools fail to create a sense of community, we began to consider private schools and charter schools as viable options for our children. Many participants stated that they chose schools that exhibited high levels of parent participation and felt like a community. For example, Uncle Felix (Gen1) spoke of the benefits of sending my cousin to Kipp charter school in West Oakland so that she would receive academic rigor in a culturally and socio-economically diverse setting. Another illustration is my and my husband's decision to remove our children from the traditional public school setting in Oakland and place them in an options or charter school setting. We believe this gives them the best academic and career opportunities. As a family, we intentionally attempted to place our children in the best circumstances possible, regardless of the city we lived in. It is extremely unfortunate that our family had to migrate or take additional steps to ensure that the whole needs of our children are being met, as the educational system in the U.S. is not designed to do so.

As parents, we have experienced OUSD sites that were emotionally disconnected from families and we have experienced sites that form tribes by grade. Once our children reached high school, we found a charter school site that requires students, parents, staff, administration, and

participating community members to attend school events that showcases students' talents and abilities. While some may internally rebel against mandated events, it is a unique opportunity for us all to support our children's education by participating as members of the school community. Most of the high schools in Oakland fail to create that sense of community, which is why most parents do not participate in school events, seek schools outside of Oakland, or fight to get placement in the very few schools that put forth such effort. When describing the choice to place his daughter in a private school outside of Oakland, my Cousin D reflected, "So that's when we went to private school. And then from private school, I seen…..it was like a wakeup call! I really would rather her be in private school if I had the money, she would be in private school all the way until she graduate. Because I mean, all like, private school, they get more. I mean maybe it's because we pay or something but they get more participation from the parents (Interview, December 18, 2015). Whether we leave Oakland, or stay and fight, accessing resources to support our children's educational growth is invaluable to their success as adults.

Unfortunately, our quest to access quality schools in safe communities minimizes our connectedness to extended family. When discussing the separation of extended family due to migration, my Sister J reflected, "But I understand why everyone has left because, you know, you want to try to open up your kid's horizons to something. Give them a better opportunity" (Interview, December 20, 2015). Despite the negative impact moving out of Oakland has had on our family unit, we still try to remain connected so that the next generation can benefit from the experiences of their elders. When describing our efforts to maintain family ties, my Sister A optimistically highlighted our ability to bypass distance when she suggested,

> "With modern technology, we have Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, so we can use these
>
> platforms to get in touch with each other and actually make and plan things and kind of

come together so that we don't continue to drift apart but come back together like we used to in the past" (Interview, December 17, 2015).

While educational redlining has divided us geographically, we are determined to remain linked as a family.

**CHAPTER 5**

**DRAWING LINES IN THE SAND**

Institutions in the United States have historically utilized Whiteness as an authority to revoke Black people's ability to access quality housing, education, and jobs (Bell, 1987; Ladson-Billings, 1998). Current student placement practices in Oakland Unified School District and elsewhere endorse these historic practices by utilizing home addresses to deny families the freedom to choose schools based on the specific needs of their children. As demonstrated in the last chapter through the experiences of three generations of my family, this process of *educational redlining* impedes children's ability to thrive academically. While "regular and open" enrollment periods offered by districts give parents the perception of choice, in reality, families are confined to pre-set school boundaries. Further restricting students to the schools in within these boundaries, or their immediate neighborhoods, often compromises children's safety as crime, drug activity, and unhealthy food besieges them at every turn. Ultimately, failing to improve the conditions of inner city schools reinforces racial and economic segregation.

In this chapter, I will begin by presenting responses to the two questions guiding this study. In light of these findings and my framework for Critical Race Theory (Bell, 1987), I then discuss the following main points: 1) the economic and racial segregation reflected in the housing patterns impacting educational opportunities for Black children in Oakland; 2) the lack of interest to converge the needs of Black students with instructive practices that promote educational and economic growth; 3) the impact job opportunities could have on the reduction of crime in Oakland; 4) the reality of food deserts and an abundance of unhealthy food choices

surrounding schools located in the flatlands of Oakland compared to the community services offered in affluent areas; and 5) police brutality, drugs, and the significance of Black parents preparing Black children for the realities they may face when confronted by law enforcement and racism. I then offer recommendations for the City of Oakland, the Parent-Teacher Association and Sports Organizations as well as the Oakland Unified School District, teachers, families in general, and Black families specifically. Finally, I provide research recommendations that emerge from this study.

**Access to Housing**

The first research question guiding this study was: "How does accessibility to housing/real estate affect the educational opportunities of three generations of a Black family raising children in Oakland, California?" My findings indicate that accessibility to housing in Oakland, California affected the educational opportunities of each generation in different ways. Despite the generational differences, accessing housing in particular neighborhoods in Oakland, has equally affected three generations of my family's quest to gain admission into school sites in safe neighborhoods that also meet the whole needs of our children. Next, I discuss each generation and offer analysis of the conditions that influenced the educational opportunities of each generation.

My mother described her parents' exclusive hilltop home as being located in a neighborhood that lacked cultural diversity, which was also reflected in the school's staff and student body, as shown in chapter four. My mother's, and her siblings', educational experiences were directly tied to racist real estate redlining practices designed to minimized Black families' access to exclusive neighborhoods in Oakland, California (Ondrich, Ross, & Yinger, 2003). The United States history of placing a higher value on "whiteness as property" resulted in White

residents having access to prime real estate (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Whiteness, being primarily self-evident, granted White residents' unlimited access to exercise the right to live, the liberty to choose, and the unobstructed ability to pursue happiness. All the while, Black people in the U.S. are mistreated and murdered, labeled as property, only to have the pursuit of happiness confined by inequitable laws and educational policies (Ansley, 1988). While my mother's parents were able to secure a home in a desirable neighborhood, the lack of diversity affected her educational experiences. For example, ingrained racism minimized teachers propensity to incorporate culturally relevant curriculum to support the needs of the few Black children on campus (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011).

The quality flatland neighborhood in which my father's parents bought a home has, over time, had been infiltrated by drugs, crime, and poverty. Today, the career and educational opportunities that were once available to my father are no longer available. In chapter four, my father described Oakland in the mid 1960's as a safer place for families to receive an education and establish financial stability. Furthermore, local job opportunities made home ownership a reality for many Black families (McClintock, 2008). Both my father and Aunty T reflected on the sense of security provided by the existence of community services being generated by grassroots organizations such as the Black Panther Party (BBP) in the late 1960's. Unfortunately, the American government attacked the BBP's motives for establishing a ten-point program demanding equitable community services in the Black community, particularly in the Oakland flatlands. Their efforts to uplift the Black community in Oakland resulted in the FBI listing the BBP as a terrorist organization and, therefore, as "public enemy number one." Retaliatory actions on the behalf of J. Edgar Hoover, head of the F.B.I. at the time, included flooding the Black community with drugs to neutralize the BBP's efforts (Harris, 2015). The burning of

Black Wall Street in Tulsa, OK in the 1920's (Nasheed, 2011) and the fact that the government even considered reinstating internment camps for Black people in 1967 (Lowell & David, 1976) reflects on the American governments track record of premeditating the destruction of Black lives.

While the Loma Prieta earthquake of 1989 destroyed the revenue being generated into the flatlands of West Oakland (Housner & Thiel, 1990), the devastation of the Oakland Hills fire yielded economic returns for the homeowners affected by the disaster (Schiewe, 2011), as did the businesses operating in the immediate area (Johnson, 2006). By the early 1990's, many inner city neighborhoods became dilapidated, while more affluent neighborhoods began to restructure (McClintock, 2008). The lack of community services and increase in crime in particular areas made the commute to and from school more dangerous. While rental property in the flatlands was affordable, renting or purchasing spacious homes in a safe neighborhood became less attainable for my generation. In chapter four, I discussed local Black-owned businesses incorporating youth activities, which provided positive examples of self-sufficiency through self-determination in the Black community.

While Black-owned businesses thrived in the flatlands of East Oakland in the early 1990's, transforming the mall into social service offices minimized the number of entry-level jobs available in the immediate area. The lack of community services in the flatlands resulted in an increase in poverty, drug use, and violence which further deteriorated the home values in the community. Furthermore, an influx of technology companies in the Bay Area widened the income gap, which further impacted accessibility to housing in the Oakland hills (Berg, 2016). As the housing market began to crash, mortgage companies reinstated unethical real estate practices by offering Black families fallacious home loans to move to areas such as Antioch,

Stockton, and Sacramento. As the city became more gentrified, the cultural diversity declined as more and more families were pushed further out into affordable areas.

Challenges accessing school sites in preferred attendance zones minimized educational experiences and career prospects for our own children. While the flatlands of Oakland was a predominantly a Black community until the early 2000's (Montojo & McElvain, 2015), the realities of student placement policies reinforcing the inequities established by real estate redlining practices resulted in a mass migration of Black families leaving Oakland, California (Berg, 2016). As a result, schools in Oakland, California are less diverse in 2016 and, similarly to the experiences of participants in generation one and two, schools continue to display minimal urgency to develop culturally relevant material for Black children.

**Student Placement Practices**

The second question guiding this study was: 2) How has student placement practices in Oakland Unified School District impacted the residential stability of three generations of one Oakland-based Black family? While a few of my family members retained ownership of property in Oakland, most of us chose to lease or buy property elsewhere. The lack of resources and community services encouraged many to transition to other school districts in search of equitable educational experiences. Three generations of my own family have uprooted their children from the City of Oakland because OUSD's student placement practices hindered my family's ability to choose school sites that would best meet the needs of our children. Oakland Unified School District's mapping system educationally redlines families by utilizing a parent's home address to determine students' site placement. According to Hanson (2005), inequitable student placement practices have negatively impacted educational opportunities for Black children for decades. This policy has been particularly harmful to students who reside in

inner city neighborhoods because of the environmental risks associated with a school's surrounding community.

The City of Oakland and OUSD's inability to provide a safe learning environment for children in general, and Black children specifically, has resulted in the migration of three generations of my Oakland-based family to other school districts. For example, the City of Oakland has failed to reduce the number of undesirable businesses surrounding schools in predominately Black neighborhoods. As a result, children are being exposed to adversities as they attempt to walk to and from school every day. Furthermore, many Black children arrive to school only to have their efforts undermined by the very people responsible for their educational experiences (Smith, 2005). Remaining in an un-unified school district, in a city with a high rate of crime committed against Black people, often makes the choice to leave Oakland favorable. Ultimately, school systems' adoption of inequitable student placement practices directly supports educational redlining while violating parents' rights, according to California Education Code (Chapter 864, Statutes of 1998 Education Code Sections 51100-51102). Historic and present migration patterns are connected to Black peoples' quest for a reality that includes asserting our right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. We, the people of the United States of America, must recognize that to ensure the health and safety of some children, we must guarantee equality for all children.

**The Tale of Two Oaklands**

Housing patterns in the U.S. have been driven by racism and socio-economics (Powell, 1995). The City of Oakland, California has also historically participated in racial and economic separatist practices (Ahrens, 2014). In particular, Oakland has preserved the exclusive amenities offered to people residing in the wealthy Oakland hills while failing to enhance the community

services offered to lower-income residents of flatlands communities. As a result, two Oaklands emerged—"the hills" and "the flatlands," which are separated by the 580 freeway system. In the past several decades, real estate agents' concerted efforts to limit the ability of Black families to obtain property in predominantly White communities reinforced segregation. This is consistent with the historic use of Whiteness as leverage to create exclusivity by promoting exclusionary housing, education, and employment practices (Ondrich, Ross, & Yinger, 2003).  Such real estate redlining practices limited the cultural diversification in particular neighborhoods, which in turn impacted the diversity in schools in Oakland, California.

While unjust real estate practices minimized Black families' ability to access housing in particular neighborhoods, the city's physical and socio-economic decline further divided the housing market, thus emphasizing the existence of two Oaklands. The Oakland hills, and other affluent areas of Oakland, comprise one Oakland. In this Oakland, homes are conveniently located near well-maintained parks with walking trails, a variety of grocery stores with high quality food offerings, small businesses, and retail shops. Housing in close proximity to these types of community services and resources have an increased property value (Song & Knaap, 2004). In the other Oakland, there is a lack of such community services, but there is an abundance of abandoned buildings and unhealthy food choices, which reduces a property's aesthetic beauty and therefore its financial value (Song & Knaap, 2004). Within these two Oaklands, school boundaries have created educational redlines that preserve their separate realities. As a result, life in the Oakland hills is very different than that of the Oakland flatlands. Socio-economics not only determines the neighborhoods families can access (Powell, 1995) but obtaining housing in particular school zones grants our children admittance into highly sought after schools.

My parent's parents came to Oakland, California with a vision of attaining educational success and economic prosperity for their families. While my mother's side of the family focused on higher education as a means to achieve financial stability, my father's side of the family concentrated on vocational education opportunities. Regardless of the path taken, both sides of my family were motivated by the desire to provide adequate housing and educational opportunities for the next generation. While three generations of my family primarily lived in East Oakland, the changes occurring citywide have had an unfavorable effect on our desire to remain residents of Oakland. Those of us that chose to stay found it necessary to alter our lives considerably to ensure that our children are safe and well educated. This has included changing our work schedules to be available to transport or children to and from school, and some of us have even chosen our career paths based on the knowledge that our presence is essential to our children receiving equitable treatment both inside and outside of school.

Historic redlining practices preserve White privilege by denying Black people their fundamental rights (Ondrich, Ross, & Yinger, 2003). Decades ago, the BPP created a ten point program demanding equitable opportunities for Black people including, but not limited to, housing, education, and employment. According to Ray (2002), the ten-point program included demands from the BPP on behalf of Black people. The first point demanded Black people be given the liberty and authority to determine the destinies of Black and oppressed neighborhoods by fully controlling the institutions which exist in our communities. The second point required accountability for the American practice of refusing to provide full time employment to Black people at a decent living wage while continuing to support companies that minimally hire Black people (Ray, 2002). Furthermore, the BPP challenged the government for continually denying Black people access to the technology and financial support needed to create employment

opportunities for Black people in order to enhance Black families economic outlook. The BBP's third point demanded the government cease to participate in economically depriving the Black community of reparations owed from the enslavement and mass murder of Black people in the United States (Dawson & Popoff, 2004). The first three points of the 10 Point Program spoke to unjust educational practices and the perpetuation of race-based socio-economic hierarchy in the U.S.

The Black Panther Party's fourth point highlighted the dilapidated conditions of buildings in inner city communities by listing the need for funding to support Black organizations effort to develop decent housing for the Black community to curtail landlords' ability to operate as slumlords, collecting rent without maintaining the physical conditions of the property resulting in substandard living conditions for the tenants (Pulido, 2002). The fifth point demanded quality educational opportunities for Black people that exposes the realities of the corruption ingrained in American society in addition to providing culturally relevant material in regards to the historic and present-day contributions of Black people (Ray, 2002). The sixth point required free health care to tend to the physical ailments exiting in Black and oppressed communities as a result of being preyed upon by the American governments efforts to engulf Black and oppressed communities with substances including but not limited to oppressive practices such as granting zoning clearances to businesses that serve unhealthy food and mass amounts of alcohol in Black and oppressed communities (Pulido, 2002).

The perpetuation of racist practices in the U.S. often results in there being no safe place for Black people to raise children. Whether it's the food being consumed or the potential dangers of encountering the police, laws and policies are not designed to have the best interest of Black children in mind (McClintock, 2008). As such, putting an end to police brutality and the

unwarranted murder of all people of color including Black people as well as all oppressed people in the U.S was listed as the seventh point (Pulido, 2002). The BPP continued to outline a plan for equality in the eighth point by calling for an end to the aggressive practices of oppressing people around the world by enacting war (Ray, 2002). Recognizing that the mass incarceration of Black people was designed to reenter Black people into a position of servitude, the BPP ninth point called for the freeing of incarcerated Black and oppressed people whose only crime was demanding better living conditions and an end to racist laws and policies that violate our ability to attain justice in the United States. Finally, the BPP highlighted the United States failure to provide inclusive practices and revolutionary practices to change the living conditions of Black people. As such, the tenth point demanded basic necessities to develop an independent system to ensure Black an oppressed people received the bare necessities of life in order to live free from unjust practices and find peace (Pulido, 2002).

The ten-point program ends by reciting the Declaration of Independence to emphasize that the United States failure to provide equitable opportunities for Black and other oppressed people violates the rights that are promised to all American citizens. This fight for housing, employment, and educational equality is ongoing for Black people in the U.S. While the ten-point program outlined the overall racial and economic disparities perpetuated against Black and other oppressed people in the U.S., points four, five, seven, and ten speak directly to the oppressive impact educational redlining currently has on Black children in the school system. Point four highlights the unjust practice of overlooking rundown conditions of homes by landlords who overcharge low-income families to live in (Ray, 2002) which reflects the systemic abuse of real estate redlining practices. Point five calls attention to the school system's failure to accurately acknowledge the true history of Black people in the U.S (Pulido, 2002) therefore

preserving the dominant cultures perspective of Black people. Point seven specifies the justice systems inability to protect and serve Black people because law enforcement declares it to be self-evident to apply unreasonable and often deadly force against Black citizens in the United States (Armaline, Vera Sanchez, & Correia, 2014). Finally, the tenth point indicates Black people's ability and willingness to establish communities that allow Black children to thrive (Ray, 2002). While the ten point program was established in the late 1960s, the United States continues to support laws designed to oppress the advancement of Black people or policies that diminished educational opportunities for Black children.

Student placement policies separate nuclear family members from their extended family, which further degrades the biological village designed to support the overall growth of its children. As such, the Black community has a responsibility to advocate for Black children by holding the city and the school district accountable for the disservice Black people are subjected to under unjust policies—as the Black Panthers attempted to do nearly sixty years ago.

## A Meeting of the Minds: Interest Convergence

While interest convergence is generally rooted in the ethnic division established during the enslavement of African people by White people (Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009), economics have a more significant role in modern day society. The racial and economic divide reflected in the Oakland hills and the flatlands preserves the two realities that exist within one school district. As discussed in chapter four, my cousin D and I recognized the lack of resources available to OUSD's flatland schools compared to what was being offered to students attending schools in the Oakland hills. Furthermore, my mom, Uncle F, Aunty T, Cousin D, and I discussed private and charter schools becoming alternative locations for school placement in an effort to access quality educational services too often missing in flatland schools. Moreover,

having attended schools outside of OUSD gave members of my family perspective as to what OUSD failed to offer its students to promote educational and economic growth for students beyond their high school experience.

When reflecting on my father's experiences as a student in OUSD, I realized that participating in a vocational education program not only motivated my father to pursue his career goals, but also gave him the skills to do so. As a vocational education teacher myself, I recognize that the very class I teach would have benefitted me as a student in OUSD. While the program I attended at Oakland Tech for pregnant students offered a self-paced curriculum, it did not offer college credits, internship experiences, or a platform to accumulate professional letters of recommendations. Participating in a vocational education program would have increased my income immediately following graduation. Offering college and career readiness programs has the potential of increasing families' economic outlook. Unfortunately, Oakland, California is currently one of the only cities in the East Bay that does not participate in a vocational education program.

Being the child of my parents provided me access to the hills of East Oakland as well as the flatlands. My work experience at OUSD's school sites in the hills and other affluent areas of Oakland also gave me insight into the physical and curricular differences occurring within the city. Being a former student and current parent of a student in OUSD gives me first and second hand knowledge of the racial biases present in public schools that result in missed educational opportunities for Black children (Gordon, Piana, and Keleher, 2000). As discussed in chapter four, parents of Black children depended on my ability to identify with their children and support their children's needs because educators often mistreated or neglected them. In Oakland schools, and likely elsewhere, children are being subjected to differential treatment based on race and/or

home address. This kind of treatment has obvious negative educational consequences—for example, unfair disciplinary practices often result in a disproportionate number of Black students dropping out of high school (Gordon, Piana, & Keleher, 2000).

Not only are Black children disciplined more often than their White peers (Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002) but the resources in schools in inner city schools are inauspicious compared to affluent areas of the community (Warren, 2005). In Chapter four, my mom, Aunty T, Sister J, and I highlighted the importance of constant advocacy to ensure our Black children were being treated fairly in school opposed to being dismissed as discipline problems. Unfortunately, school boundaries diminish families' ability to access sites that offers educational opportunities that specifically benefit the individual needs of Black children. As noted in the last chapter, my Cousin D and I often chose school sites based on the presence of a family member to ensure that the individual needs of our children were being met. We recognize that the school system is designed to do exactly what it has been doing for over 60 years—that is, to deny equitable educational opportunities to Black people to ensure that they remain subordinated.

Educational redlining also reinforces racism by segregating families based on physical locale, which, as noted in the previous section, means they have access to differential resources. Creating a safe environment for children to thrive requires cities and districts to collaborate to ensure the actual site as well as the surrounding community foster services that benefit young people. For example, children attending school in the Oakland hills have access to healthier food items while children in the flatlands are surrounded by sugar and chemical-filled foods. There are three grocery stores in the Oakland hills, while children in the flatlands are surrounded by liquor stores, gas stations, convenience stores, corner markets, and fast food restaurants. In fact,

the liquor stores in this area serve so many students before and after school that many have posted signs limiting the number of students allowed in the store at one time. Students spend every dime they have purchasing candy, soda, and chips before entering the classroom. See Photo 31, below, for evidence of convenience stores serving students before and after school. The drug epidemic of the 1980's yielded crack-addicted babies (Gates-Williams, Jackson, Jenkins-Monroe, & Williams, 1992) and the food deserts of the 1990s (McClintock, 2008). This epidemic reduced many neighborhood food sources to liquor stores/markets and convenience stores resulting in a food consumption epidemic, "liquor store babies." As a result, the amount of sugar being consumed by students before they get to school impacts their ability to focus in school, which consequently increases the incidents of discipline in the classroom (Ladson-Billings, 2006).



*Photo 31*

**The Revolution Will Not Be Televised**

Living in the City of Oakland presents many risks for Black people (Jones, 2015). As I discussed in chapter four, the police department has battled with corruption, which included regularly racially profiling Black people in general and Black men specifically. Supporting this point, my Cousin D, Sister J, and Brother B reflected on strategically maneuvering through Oakland to avoid being shot or exposed to the criminal activity plaguing many inner city street corners. The challenges we experienced within OUSD could be compared to dealing with our legal systems' inability to protect and serve the people, while it consistently manages to punish and dismantle lives. Jones (2015) recently listed Oakland as the fourth worst place to raise Black children, citing poverty and the immediacy to drug corridors as the primary issue. As the parents of two young Black men, we are very concerned about the inequities that exist within and outside of the school walls, which makes us particular about the schools we will accept for our children. "School choice" should not mean choosing either safety for your child or cultural relevancy.

The mistreatment of Black people made our race a determining factor in the schools we selected for our children because Black males are disproportionately disciplined at school (Howard, 2008) and harassed by the police (Johnson, 2003). Lazin (2003) highlighted the harassment of Black men in Oakland during an interview with Tupac Shakur, who stated, I walked across the street at 17th and Broadway. The police officers stopped me on the sidewalk and asked to see my ID. Next thing I know… I'm going to jail for resisting arrest. That's harassment to me…that I have to be stopped in the street and checked, like we're in South Africa and asked for my ID. They didn't see me on TV with my eye and head busted. You see pictures of Tupac coming out of jail in cuffs. All that movie, that didn't mean nothing to OPD [Oakland

Police Department]. I was still an N-l-G-G-A, and they proved it. This is scars I'll go to my grave with. These are "learn to be a nigger" scars (Lazin, 2005).

While there are plenty of good police officers in Oakland, we cannot dismiss the fact that the OPD has a history of profiling and mistreating Black people in Oakland. This history includes the Oakland Riders, a group of police offers who committed crimes against the citizens of Oakland, and particularly against Black residents (Armaline et al., 2014). When I reflect on our older son being stopped and checked by the police while waiting for the bus on 14th and Broadway, I have a newfound appreciation for our elders' forethought to expose us to the realities of racism in the U.S. via documentaries and family discussions.

The messages my grandfather presented to me through counter-storytelling (Howeard, 2008) has had a major influence on my ability to make sound decisions about how societal woes impact my spirit. His firm but loving approach allowed me to internalize the morals being presented. As a child, I was considered to be strong-willed and feisty, which often translated into being an "intelligent troublemaker." After questioning authority in high school and being reprimanded for it, my mother sent me to my grandfather's office to speak with him about my "behavior." As I entered my grandfather's office, he smiled and asked me to have a seat across from him. My grandfather pointed out a picture hanging on his wall. It was a picture of Dr. Charles Drew. My grandfather went on to say,

> Dr. Drew was a brilliant man who invented the blood transfusion. He saved many lives and although he was fair enough to pass for White, his Blackness was considered unworthy for admissions into the hospital to receive a blood transfusion. Although his death was unjust, he will always be remembered in the Black community as a man who

made a difference in the world by succeeding in spite of the plight of Black people. What

legacy will you leave? (Attorney Felix Forest Stuckey, Stuckey Law Firm, 1992).

As I sat in deep thought contemplating the legacy I would leave, my grandfather told me another

story.

You know Erika, knowledge is power. The question is how will you use your power….by

showing anger or by creating change?  I was born during a time when racism was law. I

picked cotton when I was just a boy. I used my own frustration as fuel to change my

circumstances. You must recognize that education, hard work, and understanding the

system are the fundamental components of creating change. This world can make you an

angry person….if you let it. You are destined for greatness, Erika, so go be powerful.

Attorney Felix Forest Stuckey, Stuckey Law Firm 1992.

Although my heritage, cultural experiences, and spiritual upbringing—including the counter-

stories like the ones noted above--have given me the strength to overcome the hurdles of

educational redlining, Black children continue to be subjected to the negativity associated with

racial intolerance. For example, Black children continue to receive punishments based on

behaviors deemed acceptable for White children (Skiba et al., 2002). Furthermore, the

curriculum offered in schools lacks cultural relevance (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

While counter-stories provide an alternative perspective to mainstream narratives

(Howard, 2008), critical race theory provides a platform to examine the significance of counter-

storytelling to the cognitive development of Black people in the United States. Counter-stories

are important because mainstream stories often omit the realities of being Black in the U.S. This

study serves as a counter-story that offers policy-makers and other stakeholders insight into the

impact racism in the U.S. has had on housing accessibility for three generations of one Black

family raising children in Oakland, CA. Moreover, policy-makers and others can utilize our experiences to avoid adversely affecting the educational opportunities of other Black families raising children in Oakland, CA. It also can help families understand student placement practices so they can tackle the inequities preventing them from accessing the best school sites for their children.

This counter-story delivers a message to the school system regarding the benefit of implementing programs, core classes, and extra-curricular activities that increase classroom productivity while reducing the incidents of discipline. It also offers businesses and affluent residents in Oakland, CA a glimpse of the realities existing in areas other than their own. Hopefully this counter-story can create an upsurge in financial support so that all students have equitable access to quality community services and school resources. This counter-story also can inform educators of the challenges the surrounding community poses for students before entering their classrooms. Educators can use that knowledge to work with schools, the district, and the city to provide students with services that could alleviate the challenges that impacts a student's ability to thrive. Finally, this counter-story represents the history of three generations of one Black family in Oakland, California. It offers the next generation of my family and other Black families with a story of the strength, pride, and perseverance of Black people in the United States.

Counter-story telling is essential to preserving the history, culture, and revolutionary spirit of Black people in the U.S., not the fallacies so often imposed by White America (Love, 2004). Mainstream media often creates images of Black people that perpetuate negativity through stereotypes. For example, music has historically been a platform for Black people to share stories about the struggles and endurance of our people. Whether it is in the form of gospel

music or rap music, the message was one of encouragement and political activism. While there was always an element of negativity within rap music, the overall messages highlighted the inequities plaguing Black America (Imani Perry, 2004). Unfortunately, our music has been mainstreamed by an industry that mostly promotes artists that encourage drug use, irresponsible spending habits, and criminal activity (Herd, 2008). Artists that encourage positivity in the Black community are often overlooked by the industry (Stephens and Few, 2007). As a result, many artists remain "underground" because, like Harriett Tubman, they have to usher the message through an alternative channel. It is our responsibility to protect our children from and educate them about the overt and subliminal messages presented in schoolbooks and in the media so they have the fortitude to surpass the system to ensure success instead of falling victim to it.

As discussed in chapter four, having been exposed to the political rhetoric and beauty of Blackness presented in documentaries and music by my parents and others impacted my ability to endure the punitive actions issued to me during my initial cultural examination in preschool. The collective experiences of three generations of my own family represents a counter-story as it dismantles the conventional narrative of Black families offered by the media by exposing educational redlining practices in Oakland, California. Housing patterns have been historically biased against Black people (National Fair Housing Alliance, 2014). Using a parent's home address to determine the school site placement of their children negatively impacts the educational opportunities of Black children and violates the constitutional rights of Black people. Generational counter-storytelling provides future generations with the knowledge to combat inequalities in an effort to progressively revolutionize the patterns of housing, education, and employment accessibility in the Black community.

**Recommendations**

The purpose of this section is to provide recommendations to the City of Oakland, the PTA, Sporting organizations including but not limited to the NBA, NFL, and MLB, as well as Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) administration, teachers, parents, and Black parents in the United States. Strategies offered can be utilized to create equitable educational opportunities for children in Oakland, California. These suggestions are intended to 1) generate additional revenue to improve schools and develop community services, 2) incite an organized movement to enhance the beauty, quality, and safety of inner city schools and their surrounding environment, 3) inspire educational changes that incorporate culturally relevant curriculum, and 4) curricular and extra-curricular activities that promote student's college and career goals. Notably, the main goal is to improve the overall conditions of all schools so that parents feel comfortable within and outside of their neighborhood's school boundaries.

**City of Oakland.** There are both beautiful and horrifying aspects of growing up in Oakland, CA. While Lake Merritt, the Redwood walking trails, and the views of the Bay are beautiful, the crime, police brutality, and inequitable educational and economic opportunities are disturbing. For example, young Black men are murdered at an alarming rate in Oakland, California and most of the cases go unsolved. In reality, there are more Black people killed in Oakland, California every year than there are football players, coaches, and staff on the Oakland Raiders. In 2002, the Oakland Raiders won the AFC championship with 99 football players, coaches, and staff; 49 of them were Black including my cousin #20, Tory James. However, in 2003, over 98 of the114 homicides in Oakland, CA were Black people. There is something fundamentally wrong with a city that shows a lack of concern for the safety and well-being of Black people who do not play professional sports. So many Black children strive to become ball

players or entertainers because it's only then that this country recognizes the greatness in them. Black people are so much more than entertainment for the masses but the educational system often minimizes Black children to their athletic abilities by failing to offer structured alternatives.

The City of Oakland is accountable for supporting all citizens within the city by modifying the regulations for zoning clearances to ensure that surrounding communities are safe for ALL children as they journey to and from school. Children depend on the adults in their immediate environment to protect them from harm's way. Likewise, residents depend on city officials to keep the surrounding environment safe so that all citizens can flourish academically and economically. When communities have been allowed to fall into disrepair/become derelict, parents do not feel safe sending their students to school there. The student placement office would be less overwhelmed with parents requesting placement at sites outside of their attendance zone if the schools and surrounding environments were consistently maintained throughout the city.

Creating a safe school environment for children can be particularly difficult in a city where the public servants protect and service certain parts of the community and patrol and control others. For example, Oakland's continual failure to support the needs of Black families resulted in the Black Panther Party developing a street team designed to monitor officers as they conducted police activities to ensure Black people were not being unjustly arrested or brutalized for simply being Black (Shames, 2015). Furthermore, as I discussed in chapter four, police officers profiled my son as he attempted to take public transportation to his internship interview but failed to safely transport him to his original location once they discovered they were wrong. As such, Black parent's rights have been denied because the City of Oakland and OUSD fail to provide Black children with a safe school environment.

In (2014), Mayor Libby Schaaf ran on the slogan "It's Hella Time for Leadership in Oakland" and that needs to be a mantra reflected in every aspect of our city (Ayers, 2014). It is "hella time" for the flatland areas of Oakland to receive the level of services provided in the hills, around the lake, near Jack London Square, and in the downtown area. City workers should be responsible for patrolling flatland neighborhoods collecting trash and cleaning graffiti as they do in other areas of the city. Businesses should receive tax breaks or other incentives to operate in inner city neighborhoods. Furthermore, California law dictates that medical marijuana facilities cannot operate near specific businesses including schools, libraries, and parks but liquor stores receive zoning clearances to be in close proximity to every inner city school, library, and park. As citizens of the same city, we all deserve the same quality service and protection. When it comes to demanding equality and accessibility from our schools and government officials, Mayor Schaaf said it herself "it's as basic as it gets." Her words suggest that the basic needs of Black families are not a priority for the city of Oakland.

**An Education Association and Sporting Organizations.** In order to provide equitable educational opportunities for all students, district-wide**,** the Parent-Teachers Association's (PTA's) at affluent schools should take the initiative to sponsor inner city school sites. The PTA could offer support in the form of monetary donations and/or resource support. For example, a portion of the money raised and/or donated by affluent families could be used to ensure that the classrooms in inner city schools are equally equipped with computers, textbooks and other reading materials, as well as costs associated with chartering buses for field trips. Moreover, a sizable portion of the revenue generated from sporting events, concerts, and other large forms of entertainment held in Oakland, California should directly fund the local schools. Families from all over the country attend NFL, NBA, and the MLB in Oakland. For example, one Golden State

Warriors playoff ticket ranges from $195.00 to $1750.00 (Ticket Master, 2016). The revenue

from one seat, per row, per section could be used to beautify an inner city school and its

surrounding neighborhood at the conclusion of each playoff home game. A committee should be

created to facilitate the redevelopment of inner city neighborhoods in Oakland, California. The

board should include parents, students, school district representatives, City of Oakland zoning

and redevelopment workers, and monetary contributors. They would be responsible for assessing

the curricular, extra-curricular, diversity, and structural needs of each site as well as nutritional

deficits and safety concerns in the surrounding community.

Once the assessment has been conducted, the committee would be responsible for

overseeing an implementation plan designed to tackle the issues preventing students in general

and Black students specifically from thriving academically and economically. By executing

improvements, 1) students at every school would have access to the resources needed to thrive

academically, 2) teachers would have the materials necessary to implement lesson plans and field

trip experiences designed to enhance the learning opportunities for all children, 3) surrounding

communities would become safer for children to walk to and from school every day, and 4) the

school district would have additional money to implement a vocational education program to

improve the economic outlook of the families they serve.

**Oakland Unified District.** The graduation rate amongst Black students in Oakland

Unified School District is lower than that of its White counterparts (Hopkins, 2013). School

policies have to be modified to discontinue the practice of utilizing home addresses to confine

families to schools within specific school boundaries. According to Barnes (2006) the lack of

diversity in the curriculum and staff negatively impacts Black students. While there is some

debate as whether or not teachers in Finland are paid as well as doctors in  the United States, the

fact still remains safety, community, and accountability are primary factors in the success of the education system in Finland (Hancock, 2011). As discussed in chapter four, safety refers to students' learning experiences being enhanced when they feel secure in their school environment while recognizing that such factors as 1) a family's socio-economic status, 2) the housing patterns of the community, 3) families access to choice schools, and 4) current student placement practices impact educational opportunities (Cornell & Mayer, 2010). Adults establish community for children by providing a variety of opportunities for educational advancement for the children within the community, regardless of home address.

Accountability refers to the responsibility adults have to develop an educational system that provides evenhanded learning opportunities for a diverse student body. One opposing argument is that the homogeneous nature of Finland's residents minimizes the need for cultural relevance (Gamerman, 2008). Nevertheless, other aspects of the educational system promote equitable accessibility to educational opportunities for the students they serve regardless of socio-economic status. On the other hand, the American school system serves a diverse population of students but the division of community wealth affords the exclusion of minority interest. Furthermore, districts should give teachers the freedom to construct curriculum based on the ever-changing technology that impacts the job market. As discussed in chapter four, My Brother B recognized the flawed design of academics in our current school system as he described the need for students to focus on academics that would support career advancements beyond high school. The district can improve the graduation rates among Black students if curriculum was structured toward relevant real world experiences and economic opportunities (Lehr, Johnson, Bremer, Cosio, & Thompson, 2004).

Another recommendation is to reduce racial intolerance by creating continuity contracts to establish connectivity between the classroom teachers, their students, and the student's families. Differential treatment is an inequitable action common in public school settings (Crosnoe et al., 2004). These inequities force families to maneuver around student placement policies to find sites with a diverse staff and student body to hopefully shield children from the racist attitudes of many adults. Creating continuity contracts may assist with high turnover rates, hunger, poverty, racism, classism, and sexism as teachers will be in place long enough to establish relationships with families to understand their individual needs. Tackling these issues at the beginning of a child's education may create the foundational support needed to establish an open dialog between families and educators to develop a cohesive school community throughout student's educational journey.

As another recommendation, Oakland Unified School District could reduce educational redlining practices by establishing a vocational education center that serves students from multiple districts to expand student's economic-outlook. Vocational schools provide structured career specific activities that yield high school and college credits for students who successfully complete the vocational program of their choice (Bottoms, Presson, & Johnson, 1992) and students are more interested in school when the material is relevant to their real life experiences (Lehr, Johnson, Bremer, Cosio, & Thompson, 2004). Moreover, vocational education centers accepts students regardless of home address. For example, Eden Area Regional Occupational Program has a partnership with San Leandro, San Lorenzo, Hayward, Castro Valley, and Alameda Unified School Districts in which participating students are bused to and from their school to participate in a class that focuses on their desired career pathway. This partnership program benefits students by offering them an opportunity to earn high school and college

credits for participating in a program that aligns their career aspirations with prospects for educational advancement. Oakland Unified School District should incorporate a comprehensive vocational occupations program to offer students a variety of educational experiences that can enhance their economic outlook.

Oakland Unified School District is under new leadership. Our new superintendent recognized that the enrollment system is flawed when he was unable to find the appropriate site for his own daughter. The school district held a meeting at Piedmont Elementary school so parents, educators, administrators, and support staff could discuss the current enrollment system, crises. Unfortunately, many parents left that meeting questioning the strategies being implemented to improve the current system and the support structures in place to assist parents during the transformation. The district needs to implement follow-up meetings to address the specific concerns parents have by offering actual solutions to enhance the quality of their children's neighborhood school or plans being implemented to ensure parents can secure space at sites that best meets the needs of their children.

**Teachers.** As discussed in chapter four, while our children had several excellent teachers, they were often exposed to inexperienced teachers who were unable to maintain classroom control. Perhaps every new teacher should be required to co-teach in the classroom with a veteran teacher for at least three years before they are given their own classroom (Walther-Thomas, Bryant, & Land, 1996). It would benefit the veteran teacher as he/she would have a semi-qualified counterpart to 1) support classroom management 2) focus on the socio-emotional needs of individual students, and to 3) collaborate in order to incorporate fresh ideas to the curricular approach (Feiman-Nemser, 2003). It would benefit the new teacher because he/she would have an experienced teacher to mentor them through the first years of teaching (Feiman-

Nemser, 2003). And most importantly, this would benefit the students as the combination of the two teaching styles could better meet the whole needs of students. This approach could also assist in creating a community amongst the staff, parents, and the students while lowering staff turnover rates (Dolton & Newson, 2003).

As an educator, I cross paths with people from all walks of life. The personal stories that some students enter my classroom with include gang affiliation, poverty, hunger, homelessness, and being a part of the system by way of the foster care or the criminal justice system. Other students express economic and personal stability as well as extensive college and career aspirations. Students should be treated as individuals who offer something unique to the world that deserves to be heard and respected. Teachers should incorporate elements of social change into student assignments in order to promote metacognition (Banks, 2004). Educating students should include having students reflect on and question their own epistemological perspective. When creating lesson plans, teachers should require students to incorporate ways to give back to the community which requires them to think about social injustices, how they would approach remedying these injustices, as well as the best outlets to utilize to have the most impact on the community they are attempting to assist (Noddings, 1995). I believe taking this approach develops students who are socially conscience regarding their responsibility to create change as well as their ability to control their own destiny.

Today's school environment includes a diverse student population that requires varied approaches to inspire students to learn, envision a prosperous future, and take the actions required to achieve their goals (Noddings, 1995). In my opinion, respecting the core values of others includes understanding cultural principles and practices.  I believe educators should establish mutual respect with students by humanizing themselves through personal stories

regarding their own life experiences including trials and tribulations. The sharing of stories has the potential of advancing students socio-emotional development by giving them an outlet to express themselves. As an educator with an early childhood background, I understand the importance of meeting the needs of the whole child. Unfortunately, the significance of fulfilling the prerequisites children have for educational success is a forgotten practice by the time students enter the 3rd grade.

All teachers should understand the fundamentals of early childhood education so the knowledge gained can be used in the field to change the way educators approach meeting the needs of the whole child. For example, my cousin D described becoming desensitized to the crime existing in the community. Many children residing in inner city communities become numb to the negativity in their surrounding environment as a coping mechanism and survival tactic; a symptom commonly recognized in children who develop post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) from living in war zone dense countries (Shakoor & Chalmers, 1991). After surviving these harsh realities, many Black students enter classrooms only to be disparaged by some teachers, the curriculum, and the deficient investment in the schools ability to meet the whole needs of Black students. For example, our school system currently receives additional funds to promote the academic advancement of children who speak English as a Second Language (ESL) (Graham, 2014). According to Chamot and O'Malley (1986) ESL curriculum is essential to the language skills developed by ESL students. (p.8)

In comparison, while Black Americans speak English, our home language is often different than the dialectal we use in school and at work. As such, Ebonics was developed as an educational tool designed to promote language skills for Black children who needed assistance (Fillmore & Snow, 2000). The controversy surrounding the implementation of Ebonics in OUSD

in the late 1990's, eliminated the possibility of receiving additional funds to support language development for Black children experiencing difficulties code switching (Baron, 2000). This tool could have been utilized to access language grants if Limited English Proficiency (LEP) was recognized in schools. Early childhood education provides educators with strategies to support the individual needs of every student by developing an individualized educational training plan to promote cognitive, physical, socio-emotional, and language development of each child.

**Best Practices of Teaching.** As a Black woman, my epistemological perspective affects the way I approach being educated as well as how I educate others. The approach I take comes from the knowledge and understanding, but lack of acceptance, for a society that is designed not to include the well-being of people of color in general and Black people specifically. So as a Black educator, I feel inclined to approach and support students based on the knowledge that the only way for students to achieve in life, academically and personally, is to make them aware of the inequities that exist within our society as well as ways they can combat them (Freire, 1970). To reiterate my grandfather's sentiments, knowledge is power, and I believe it is my duty as an educator to empower students to be independent critical thinkers who are prepared to follow their dreams and make a positive difference in the world.

My instructional approach includes exposing students to life beyond high school which includes comprehending forms required to enter college, organizing college tours, providing resume development sessions, assisting with financial aid requirements, and providing job placement assistance. I also require students to complete a project titled "Budgeting My Life" in which students create a plan for becoming self-sufficient independent citizens of the community. Our current educational system primarily focuses on student's ability to achieve on standardized tests opposed to preparing them to successfully function as active members of our society. I think

students should be taught how to maneuver through the college system database to successfully enroll in transferable courses as well as gain eligibility for financial aid. Furthermore, students should be taught how to balance a checkbook, complete tax forms for work, prepare their own taxes annually, manage a credit card, monitor their credit score, and apply for a home loan. Providing students with the training necessary to support real world experiences teaches them the importance of making sound decisions as youth so they have a multitude of opportunities in the future (Lehr, Johnson, Bremer, Cosio, & Thompson, 2004). Students become better equipped to participate as citizens of our society when educators provide them with an accurate understanding of societal structures and systems (Chubbuck, 2010). I have adopted the old African proverb "It takes a village to raise a child" as a common practice in my personal and professional life. As a wife and mother of Black men, I must always be conscious of the hurdles that may impact the well-being of my family. As a Black educator, I have to consider the obstacles that might stifle student development. And as an advocate for social justice who has the spirit of the Stuckey family and the heart of the Green family coursing through my veins, it is my responsibility to develop a community where my children and my students feel safe and secure in the fact that they can achieve greatness without annihilating one another to attain it.

**All Families.** Families should visit a school site within school boundaries least desired by parents (according to student placement waiting lists) and determine if the school site, staff, and immediate environment are conducive to learning. Then they should determine what measures they would take to improve the site and surrounding community if their child was required to attend that site. Families should question the challenges associated with ensuring every child receives the best possible education. As a society, we need to question our collective tolerance of inequities within the same city and within the same school district. Families have to unite in a

call for action to support all students. Parents must be proactive in their efforts to advocate for

equality by volunteering at their children's schools and organizing parents dedicated to

improving the quality of life for children.

      **Black Families.** We need to stop trying to fight the system and create our own.

Understand that this does not mean we have to have all Black schools nor do we have to uproot

our children from the extended family in search of better opportunities. Instead, we have to

develop systems and integrate organizations into the current system that are designed to meet the

whole needs of our children. We need to reenact the Black Panther's free breakfast and wellness

programs to educate and promote health within our own community while giving children access

to services that would help them thrive educationally. Black families at each site can organize to

integrate culturally relevant resources into the students' daily school life. For example, an eleven

year old Black girl named Marley Davis recognized that the books offered at her school rarely

include images that reflected her reality, so she developed her own system (Grinberg, 2016).

This young girl had the fortitude to drive change by creating "1000 Black Girl Books," a non-

profit organization dedicated to collecting one thousand plus books. Once the books were

collected, Marley Davis and her mother donated some of the books to Marley's former

elementary school and shipped the rest to her mother's hometown in Jamaica.

Black families can also demand additional funding for proposed and existing programs catering

to the overall needs of Black children. For example, the African-American Male Achievement

Program in Oakland, CA successfully utilizes men from the community to mentor young men as

a strategy to decreasing school and street violence while offering viable options for personal,

educational, and financial growth. Black parents may find some form of reciprocity for their own

children when participating in the regular and/or open enrollment process but the collective

impact on our cultural community and family structure results in an academic environment lacking cultural relevance or understanding. Incorporating programs that focus on the needs of Black students provides Black families with resources needed to enhance the educational experience of Black children.

**Families Facing the Inequities of Educational Redlining.** While school districts do in fact provide information on how to participate in the regular and open enrollment process, the information is rarely centrally located. Parents must be vigilant in their efforts to seek out information that could be used to guarantee space at a sought after school. For example, student placement procedures include an appeals process. Parents should first research the appeals process before gathering the necessary documentation. If a student is denied placement at select school sites, parents should submit an appeal and immediately make an appointment with a school district administrator. Nevertheless, student placement policies minimize families' accessibility to sites outside their attendance zone making this process an often difficult and frustrating experience. As such, families could benefit from establishing meetings with one another to share knowledge as it relates to effective strategies to combat inequitable student placement practices. Families in each district should take the initiative to develop websites highlighting student placement procedures within their own district as well as links that direct families to informative solutions to the dilemma of educational redlining.

## Recommendations for Future Research

The issue of inequitable educational and socio-economic opportunities continues to adversely affect Black people in the United States. Accordingly, I offer a few recommendations for future research. The first recommendation comprises of researching the benefits of incorporating on-site programs that meet the whole needs of Black children. We must investigate

the impact programs have on Black students' academic, socio-economic, and socio-emotional growth. Another recommendation includes supporting the efforts of the African-American Female Achievement Program, a recently established organization that seeks to uncover strategies being utilized to support Black female students in Oakland, CA. We must research and document their work to implement these lessons for all Black children in our community. An additional recommendation for future research includes uncovering OUSD's plan to use culturally relevant curriculum to 1) promote student's personal and educational growth, 2) support student's emotional development, and 3) establish programs designed to generate financial stability for students beyond high school. Finally, we require further research in terms of the impact homeownership has on migration patterns in the Black community.

## Conclusion

Historically unjust real estate redlining practices served as a precursor for educational redlining, or using a parent's home address to decide a students' site placement. This research study utilized aspects of critical race theory (CRT) to highlight the impact educational redlining has on learning opportunities for Black students in Oakland, California. Three of the five tenets of CRT, including whiteness as property, interest convergence, and counter-storytelling, were applied to convey the manner in which accessibility to housing and student placement policies adversely affected three generations of one Black's family's migration patterns. Interviews, observations, and personal journaling were methods used to capture three generations of my family's experience with educational redlining in Oakland, California and identify the primary factors affecting accessibility to housing and educational opportunities. Safety, accountability,

and community were highlighted as key issues in the perception of stability as it relates to occupational and educational opportunities. School boundaries were specified as problematic because of the differential treatment taking place at school sites within the same district. OUSD could improve the enrollment policy by eradicating the practice of binding families to schools based on their home address.

This collaborative auto-ethnography provides insight into the journey of three generations of my extended family as we migrated from school site to school site and from city to city searching for public, private, or charter school sites that meet the whole needs of our Black children. This multi-generational counter-story presents a timeline account of the inequities that influenced our decisions to stay or leave Oakland, California. As a family, we are unsatisfied with the un-unified nature of the City of Oakland as well as the Oakland Unified School District. Adults are responsible for the well-being of children which includes ensuring students have 1) culturally relevant materials in the classroom, 2) ample field trip opportunities while minimizing the time students spend on public transportation, and 3) adequate community services surrounding school sites. The lack of safety, accountability, and community presented to people residing in inner city areas of Oakland, CA compared to that of affluent areas created a climate of equitable housing patterns and educational opportunities.

Our youth need educational, recreational, and vocational programs that teach them skills that are fundamental to their survival. For instance, young people need more guidance to become more deliberate about strategies to meet their college and career goals as well as the processes to owning property and operating businesses. Ownership is an essential component of freedom and accessibility. As individuals and as a people, our historic and current realities have included fighting for the rights of our families. While *Brown v. Board of Education (*1954, 1955*)* occurred

over 60 years ago, our right to equitable educational opportunities and housing are still being minimized by policies. While life lessons were introduced to us at a very young age, they served as counter-stories necessary to our survival. The significant injustices perpetuated against Black people in the U.S. heightens Black parents awareness of the potential dangers our children are in every time they leave the house, even when they interact with the police. The student placement office does not consider these factors when they deny parents request to transfer their children for safety reasons. Lazin (2003) described the potential of young Black people in an interview with Tupac Shakur, who stated, *"The message is, young black males could do anything if you just give us a shot…stop trying to beat us down."* Black children will thrive when we create a "system within the system" designed to meet the specific needs of our children.

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