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BLACK WOMEN BUILD COMMUNITY: AN EXAMINATION OF THE
RADCLIFFE BLACK WOMEN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

by

Dawn Michelle Hinton

A Dissertation
Submitted to the
Faculty of The Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the
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Department of Sociology

Western Michigan University
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BLACK WOMEN BUILD COMMUNITY: AN EXAMINATION OF THE
RADCLIFFE BLACK WOMEN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Dawn Michelle Hinton, Ph.D.

Western Michigan University, 1998

This study investigated the unique position of Black women in the creation of community. Narratives from the Radcliffe Black Women Oral History Project were the source of information used for this work. These 20 oral narratives were collected between 1978 and 1982 by the Schlesinger Library. The women studied were involved in various community activities and represent Black women from various social classes and geographical locations.

An in-depth reading of each of the narratives identified three themes: life-informing work, community-building, and religion. The theme of life-informing work was identified because the work and community involvement of the narrators had a basis in their lives; something going on in their personal lives led to their interest in certain community organizations. Community-building as a theme can be seen on two levels. These women were involved in various community organizations as a result of some life experience; this led to the narrators either joining a pre-existing organization or to the creation of new organizations. The narrators also acknowledge the role that the Black church played in the development of their lives and life within the Black community. The Black church was described by these women as the social, political, and educational center of

the Black community. The interrelationships between these themes and various concepts within Black feminist theory are also examined.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Personal Statement

I have developed intellectually from the works of bell hooks, Patricia Hill-Collins, Michelle Wallace, Barbara Smith, Gloria Hull, Rose Brewer, Patricia Bell-Scott, Darlene Clark-Hine, and the like; all of these women have made numerous contributions to the development of literature and studies surrounding the development of the Black woman. The stories of these women have influenced my writing and thinking about Black women. I am standing on the shoulders of great Black women who have made extraordinary contributions to the development of the Black woman, and for this, I am grateful.

Many Black feminists have argued, and rightfully so, that Black women have historically been marginalized in the literature; as a result of this marginalization, Black women intellectuals have been aggressive and persistent in their development of literature surrounding the Black woman. Unlike these women, I have developed in an environment where I have seen the value of studying the Black woman. My experiences are validated as a result of their study. To these women I owe a great debt of gratitude for their ability to express what had been suppressed by mainstream society, hence validating and encouraging similar writings.

Statement of the Problem

Many marginalized groups exist in American society, and in the course of history these populations have been defined and spoken for by those who possess the power to do so. Typically these groups are not given the opportunity to speak for themselves. More recently these marginalized populations have attempted to reclaim their power to speak for themselves, and to create their own history. Hobsbawn (1985) refers to this notion as "grassroots history, history seen from below or the history of the common people" (p. 13).

Black power, civil rights, and the women's movement have given Blacks as well as women the chance to redefine themselves and to reclaim their place in history. Yet there remains a marginalized population on the periphery of not only the mainstream population but of both Black movements and women's movements. The voices and opinions of Black women have seldom been heard within these movements.

In this dissertation I explore the unique position of Black women in the creation of community. The examination of their life histories allows them to tell about their lives in their own words. This technique allows them to be themselves and speak on their behalf; it empowers them to become their own creators.

This study uses the Black Woman Oral History Project which was sponsored by the Schlesinger library at Radcliffe College. These life histories, collected between 1978 to 1982, are an attempt to chronicle the lives of Black women who were believed to have made a significant impact on American society.

A thorough examination of each of the narratives in this collection led to the selection of 20 narratives that will be used in this research. After the selection of the narratives, I began reading and rereading each narrative in an effort to identify commonalities that existed among the women. The commonalities identified through this process are called themes, of which there are three: life-informing work, community-building, and religion. I found that many women became involved in community activities or work-related activities as a result of something that happened in their lives; this I define as life-informing work. Secondly, as a result of this interest in community and work activities, these women either created or joined organizations that addressed these needs--hence the label community-building. Finally, throughout the narratives there was a common discourse in the narratives about the role of religion in their lives and in the Black community--hence the identification of religion as a theme.

The interrelationships between the themes identified and Black feminist theory are interesting, and led to a comparison between the themes and various concepts within Black feminist theory. Of particular concern are the notions of self-definition, safe places, the interdependency of thought and action, and legacy of struggle.

Black Feminism

Historically Black women have not been viewed as subjects worthy of study; whenever there was a woman question, the woman was

white, and whenever there was a Black issue, the concern was for Black men. Black women have for a long time taken a back seat when discussing issues of either gender or race. As a result of the increasing interest of Black women intellectuals in the contributions and impact of Black women, there is an emerging literature which deals with the specific concerns of Black women.

What is currently known as Black feminist theory is a developing field of study which takes as its primary concern the Black woman. This theory is unique in that it attempts to address issues that directly and indirectly affect the Black woman, based on the premise that the Black woman is central in all theorizing. Black feminist theory, it is argued, is a theory about and by Black women (Hill-Collins, 1992). Black feminism as a theoretical perspective is not monolithic but has many variations, as do most theoretical perspectives. These variations range from how to define Black feminism to the identification of sources of oppression.

Central to most definitions on Black feminism are the notions that oppression on the basis of race, gender, and class occurs simultaneously. Most Black feminists reject the notion that one form of oppression is more important, in terms of the effect on Black women's lives, than any other form. The simultaneity argument also rejects the conventional idea that the oppression is additive: that is, race plus class plus gender. They argue that it is multiplicative in nature: race times class times gender. Because these oppressive forces are experienced at the same time, it is impossible to

determine whether oppression is on the basis of race, class, or gender, because it is argued that these things cannot be separated.

Also important in Black feminist theorizing, and one of the reasons for the necessity of Black feminist theory, is the resisting of negative images and stereotypes. Most marginalized populations are in marginal positions as a result of a lack of power. Black feminists argue that as a result of this, Black women have been defined and spoken for. However, through this theory, Black women are given the opportunity to redefine themselves, and to become their own expert. Reclaiming this power is critical to Black feminist theory, in that it is only through this process of redefinition that Black women are able to reclaim their identities. This self-definition is accomplished through the identification of safe places, those places where Black women feel comfortable expressing themselves. Hill-Collins (1992) has identified music, writing, and Black women's relationships with each other as places where Black women feel comfortable expressing themselves.

Two other concepts within Black feminism that are important in light of this research: the interdependence of thought and action and the legacy of struggle. It is argued that Black women make links between life experiences and the actions that follow. The second concept that also has bearing on this research is the notion that there is a legacy of struggle for Black women. This legacy of struggle for Black women involves the efforts made by Black women to create arenas where they have the ability to effect change. The

connections between these theoretical concepts and the findings of this research are the aim of this study.

The identification of themes has produced interesting results, in that the concepts of Black feminism--self-definition, safe places, interdependence of thought and action, and legacy of struggle--are manifest in the lives of these women. Through the examination of these narratives, we are able to look at the relationships that developed between Black feminism and the narratives.

These stories are communicated to us through a medium that values the perspective of the individual, which allows the individual to tell her story on her own terms. The use of oral narratives in this research is invaluable; since these Black women are given a voice to communicate their concerns, they are no longer being defined but are themselves defining their situation.

Use of Oral History

There are many variations on the definition of oral history; basically oral history involves the process of collecting the recordings (audio or visual) of recollections and interpretations of events of the past that have historical relevance (Hoffman, 1984). There is dissension in terms of the usefulness or the ability of oral history to effectively represent actual historical events. Some historians argue that oral narratives can be used to fill a void that exists in current historical research (Starr, 1984). Others suggest that the tape recorder is a tapeworm that produces

mountains of useless trivia on people who are not worthwhile subjects (Tuchman, 1984). However, this polemic is not the concern of this project; this research uses oral narratives as data on which analysis is performed.

These oral narratives are valuable to this research in that they provide a unique opportunity, one in which the researcher is able to look at the experiences of individuals from the individual's perspective. These women are given the opportunity to interpret their lives and discuss how they have been affected by various social, cultural, and historical phenomena.

In the chapters to follow I discuss the use of Black feminism and how it relates particularly to this study as well as the importance of the usage of oral narratives as the source of data. The themes identified above are expounded, accompanied by a discussion on how the themes developed.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW/THEORY

In the following section I address several concerns that are important in the discussion of Black women and the Black community. The first part is theoretical and deals with the use of Black feminism as a theoretical approach to this study. I examine the core concepts within Black feminism, including the multiplicity and simultaneity of oppression, the Black woman objectified, self-definition, and safe places. In the second half of the chapter, there is a discussion of the concept of community, how this applies to the Black community, and the role of the Black woman in the Black community. Finally the usefulness of oral history to this study is discussed.

Black Feminism

Black Feminism Defined

What is Black feminist theory? Hill-Collins (1990) argues that Black feminist theory "consists of specialized knowledge created by African-American women which clarifies a standpoint of and for Black women" (p. 22); in essence, Black feminism is about Black women as explained by Black women. Essential to any discussion of Black feminism is the idea that the Black woman is central in Black feminist theorizing. Hill-Collins (1990) further notes that "definitions

claiming that anyone can produce and develop Black feminist thought risk obscuring the special angle of vision that Black women bring to the knowledge production process" (p. 21). This theoretical perspective values the unique position that Black women occupy and the perspective that they offer from this viewpoint.

In defining Black feminism, Hill-Collins (1990) goes on to identify several themes that are prominent in the life experiences of Black women: the legacy of struggle, necessity of self-definition, role of family, and community activism. Simply because these have been identified as themes does not mean that all Black women respond in the same manner. As Black women our responses vary, "diversity among Black women produces different concrete experiences that in turn shape various reactions to the core themes" (p. 23). Black feminist theory is viewed as a response to these core themes.

Nature of Oppression: Issues of Primacy

There has been much debate within the Black feminist community over what constitutes the subject matter of Black feminism; of major concern is the nature of oppression that is experienced by Black women. At the core of these discussions are questions of what types of oppression are primary and what types of oppression should be addressed when discussing Black feminism. When discussing Black feminism, some question the primacy of race or gender; others place a priority on sexuality.

Gordon (1987) argues that for the Black woman, race is always

.

central and takes precedent over both class and gender. She goes on to present a typology which represents the needs of Black women:

1. Racism should be the primary target for African Americans.
2. It is difficult to wage a battle on two fronts with limited resources, and the issue of race is primary.
3. Black women do not want to compartmentalize themselves into segments of race vs. gender.
4. In large measure, rape and domestic violence will be diminished when Black men have the opportunity for positive means for definitions of manhood.
5. Black liberation represents freedom from sexism and racism and embraces a Black female/male co-partnership in struggle and love. (p. 46)

She believes that any approach to the study of the conditions of Black women should first begin with concern for the larger Black community. According to Gordon (1987), this struggle against oppression is one that both Black women and men undertake together. As for coalitions with white women, she suggests that "only short-term, issue-specific coalitions are viable" (p. 56). Smith (1995) takes issue with the position forwarded by Gordon (1987) when she argues,

if we have to wait for racism to be obliterated before we can begin to address sexism, we will be waiting for a long time. Denying that sexual oppression exists or requiring that we wait to bring it up until racism, or in some cases capitalism, is toppled, is a bankrupt position (p. 256).

Other Black feminists have argued that not only are race, class, and gender important aspects of Black feminism, but that sexuality is an issue that cannot be overlooked. The Combahee River Collective (1995) wrote a manifesto which "emphasized the importance of eradicating homophobia and acknowledging the role of lesbians in the development of Black feminism" (p. 231). In elaborating on their approach to Black feminism they note that

the most general statement of our politics at the present

time would be that we are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression and see as our particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking. (p. 232)

Many Black feminists are not interested in ranking oppression or determining which one is more pervasive; the argument is that they occur at the same time and cannot be separated. It is not possible to begin your day and say "I am not going to be a woman today, so just treat me like a Black person." It is not an issue of which is primary. When discussing the struggle against racism, Smith (1995) argues that "the notion that struggling against or eliminating racism will completely alleviate Black women's problems does not take into account the way that sexual oppression cuts across all racial, nationality, age, religious, ethnic, and class groupings" (p. 256).

Multiplicity and Simultaneity of Oppression

Given all of the variations of Black feminism, at the center of these discussions is the notion that Black women experience multiple forms of oppression. As noted by the Combahee River Collective (1995), their struggle is against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression. Others note that Black women are suffering from race, class, and gender oppression (Brewer, 1993; Hill-Collins 1992; Gordon, 1987). Brewer (1993) suggests that "gender as a category of analysis cannot be understood decontextualized from race and class in Black feminist theorizing" (p. 17). Black feminists refer to the experience of race, class, and gender oppression as triple

jeopardy (King, 1995).

The oppression experienced by Black women occurs simultaneously and is multiplicative in nature. The Black feminist theory used here is one which suggests that race, gender, and class function together as oppressive forces; none can be separated from the other and none alone are primary. King (1995), when discussing the experience of oppression, suggests that "the modifier multiple refers not only to several, simultaneous oppressions but to the multiplicative relationships among them as well. In other words, the equivalent formulation is racism multiplied by sexism multiplied by classism" (p. 297).

Oppression in any form can be debilitating, and in many cases those who are being oppressed have been characterized negatively through the application of stereotypes. As a result it becomes important for Black feminist theorists to propose ways and means to resist these negative images.

Resisting Negative Images

The centrality of the Black woman in theorizing is crucial when discussing the importance and necessity of resisting negative images. These negative images that are imposed on Black women involves their objectification as the other. Hill-Collins (1990) notes that although both feminist and Black organizations have criticized the hegemony of white male patriarchy, they have also suppressed the voices of Black women. According to hooks (1984), non-white partici-

pants in the women's movement were treated in a condescending manner and the only reason there were non-white participants is because "we were needed to legitimate the process" (p. 11). Traditional feminist literature typically supports the position of middle-class white women. From this position gender is dominant and is the primary source of oppression for all women: "from the point of view of the female, gender is central to human life, thought, and identity" (Goetting & Fenstermaker, 1995, p. 12). When viewing feminism from this perspective, there is no consideration of the impact of race and class. As a result of this lack of concern, the issues and concerns of Black women are omitted. Hill-Collins (1990) submits that "theories advanced as being universally applicable to women as a group on closer examination appear greatly limited by the white, middle-class origins of their proponents" (p. 7).

When discussing the role of Black women in Black movements, Hill-Collins (1990) suggests that although Black women have been included in Black social and political issues, "with the exception of Black women's organizations, male-run organizations have not stressed Black women's issues" (p. 8). Hull, Scott and Smith (1982), Black feminist theorists, summarize this phenomenon the best in the title of their book All the Women are White, All the Blacks are Men, but Some of Us are Brave. King (1995) notes,

we are rarely recognized as a group separate and distinct from Black men, or a present part of the larger group of women in this culture. . . . When Black people are talked about the focus tends to be on Black men; and when women are talked about the focus tends to be on white women. (p. 296)

Omolade (1994) suggests that the Black woman is and has been central to U.S. societal institutions and organizations, "yet there are no history books that tell her story on her own terms, few history books that sing her songs" (p. 103). She also suggests that a history of Black women will emerge only when Black women begin to speak for themselves and create their own language.

Oppression in general is a concern of Black feminists. Many argue that we cannot be free until all oppression is eliminated. For some Black feminists, it is not an issue of woman against man or white against Black, but one of seeking equality for all people. King (1995) notes that "the necessity of addressing all oppressions is one of the hallmarks of Black feminist thought" (p. 295).

Self Definition

The ability that Black women have to resist negative images and stereotypes comes through their capacity to redefine their positions. As a result of being surrounded by many who have objectified her, the Black woman retreats to those positions where she feels comfortable expressing herself.

Lorde (1984) states, "I have come to believe over and over again that what is most important to me must be spoken, made verbal and shared, even at the risk of having it bruised or misunderstood" (p. 40). She then suggests that danger and fear are associated with revealing the self; we fear that others judge us harshly, or even punish us for speaking on our behalf. Viewing visibility as a

strength allows women to reject controlling and denigrating images of the other, and to incorporate personal knowledge of self with accurate external images.

Feminist theorists agree that definitions of self are a result of a combination of the women's objectification as the other and personal knowledge of self. Hill-Collins (1990) suggests that "Black women's lives are a series of negotiations that aim to reconcile the contradictions separating our own internally defined images of self as African-American women with our objectification as the Other" (p. 94). This notion is supported by Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule (1986), who define this phenomenon as constructed knowledge.

The primary focus of Black feminist thought involves giving Black women the opportunity to create definitions of self from the position of the Black woman (Hill-Collins, 1990). By beginning to speak for themselves, and hence defining themselves, the woman moves away from external definitions and develops "a new conception of truth as personal, private, and subjectively known" (Belenky et al., 1986, p. 54). Relying on this process of knowing self, women are better able to be assertive, and protect themselves by becoming their own expert. As a woman begins to listen to the voice inside, "she finds an inner source of strength" (Belenky et al., 1986, p. 54).

Black feminist theory suggests that there are times and places where Black women are comfortable communicating how they feel. These occasions allow Black women to express both anger and joy, and to

define and name themselves. In many cases these safe places exist not only in the context of work, churches, or other societal institutions; for some women, these safe places exist in their music, writing, or in their relationships with other Black women.

Safe Places

Patricia Hill-Collins (1990) refers to a private, hidden space to which some Black women retreat in an effort to deal with multiple forms of oppression. These safe places are not necessarily physical places, for they also exist in the consciousness of these women. Safe places allow some Black women to feel comfortable being themselves, and to define themselves. She goes on to say that

Black women intellectuals have long explored this private, hidden space of Black women's consciousness, the inside ideas that allow Black women to cope with and, in most cases, transcend the confines of race, class, and gender oppression. (pp. 92-93)

Black women create definitions of self in those places where they speak freely: "this space is not only safe--it forms a prime location for resisting objectification as the Other" (Hill-Collins, 1990, p. 95). According to the white women studied by Belenky et al. (1986), in an effort to define themselves these women found it necessary to "end relationships with lovers or husbands, to reject further obligations to family members, and to move out and away on their own" (p. 76).

From the perspective of the Black feminist, there are physical limitations experienced by Black women which affects their self-

definition: "Self is not defined as the increased autonomy gained by separating oneself from others. Instead, self is found in the context of family and community" (Hill-Collins, 1990, p. 105). These safe places exist not only in family and community but also "in the comfort of daily conversations, through serious conversation and humor. African American women as sisters and friends affirm one another's humanity, specialness, and right to exist" (Hill-Collins, 1990, p. 97). She also suggests that only other Black women are capable of seeing through the barrier of invisibility created by objectification as the other, to recognize another Black woman as human.

Challenging controlling images and beginning to view life from a Black woman's perspective is critical to the resistance of oppression which results from race, class, and gender. Through this process, referred to as self-definition, the Black woman not only questions what is being said but also the intentions of those who possess the power to define.

The Black Woman Objectified

Black feminism empowers Black women by giving them the opportunity to construct a knowledge of self. This is necessary in the liberation of Black women, because historically Black women have been viewed as an objectified other. In terms of power and prestige, Hill-Collins (1990) argues that "portraying African-American women as stereotypical mummies, matriarchs, welfare recipients, and hot

mommas has been essential to the political economy of domination fostering Black women's oppression" (p. 67).

Resisting these negative images of Black womanhood is central to Black feminist theorizing, in that the ability to associate stereotypes with marginalized populations requires power. Black feminists recognize that "these controlling images are designed to make racism, sexism, and poverty appear to be natural, normal, and an inevitable part of everyday life" (Hill-Collins, 1992, p. 68). For Black feminists, the effort is not to replace these negative images with positive ones, but to replace them with accurate images. Higginbotham (1982) addresses this issue when she posits that

in our eagerness to counteract the negative stereotypes, we must not create a different one, which also fails to reflect accurately the varied lives of Black women. Even though many Black women are able to overcome difficult situations, Black women are not superwomen devoid of needs and emotions. (p. 96).

The objectification as the other and the attempted application of various stereotypes can be seen as reasons for the development and need for Black feminism. In an effort to resist these negative stereotypes, it is critical that Black women reclaim the power over their identity and define themselves. King (1995) argues that "Black feminism asserts self-determination as essential. Black women are empowered with the right to interpret our reality and define our objectives" (p. 312).

Black feminist theory is used here as a lens through which the lives of Black women can be examined. However, Black feminism itself is not the only issue. Also of concern to this research is

the notion of community and the importance of the Black community in the lives of Black women. In the following section I examine definitions of community, how we have come to identify the Black community, and the relationships between the Black community and Black women.

Community

According to Jason (1997),

Alexis de Toqueville, an astute observer of the cultural landscape, noted how strange Americans were--rabid about their individualism, yet amazingly, a country of joiners where voluntary associations abounded even as their members remained islands unto themselves. (p. x)

In this section I briefly discuss the development of the study of community in sociology, as well as the basic approaches to the study of community. Following this I will discuss how this relates to the Black community and the importance of Black women in its development.

The study of community has developed around three basic ideas, the "three most common types of definitions: those including (1) area, (2) common ties, and (3) social interaction" (Lyons, 1987, p. 77).

Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft

From the perspective of community as a typology, the most common approach are the ideas of gemeinschaft and gesellschaft. Lyons (1987) suggests that Tönnies' book Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft

marks the beginning of the study of community from a sociological perspective. In this discussion of community and society, Tönnies compares "human relationships appearing typically in extended families or rural villages (Gemeinschaft) with those found in modern, capitalist states (Gesellschaft)" (p. 7). Both gemeinschaft and gesellschaft are ideal types; generally relationships don't exist in these forms, but they can be seen as variations of these types.

Gemeinschaft represents those relationships among people that involve tradition; it is "characterized by a strong identification with the community, emotionalism, traditionalism, and holistic conceptions of other members of the community" (p. 7). Gesellschaft is the opposite of gemeinschaft in that it represents rationality and individualism, "characterized by little or no identification with the community, affective neutrality, legalism, and segmental conceptions of other members of the community" (p. 7). It would be hard to find societies where tradition ruled exclusively or one where all authority was based entirely on law. Tönnies suggests that all societies can be found somewhere between these extremes.

Ecological Approach

The ecological approach is one method used to define community. This approach, unlike Tönnies', believes that the community is defined on the basis of geographical location. This perspective focuses on area and relies on the relationship between the people and the geographic area, according to Lyons (1987),

Robert Park suggests that the essential characteristics of a community, so conceived, are those of (1) a population territorially organized, (2) more or less completely rooted in the soil it occupies, (3) its individual units living in a relationship of mutual interdependence. (p. 5)

This type of approach to the study of community can be seen in the work of the Chicago school's ecological approach to the study of community, a notion borrowed from biology. Biological ecologists examine the interrelationships between organisms and the community in which the organisms exist. Bell and Newby (1972) suggest that the ecologists, then, have a distinctive view of community, regarding the solidarity and shared interests of community members as a function of their common residence.

The Chicago school then applied this approach to community studies with their work in deviance and social problems. They argued that just like there are dangers to the biological ecological systems, there are also dangers within the community: invasion, conflict, accommodation, and assimilation.

This biological analogy was applied to the human community during the 1920's when "rapid technologicalization, urbanization, immigration, and the like were conceptualized as forces of invasion" (Pfohl, 1985, p. 188). Through the application of the ecological terminology, Park and Burgess identified areas of deviance, within and surrounding the city, using the concept of concentric zones. Within these zones there were different types of people, defined on the basis of their relationship to the center of the city. Community in this sense is defined solely on the basis of geographic location.

Black Community

The sense of community that I am trying to describe is not bound by the notions forwarded through ecology, and is located somewhere between Tönnies' notions of Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft. The commonalities that exists within the Black community, and the basis for a definition of the Black community, is common historical discrimination. It is as a result of this discrimination--out of need--that this community developed. Although this Black community had some direct ties to the larger society, blacks were in many ways forced to depend on each other for survival. We can also see interactional characteristics within the Black community. According to Blackwell (1975) the Black community,

. . .is not characterized by unidimensionality. It is multifaceted. It can be used in both an ecological sense (territoriality and propinquity) or in sociopsychological terms. In the latter sense we are speaking of the role of shared values in creating a sense of identity with a particular group that may or may not live within the same geographic boundary. (p. 16)

Those who are involved in the community share interests, values, and, in the case of the Black community, life experiences. This sets them apart from others with different values and interests.

A number of concepts that are important when discussing the characteristics of the Black community. Blackwell (1975) has identified the following ideas:

(1) production-distribution-consumption, which concerns the availability of goods and services essential to daily living in the immediate locality (and included all social institutions found in the community); (2) socialization, which refers to the transmission of basic values and behavioral patterns to

the individual members of the system; (3) social control, which is the structural arrangement for influencing members toward behavioral conformity; (4) social participation, which refers to those structures that facilitate incorporation into the community by virtue of opportunities for participation in its life; and (5) mutual support, which describes the process of care and exchanges for help among the members of a group, especially in times of stress. (p. 16)

In my discussion on the impact and contributions of the Black woman to the Black community, I have used the above concepts as points of contact when addressing Black women and the Black community.

Black Women and the Black Community

Clark-Hine (1989) stated that

for centuries, Black women, during slavery and in freedom, played a significant role in the creation of social, cultural, educational, religious, and economic institutions designed to improve the material conditions and to raise the self-esteem of African Americans. (p. 109)

Black women have historically been the active forces in the development of the Black community, through their involvement in the creation of social, political, and educational organizations. Many have argued that the organizations that were formed by Black women were charitable or simply social clubs; however, Jones (1995) makes the observation that the Black woman had a special role in these organizations "which, over and above their particular functions, seek to provide social services denied to Negro youth as a result of the Jim-Crow lynch system in the U.S." (p. 114).

Hill Collins (1990) argues that there are two primary dimensions of Black women's activism. The first involves the struggle for group survival, and the second dimension involves the struggle

for institutional transformation. The creation of these organizations is simply to ensure the physical survival of the Black community. This can be seen in the development of food and clothing pantries, boarding houses, and neighborhood centers, all created to physically sustain the community. Efforts to effect change within social institutions are manifest in Black women's participation in civil rights movements, boycotts, and union organizing.

Hill-Collins (1990) further argues that

Black women cannot be content with merely creating culture and providing for families and communities because the welfare of those families and communities is profoundly affected by American political, economic, and social institutions. (p. 144)

As a result of the interdependency of these social institutions, Black women not only created culture within their own communities but they also protested inequalities as they existed within the American social fabric.

Clark-Hine (1989) suggests that during the time between the collapse of slavery and reconstruction and again during World War II, Black women were critical to the survival of the Black community.

"Through it all, the vulnerable Black community--especially its aged and sick, its orphaned children, and abandoned wives and mothers, its unskilled and illiterate workers--suffered a plethora of social ills" (p. 110). As a result of this, Black women began to organize through the creation of various philanthropic organizations. Although Black women at this time possessed limited financial resources,

in many ways their giving of time and effort and commitment to

racial uplift work--including providing protection for young Black women--and their endless struggle to create living space for segregated, often illiterate, unskilled, and impoverished Black Americans were as valuable. (p. 110)

Black women began to join together through the creation of various clubs and organizations whose concern was the survival of the community. Through the creation of the social networks within the Black community, the goal of many of these Black women's organizations was to improve the Black community by allowing people to improve themselves. Notions of self help and race improvement have historically been important in Black women's public activism (Shaw, 1995). A number of mechanisms were employed by Black women in their public activism. Hill-Collins (1990) observes,

ranging from the private, individual actions of Black mothers within their homes to the more organized group behavior of Black churchwomen and sorority sisters, Black women use a variety of strategies to undermine oppressive institutions. These strategies occur in three primary settings: political and economic institutions, Black extended families, and the African-American community as family. (p. 146)

In this dissertation I examine the strategies employed by Black women to resist the oppressive influences on their lives. As noted by Hill-Collins (1990) and Shaw (1995), the Black women in this study exhibit strong will and determination to overcome the oppressive forces of social institutions, as well as efforts to continue to assist in the healthy development of the Black community. The women discussed here are examples of women who became involved in various civil rights activities after experiencing or witnessing inequities on the basis of race, class, and gender. These women were active in reorganizing the unions and day care centers which had

little concern for the workers or the children. These women committed themselves to the betterment of their community at the expense of their lives.

The Black feminist perspective forwarded here is supportive of the notion of self-definition. I have chosen a source of data that is conducive to the act of self-definition. This data source is oral narratives, which are useful in that they allow the woman to create her own definitions of the situation. These definitions are created through interviews with each respondent. In the following section I discuss the field of oral history, its value, and its applicability to this research.

Oral History as a Field of Study

Thompson (1978) states that "oral history is as old as history itself. It was the first kind of history. And it is only quite recently that skill in handling oral evidence has ceased to be one of the marks of the great historian" (p. 19).

Thompson (1978) also notes that oral history can be traced back to native cultures who pass down histories through elders. He cites Alex Haley's work on Roots as an example. He further suggests that in these societies, the oral historian was a valuable member of that society in that he/she possessed the history of that group; "Haley's story does bring home with rare power the standing of the oral historian before the spread of documentation in literate societies made redundant such public moments of historical revelation" (p.

23). He further cites numerous examples of societies whose history was passed down orally, including Greece, "where the accuracy of description of details of obsolete armour and name-lists of abandoned cities, [were] preserved orally for six hundred years before the first written versions of the Iliad were circulated" (p. 23).

Oral history is truly a method that has a long and valued tradition. Alan Nevins is recognized as the founder of oral history in the United States: he established the Oral Research Office at Columbia University in 1948. Nevins, however, suggests that he is not responsible for the development of oral history; this is something that would have developed with or without him. He argues that oral history founded itself. "It had become a patent necessity, and would have sprung into life in a dozen places, under any circumstances" (Nevins, p. 31). Regardless of its origins, oral history has since blossomed into a multidisciplinary approach to the study of society.

During a brief period after the work of Nevins at Columbia, oral history saw a decline in interest among historians. However, beginning in the late 1950's, scholars began to draw on oral history in their published works. With the rise of discontent in the U.S. during the 1960's, oral history began to have a resurgence, in that "those who rejected an elitist history of leaders and political events wanted to write about the poor and the underprivileged: about people who did not, perhaps could not record their own stories" (Harris, 1985, p. 3). With a number of projects in the works, in

1967 the Oral History Association (OHA) was founded. This organization which has since published a quarterly newsletter and an academic journal, The Oral History Review. This organization, begun with 77 members, currently boasts a membership of thousands.

Oral History Defined

There have been a number of attempts to address the definition and purpose of oral history. Some emphasize the importance of historical relevance. Hoffman (1984) suggests that oral history is involved in "a process of collecting, usually by means of a tape-recorded interview, reminiscences, accounts, and interpretations of events from the recent past which are of historical significance" (p. 68). Still others attempt to address oral histories by stressing the importance of oral histories fulfilling a current void in historical research. Starr (1984) argues that "oral history is primary source material obtained by recording the spoken words--generally by means of planned, tape recorded interviews--of persons deemed to harbor hitherto unavailable information worth preserving" (p. 4). Other definitions emphasize the contributions of populations that have been denied the opportunity to present their history. Grele (1985) states that

oral history is a way of involving people heretofore uninvolved in the creation of the documents of their past; it is an opportunity to democratize the nature of history, not simply by interviewing them but by seeing that involvement as a prelude to a method which allows people to formulate their own meanings of their past experiences in a structured manner in response to informed criticism. (p. xvi)

The above perspectives look favorably on the use of oral histories. However, there are some who would argue that their contribution to history is not as valuable as these authors suggest. Tuchman (1984) argues that "the chief difficulty in contemporary history is over-documentation or what has been called, less charitably, the multiplication of rubbish" (p. 76). Tuchman likens the tape recorder to a tapeworm, which creates an "appalling" amount of useless trivia. This author, like others, suggests that some oral histories are valuable or "worthwhile," but dependent on the individual interviewed. When discussing the interview of Army General Marshall, Tuchman (1984) contends that this was a valuable contribution because he "was a summit figure worth recording, which is more than can be said for all those shelves and stacks of oral transcripts piling up in recent years" (p. 76).

The focus or approach that research takes is dependent on the perspective that is adopted. Given the above definitions, the one closest to the position taken in this research is that forwarded by Grele (1985). Like Grele (1985), I argue that there are certain populations within society that have not been afforded the opportunity to present their own history. Through the use of oral history these populations are empowered to give an account of their experiences.

Value of Oral History

Hobsbawn (1985) argues that

most of the history written by contemporary chroniclers and subsequent scholars from the beginning of literacy until, say, the end of the nineteenth century, tells us so little about the great majority of the inhabitants of the countries or states it was recording. (p. 13)

Thompson (1984) concurs and suggests that "history was essentially political: a documentation of the struggle for power, in which the lives of ordinary people, or the workings of the economy or religion, were given little attention except in times of crisis" (p. 38). This type of history has provided only a partial way of understanding the past, since there has been no picture of common people, and the images that are typically presented of marginalized populations have often been stereotypic. These marginalized groups within American society have, through the course of history, been defined and spoken for by those who possess the power to define.

Given the nature of oral histories, these populations are now given a voice, the ability to present an interpretation of their lives in "a dynamic, interactive methodology that preserves an individual's own words and perspectives in a particularly authentic way" (Etter-Lewis, 1993, p. xii). Through the use of oral histories, history can be transformed by "giving back to the people who made and experienced history, through their own words, a central place" (Thompson, 1984, p. 38).

These life documents are intimate in that they "attempt to enter the subjective world of informants, taking them seriously on their own terms and thereby providing first-hand, intimately involved accounts of life" (Plummer, 1983, p. 14). This method is

also versatile in that it can bring to our attention the life stories that are not addressed outside of this approach. "Oral history bids fair to reflect the myriad interests of a pluralistic society--its ethnic groups, its cultural pursuits, its political leadership, its institutions and occupational groups" (Starr, 1984, p. 4).

With the contributions of oral history, the records of how things really happened may be questioned, presenting a more democratic approach to the study of history. Oral history further questions the status quo by providing a forum for marginalized populations. We can now put history on trial; "witnesses can now also be called from the under-classes, the unprivileged, and the defeated. It provides a more realistic and fair reconstruction of the past, a challenge to the established account" (Thompson, 1984, p. 41).

This method of research is valuable for the very reason that it is concerned with the representations of marginalized populations. "Its most important advantage in my view, however, is that it makes possible the preservation of the life experience of persons who do not have the literary talent or leisure to write their memoirs" (Hoffman, 1984, p. 72). In this sense it is not a history of big men and big battles, but a story of everyday individual life and the examination of the impact of various social and historical phenomena.

Oral History as Method

Plummer (1983) argues that there are a number of different types of life documents. These documents are "account(s) of indivi-

dual experience which reveal the individual's actions as a human agent and as a participant in social life" (p. 2). Documents such as diaries, letters, photos, memos, biographies, and oral histories are what Plummer (1983) refers to in "a broad sense" as documents of life. Plummer further suggests that

a human or personal document is one in which the human and personal characteristics of somebody who is in some sense the author of the document find expression, so that through its means the reader of the document comes to know the author and his views of events with which the document is concerned. (p. 14)

These documents of life are seriously concerned with the subjective world of the individual. Their primary concern is with "the phenomenal role of lived experience, with the ways in which members interpret their own lives and the world around them" (Plummer, 1983, p. 67). Those who support the study and use of life histories are typically concerned with how people understand and interpret their lives and the social world that surrounds them.

Within the social sciences, research is focused on both the consistencies and inconsistencies within history and individuals' lives. Given this there is an appreciation for the contribution of life documents. "The life history technique is peculiarly suited to discovering the confusions, ambiguities and contradictions that are played in everyday experiences" (Plummer, 1983, p. 68). Through the examination or collection of life histories, the researcher is allowed to acknowledge the contradictions as well as consistencies in everyday life; it is also possible to view an individual life in conjunction with social and historical events. Plummer (1989) also

says that

the perspective of life history research is the totality of the biographical experience--a totality which necessarily weaves between biological bodily needs, immediate social groups, personal definitions of the situation, and historical change both in one's own life and in the outside world. (p. 69)

It is a mistake to see the contributions of this method as individual, for through this approach we are able to view the totality of human life. We are allowed to examine social phenomena such as war, unemployment, migration, community development, political uprisings, etc., that have directly or indirectly affected the individual. Plummer (1983) articulates this when noting that "invariably the gathering of a life history will entail the subject moving to and fro between the developments of their own life cycle and the ways in which external crises and situations have impinged on this" (p. 70).

According to Etter-Lewis (1993), oral narrative, a document of life, "reconstructs a life once lived; and it is a text that makes relevant the present metaphors of a narrator's past" (p. xii). Through these reconstructions that we are better able to understand various social and historical phenomena within the context of that individual's life. History and all of its cycles have inevitably had considerable influence on the lives of those interviewed, and it is virtually impossible to record a life history without referencing historical phenomena. "A life history cannot be told without a constant reference to historical change, and this central focus on change must be seen as one of life history's

great values" (Plummer, 1983, p. 70).

Limitations of Oral History

Many of the criticisms surrounding the use of oral history as a method of analysis are concerned with issues of reliability and validity. In relation to oral histories, Hoffman (1984) presents definitions for both reliability and validity. She suggests that reliability is

the consistency with which an individual will tell the same story about the same events on a number of different occasions. Validity refers to the degree of conformity between the reports of the event and the event itself as recorded by other primary resource material such as documents, photographs, diaries, and letters. (p. 69)

An oral report may give an accurate description of the actual event; however, "its validity cannot really be tested unless it can be measured against some body of evidence" (Hoffman, 1984, pp. 69-70). The issue of validity is addressed through the use of corroborating evidence in the form of other written sources, which many oral historians agree are necessary when using oral narratives. Plummer (1983) suggests that the researcher use validity checks, by comparing them to other life histories which document the same phenomena, through comparisons with official records, or through interviews with others who have similar roles or who knew the narrator well.

Oral historians find great value in this technique of collaboration. When narrators tell their stories, generally people tell you what they want you to know, not necessarily giving an accurate view of what happened. Through the use of outside sources (Harris,

1985), this can be informative in that

often what's left out is more significant than what's put in, and it's only if you know something about a culture or a period from other sources, of all kinds, that you can begin to judge how the memories reflect not only what's not there but what is there. (p. 69)

The use of oral histories has been criticized by researchers who argue that these types of interviews are not statistically representative of the population. Grele (1985) argues that this is a false issue. He further suggests that "interviewees are selected, not because they represent some abstract statistical norm, but because they typify historical processes" (Grele, 1985, p. 131). The issue for Grele (1985) is how the researcher views history and the relevance of the narratives to this historical process, not whether or not they are representative of the larger population.

Oral histories capture an individual's subjective state at the time of the interview; it is both a combination of the past and the present. Regardless as to whether the individual's story is truth, it is that individual's definition of the situation and, hence, legitimate. If the concern of the research is the subjective story of the individual, then using oral histories is the most effective method (Plummer, 1983).

The issue with the use of oral history in this analysis is not reliability or validity. Historians are rightfully concerned about reliability and whether narratives represent true historical processes. As a sociologist, however I am looking at relationships that these narrators have with various social institutions as well as

commonalities as they exist among the narrators.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The type of documents used in this study are life histories, defined as "the account of one person's life 'as told to' another, the researcher" (Angrosino, 1989, p. 3). Those who support the study and use of life histories are typically concerned with "the ways in which members interpret their own lives and the world around them" (Plummer, 1983, p. 67). The interest is in individual interpretations, and a subjective approach to the topic studied.

Through the examination or collection of life histories, the researcher is allowed to acknowledge the contradictions as well as consistencies in the lives of the narrators. It is also possible to view the life of the individual in conjunction with social and historical events.

I am using life histories in this analysis because I am interested in the subjective experiences of these women and how they have experienced their social worlds. In examining each narrative I have developed a relationship with each of these women and have been privy to their inside thoughts on various events in their lives and how these affected the women, not only as women but as Black women who lived during the early 1900s.

In this chapter I do four things: (1) describe the data set, (2) discuss other uses of this data source, (3) elaborate on the

research plan, and (4) discuss the narratives and how they are used in this study.

Description of Data Source

The Black woman oral history project is the result of the work of Professor Letitia Woods Brown. In response to Dr. Brown's request to collect the life histories of Black women, the Schlesinger Library of Radcliffe College began the collection of the oral memoirs of Black women. The oral narratives that are included are from women who "made substantial contributions to improving the lives of African-Americans and all people" (Hill & King, 1991, p. ix,). The Rockefeller Foundation funded this project, which began in July 1976, with the support of the Advisory committee of the Schlesinger Library.

Data Collection

A telephone conversation with Ruth Hill, the supervisor of this project, yielded the following information. This project began as a committee of thirteen women around the country, all well-known in their communities, who were selected by the director of the library. These women were responsible for the supervision of the project, the selection of interviewers, and of interviewees.

In order to obtain recommendations for women to survey, the library put information about the project in history and women's journals along with an address and phone number to be used to make

suggestions for potential interviewees. From this information the library compiled a list, which was then distributed to the project's advisory committee, who made recommendations about interviewees. From hundreds of candidates, the committee chose 72 women from across the United States; interviewing began in 1976 and ended in 1981. The professional career fields of these women included education, the arts, business, medicine, and law. Many women combined care for their families with various volunteer agencies throughout the country.

There were no efforts by the Advisory committee to obtain a random sample, nor were they interested in including all influential African-American women. According to Hill and King (1991),

the goal of the project was to interview a cross section of the many women of African descent who made significant contributions of varying kinds to American society in the early and mid-decades of the twentieth century. (p. ix)

However, there was an effort to balance urban/rural birthplaces, level of education, and various professions versus those women who made their community contributions through involvement in voluntary organizations (Hill, 1991).

The Interview

The oral history interviews were conducted at the home of the interviewee by interviewers selected by the advisory committee.

"Most of the interviewers were Black women, ranging in age from the twenties to the seventies" (Hill, 1991, p. xv). The project advisory committee believed that having interviewers who were the same race

and gender would lead to more detailed information. "The empathy produced by the shared experiences of being Black women in America might better capture the nuances of that experience" (Hill, 1991, p. xv).

The interview process began with an initial social meeting; this allowed the interviewer and the interviewee to become familiar with one another and provided a chance to find out about the life of the interviewee. During this meeting the interviewer explained the legal agreements. Each interviewer received a general interview schedule (see Appendix A), which was combined with the information obtained from the initial meeting, to form the final interview schedule. The final interview occurred in the household of the interviewee and, in some cases, involved more than one meeting.

Themes examined during the recording of the oral history include "family background, education and training, employment, voluntary activities, and family and personal life" (Hill & King, 1991, p. x). The interviewee was given the opportunity to reflect on those events which she believe shaped her life.

In the narratives selected, the questions asked by the interviewer were probing and seemed to correspond to the interview schedule. All the interviews in the collection were unedited and appear in question and answer format. This allows for a better analysis of the quality of the questions and the usefulness of the interviews.

After transcription of the interviews, the interviewee was given the chance to "edit and correct her oral history before the

final copy was prepared" (Hill & King, 1991, p. x). The first editing was done at the library; following this the transcripts were sent to the interviewee for corrections and additional questions from the library. The corrections that the interviewee were asked to make mainly concerned the accuracy of address, name, and date. The interviewees were asked not to rewrite the transcript but to simply address the questions. On occasion there were some who changed a significant portion of the transcript. On occasions such as these, the library accepted the changes and published the interviews as corrected. However, the library also kept the original transcripts, those without corrections, and these are available for public view.

Although these narratives were collected by and are the property of the Schlesinger Library at Radcliffe College, there were several sites were identified as repositories. The advisory committee recognized that there was a lack of information on the lives of Black women; hence, the Schlesinger Library's original proposal provided for the free distribution of completed transcripts to more than a dozen academic institutions, including Michigan State University, which is where I gained access to these narratives.

It was indeed possible to collect interviews and create oral narratives of my own. I chose, however, to use the Radcliffe project because the women interviewed possessed unique characteristics that would prove valuable to this type of research. The women interviewed for this project were born in the early 1900's; at the time

time of the interviews many of these women were approximately 70 or 80. There is so little research that gives Black women the opportunity to present their lives from their perspective, particularly older Black women. This project was selected because of the value of viewing the lives of Black women who had experienced life through Jim Crow, World War II, and other social and historical events that occurred over the span of an entire century.

The Analysis

The type of research presented here is a newly-developing field of research. Narrative Research is defined by Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber (1998) as "any study that uses or analyzes narrative materials" (p. 2). The insight gained from reading Leiblich, et al. (1998) is the classification scheme presented. This classification schemes presents two dimensions of narrative analysis.

The first dimension compares the notion of holistic versus categorical; the second dimension involves a comparison between content and form. In the first dimension, the categorical perspective involves dissecting the narrative and identifying "sections or single words belonging to a defined category" (Lieblich et al., 1998, p. 12). The categorical perspective is contrasted with the holistic approach. This approach does not break the selection into categories, but allows the researcher to examine the life story as in its entirety. The second dimension of narrative analysis involves content versus form. Content involves looking at specifically "what

happened, or why, who participated in the event" (Lieblich, et al, 1998, p. 12), whereas form looks at the structure of the narrative, when events occurred or appeared in the narrative, and the style of the narrative. When you bring these two dimensions together, a clearer picture of the type of analysis is presented.

The research presented here is identified as holistic-content; the focus of this type of approach involves a concentration on the entire life story of the individual through an examination of the content of the narrative. In discussing how to approach narrative research from a holistic-content perspective, Lieblich et al., (1998) delineates a process that could be helpful in reading and analyzing the narrative. The first step of this analysis involves reading the material repeatedly, until a pattern appears; then there must be a decision on "special foci of content or themes that you want to follow in the story as it evolves" (p. 63). It is important to mark the various themes as they appear in your reading and finally keep track of your results.

This process of analyzing narratives is similar to Creswell's (1998) approach to analyzing qualitative data. Creswell (1998) supports Lieblich et al., (1998) in suggesting that the researcher immerse himself or herself in the transcripts by repeatedly reading the material until he/she has a clear understanding. Following the immersion, he encourages researchers to "develop themes or dimensions through some classification system, and provide an interpretation in light of their own views or views of perspectives in the literature"

(Creswell, 1988, p. 144).

Given that I am taking a holistic-content approach, how do I begin to analyze or evaluate the narrative? Lieblich et al., (1998) presents two criteria that are helpful for evaluation. First, the evidence must be comprehensive, in that there should be "numerous quotations in reporting narrative studies" (p. 173). Second, coherence is necessary; different parts of the interpretation must fit together to create a larger meaningful picture.

Taking this qualitative approach to the analysis of these narratives is essential. This method of analysis is invaluable in insuring the preservation of the individual voices of each of the narrators. Through identifying themes among the narrators, a clearer picture of the commonalities between each of the women is presented, which makes this research unique. The one other study which addressed this data set differs greatly in terms of the analysis of the data.

Other Uses of This Source

The Black Women's Oral History Project has been used by Lykes (1983) in a study of the coping techniques Black women use to deal with discrimination in the workplace. This author states that his study "presents an exploration of the effects of institutional oppression and individual prejudice on Black women through the examination of their descriptions of such experiences and an analysis of their strategies for coping with them" (p. 82).

Through an examination of the oral narratives of these women, Lykes (1983) identifies variables that are believed to be indicators of discrimination and coping. Specifically, the variables identified are situational factors within the place of predominant employment. Life problems are identified as another variable which the author suggests is an action

that was spontaneously reported by the subject as part of her own life and seen as a problem by her. Three kinds of life problems were recorded; obstacles to goal attainment, disruption of normal activity, and recurrent or frequent difficulties that were obstacles or disruptions. (p. 88)

The source of these life problems was also identified as a variable. This is coded as "personal or individual prejudice or as institutional or societal conditions" (Lykes, 1983, p. 89). Lykes (1983) also identified perceived control of the outcome as a variable which is measured by examining how the narrator defines the locus of control, either as personal control or outside control. This author identifies various coping strategies and examines each narrative looking for variation in coping techniques, specifically concerned with whether the women directly or indirectly dealt with the incident.

After these variables have been identified in each of the narratives, Lykes (1983) uses analysis of variance to analyze the relationships. The major finding is that

Black women depend differentially on cues from the context and on their perceptions of the source of the problem and their control over the outcome in determining the degree of directness and flexibility of coping in dealing with experiences of discrimination. (p. 97)

Research Plan

In this analysis I focus on the content of the oral narratives through exploring common themes that have become apparent in reading. Through a careful examination of each of these oral narratives, I identify similarities as well as differences. This approach is similar to those employed by others doing research using oral histories (Rucker & Abron, 1996; Etter-Lewis, 1993; Lykes, 1983). Reinhartz (1992) suggests that there are many ways to use previously published oral histories and autobiographies. They could be used to describe empirical patterns as paired histories through telling the stories of two different people and how they relate to each other; and, more importantly to this study, oral histories can be used to "stress the shared characteristics of the oral histories of these women despite their differing life-styles and cultures" (p. 128). Using this approach I hope to provide a better understanding of the unique position of Black women in the US during the early 1900s.

Narratives

This collection has a total of 68 oral narratives available for public use. After a review of each narrative I discovered that those narratives that are less than 60 pages did not provide the depth of information necessary for analysis; thus, those narratives are not considered in this analysis. This process eliminated 46. Others were eliminated because the interviews are conducted poorly; in many cases the question asked by the interviewer is longer than

the response. According to Grele (1985) this is not the most effective way to conduct an interview; he argues that this is a type of acquiescence where "what happens in such conversations, whether they be acquiescence or total agreement, is that one party does all the talking and more important, the signifying" (p. 258).

As a result of this process, 20 oral narratives were selected for this analysis, and range in page length from 60 to 362 pages. There is some variation in the age of this sample; the year of birth ranges from as early as 1893 to 1917. All of these women were involved in the community in one way or another. The table below (Table 1) outlines the narrators' names, years of birth, page length of narrative, and community interest/occupation. For a more detailed description of each narrator, see Appendix B.

Table 1
Narrator Information

Narrator	Year of Birth	Length of Narrative in Pages	Community Interest/ Occupation
Frances Mary Albrier	1898	362	Civil Rights Advocate
Etta (Moten) Barnett	1902	97	Actress, Singer
Melnea Agnes (Jones) Cass	1896	144	Shaw House/Civic Leader
Alfreda (Barnett) Duster	1904	69	Social Worker, Civic Leader
Lena Edwards	1900	84	Obstetrician
Zelma (Watson) George	1903	155	Singer, Actress
Beulah (Shepard) Hester	1893	76	Social Worker
Julia Hamilton Smith	1885	117	Educator
Dorothy Height	1912	254	Civic Leader/ Civil Rights
Maida Springer-Kemp	1910	116	Trade Union Movement
Miriam Matthews	1905	81	Librarian/Lecturer
Lucy (Miller) Mitchell	1899	106	Educator
Audley Moore (Queen Mother Moore)	1898	88	Civic Leader/ Reparations
Muriel (Sutherland) Snowden	1917	117	Cofounder Freedom House
Olivia Pearl Stokes	1916	93	Educator

Table 1--Continued

Narrator	Year of Birth	Length of Narrative in Pages	Community Interest/ Occupation
Mary Crutchfield (Wright) Thompson	1902	65	Dentist
Constance Allen Thomas	1917	74	Speech Therapist
Charleszetta (Campbell) Waddles	1912	74	Founder Perpetual Mission for Saving Souls of All Nations
Dorothy West	1906	80	Harlem Renaissance Author
Deborah Wolfe	1916	125	Teacher/Social Worker

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

After a careful examination of each of the narratives, I identified commonalities among these women; I call these commonalities themes. Three themes are explored in this study: (1) life-in-forming work, (2) community-building, and (3) religion as a point of organization. In the following section I give a description of the themes, followed by an indication of how each narrator fits into these themes. These themes are identified through the recollections of these women, and specifically through what is recorded in the narrative. In the following discussion on the identified themes, I discuss the experiences of the women in this research project.

This study uses the narratives of 20 women; as a result of this I have discovered, after carefully going through each of the narratives, that there is a point of saturation, a point at which various narrators repeat the same ideas that others have identified. As a result I have included in this section a discussion of the narratives of those women who I believe are representative of each of the themes discussed.

Themes

Life-Informing Work

After reading these narratives I became interested in why these

women were active in various community and social organizations. Through a careful examination of each narrative, I identified a common theme among the women: the idea that the narrator's life informs her work. In each case the community involvement of each woman has basis in her life. These women became involved in these activities as the result of a need that developed within their lives. Their community involvement not only serviced the community but also addressed this need.

Melnea Cass

Melnea Cass became a part of the Robert Gould Shaw House after taking her child to kindergarten held in this facility. The mothers of these kindergarten children formed the Friendship Club, "the kindergarten mothers first, because we were the kindergarten mothers. Then as that house developed to the community, . . . it became stronger and stronger" (Cass, 1991, p. 310). This gave rise to her involvement in community work. She further discusses her involvement in fund-raising for this community house.

We did all kinds of community work for the settlement house, such as raising money, such as giving dinners, and giving little parties for the children, helping with the children's camp money and raising money for all kinds of things down there. (p. 311).

Her involvement in the Shaw House was the springboard for ensuing community activities. She became involved in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), where she organized sit-ins at the offices of the Boston School Committee. Her

interest in children and their welfare can also be seen in the work she did with the Homemakers Training Program and the In-migrant Program.

Narrator Cass's involvement in the Women's Service Club, founded by women during World War I to help the veterans, increased her community awareness. After the war was over, this club "decided to continue community service. . . , and decided that they would try to do community service in the neighborhood, whatever it would be to help the people" (Cass, 1991, p. 353). The Homemakers Training Program and the In-migrant Program, provided training and counseling to young women who were coming to the north from southern states. Other narrators were also influenced by early life experiences which in turn affected their choice in community work.

Muriel Snowden

Early in their marriage, Mr. and Mrs. Snowden reevaluated their lives and considered moving out of the community, because it was deteriorating. Finally deciding "No, it doesn't make sense to move, we ought to stay, because if we have any talent, if we have our skill, this is the community that we know" (Snowden, 1991, p. 18). They founded an organization which later became the Freedom House. Narrator Snowden discusses the reasoning behind her involvement in the founding of the Freedom House: "The thing that was of uppermost concern to us in 1949 when we started Freedom House, was the physical deterioration of the community" (Snowden, 1991, p. 65).

This deterioration took the form of "no street cleaning, no garbage and trash removal, general neglect, concern about recreational facilities for children" (Snowden, 1991, p. 65). Other narrators were also involved in community organizations that were influenced by early life.

Charlesetta Waddles

Narrator Waddles (1991) acknowledges the value of her life experiences and the impact they have on her contributions to the community. On occasion she is asked to speak to various groups; when asked about speaking to the group Parents Without Partners she responds,

oh, I can well talk to you because I've been a parent without a partner. . . . I think that one of the things we have to do with our life is know that each thing is a learning experience and, whether it's bad or good, always reach for something better; then you can achieve. And of course, I've taken my experiences and tried to relate to people. (p. 93)

This sentiment is exemplified in the work that she has done in the community through her mission.

The Perpetual Mission for the Saving of All Souls, an organization founded by Narrator Waddles, began as a group of women who got together for prayer meetings. They later decided that they would form an organization. Narrator Waddles (1991) notes that "we were all poor women with a house full of children, most of us--and I felt that you are never too poor to help someone" (p. 73). As a result they began to donate clothes and food to be used by those in need. She recalls that the first person that came to them for help was a

member of the group. "She was a woman with thirteen children and her husband was ill at the time, and she was behind in her house payments" (pp. 73-74). The group didn't have money to give her, so they agreed that they would give her food so the money that she would use to buy food she could use for rent.

The mission continued to develop and depending on the needs of the community, the goals and resources provided by the mission changed: "You see, the needs change from time to time. . . . Since we are an emergency services program, I like to keep abreast of what the needs are" (Waddles, 1991, p. 76). Waddles discusses the different community needs that this organization met: clothes, shoes, wedding gowns, providing for funerals, and the necessities that are not covered in governmental programs. Government programs, according to Narrator Waddles, are limiting. She argues that "if you just want to keep them alive, so to speak, well, this is fine. But if you want people to come up out of this ghetto, if you want people to reach out and be somebody, then there is more that has to be done" (p. 80). As a result of her early life experiences, narrator Waddles took action within her community.

Maidia Springer-Kemp

Through various life experiences these narrators began to take action, many through community service and others through political action at their jobs. Narrator Springer-Kemp (1991) began as a garment worker working in unfavorable conditions in a non union garment

shop as a finisher and doing hand work. She recalls coming to work early:

people came in very early in the morning, didn't have their lunch hour and all sorts of things. And if the manufacturer of the garments thought something was wrong with it, you fixed it for nothing. And, oh, just, it's hard to describe. (p. 55).

She began to threaten her supervisors by telling them that she was going to the union to complain. Not only did she follow through with her threat, she joined the union in 1932, and participated in a 1933 general strike by the garment workers.

Narrator Springer-Kemp's (1991) initial interest in the union, which rose out of a concern for better wages and work conditions, developed into a career in union activities. She became the educational director of the Plastic Button and Novelty Workers' Union, Local 132 of the International Ladies Garments Workers' Union (ILGWU). In this role, she was responsible for training women who were just entering the workforce: "a part of the training was to make all of these people understand something about the union" (p. 66). In 1945 she was selected by the American Federation of Labor (AF of L) to travel to Europe and "to represent the American labor movement as fraternal delegates to share wartime experience" (p. 76). Other travels included Africa and Sweden, each time as a union representative from the AF of L. Union activity was only one example of the many activities in which these women were involved. Other activities involved more personal issues.

Lucy Mitchell

Narrator Mitchell (1991) discusses her involvement in the birth control movement in Boston. She was connected with this movement in that she held meetings at her house. Although she states that her involvement was limited, yet it "grew out of a personal need" (p. 79). She developed a kidney condition with her second child that required hospitalization. Her doctor recommended that she and her husband abstain: "this didn't seem a practical or viable alternative" (p. 79), hence her interest in birth control. Although the use of medical birth control was not available in Boston, narrator Mitchell (1991) and others began to hold meetings, inviting speakers that addressed the use of birth control methods.

After a hysterectomy, narrator Mitchell (1991) no longer had a need for birth control and was no longer involved. This is a perfect example of life experiences informing community service. She became involved in organizing people around an issue that also serviced a personal need. Once her need was met, she moved on to address other needs in her life that she believed could be affected through community action.

Of particular concern to narrator Mitchell (1991) was day care, since she had young children who were in need of day care. She recalls being approached by the director of her child's day care who told her that she

had a natural talent for working with young children, and would I consider training for the work, on a piecemeal basis, because of my family responsibilities. Because I'd had an

opportunity to discover from my volunteer work that I enjoyed working with young children, I gave serious consideration to this suggestion. (p. 2)

Through taking her child to day care and becoming concerned over the safety and sanitation issues, narrator Mitchell (1991) went on to develop and pursue laws and regulations that would create a better environment for the care of children. She was asked to be director of a nursery school program that attempted to address not only the educational needs of the students but also the health care needs. Later she became the director of the Associated Day Care Services of Metropolitan Boston (ADCS), an organization that was responsible for the reorganization of existing nursery schools and day care centers. As a result of this position, she became interested in the regulation of day care centers. "Between the fifties and the sixties, much of my professional life was focused toward passing a state licensing law, setting up standards of child care" (p. 43). This law would establish basic standards for group child care, where there had previously been little or none. In 1962 a child care bill which would regulate day care in the state of Massachusetts was signed by Governor John Volpe. When discussing the passage of this bill she notes, "activity related to the passage of this act, I consider one of the highlights of my professional career" (p. 48).

This work led to other opportunities for narrator Mitchell (1991), including travel to Asia. Narrator Mitchell (1991) along with other delegates from the US traveled to Asia to the International Conference of Social Welfare. This gave her the opportunity

to "meet social welfare leaders, to be oriented to the social conditions and problems of that country, and to see social welfare programs and projects" (p. 91).

Narrator Mitchell's (1991) involvement on a small level, taking her child to day care, led to national and international involvement with social welfare and child care. Her philosophy on family and children was influential in the career she chose and is an example of how her life informs her work. When talking about family and motherhood, she suggests that

flexibility has to be exercised in the kind of work that the mother does. To me, being involved with my children was important, and because of that, I went into the type of work that did not have long hours so that I could have time to guide my children in their school experiences. (p. 32)

It was important that she not have long hours but also that she be able to guide the school experiences of her children; this is a sentiment that she carries over to the work she does, in her concern for the care and education of children in day care centers.

Beulah Hester

Narrator Hester (1991) talks about how she cared for her elderly aunt. This likewise is an example of how her life informs her work, although she doesn't specifically acknowledge the impact of caring for her aunt and older neighbors, the influence is evident in her discussion of how she helped a neighbor who had trouble helping herself.

Her grandmother lived with Hester when she was young and she

talks about the times they shared together. She recalls making cakes with her grandmother and selling them to neighbors: "my grandmother used to make cakes, pound cakes, layer cakes. We'd do anything honest to make a living. We'd call up and ask would they like to. . . sure. Sometimes they'd buy half a pound cake" (Hester, 1991, p. 342). The grandmother was seen as another who could help with things in the home; "as I told you, all of us helped to make this thing go-- my brothers, my mother, my grandmother. This is what my grandmother and I would do" (p. 342). Her grandmother also encouraged her to help others in the community who were unable to help themselves.

Mrs. Capehart, her neighbor across the street, had fallen and was limited in what she could do for herself. When Hester got home from school she would go over and help Mrs. Capehart with what needed to be done. "I would go over, have my dinner and go over, spending time, fix her supper, and get the fire started. Or if it were cold enough, you know make her a fire, get her comfortable" (Hester, 1991, p. 341). As a child, narrator Hester (1991) had an interest in the well-being of the elders in her community. She attended Simmons College of Social Work and accepted a field placement at the Shaw House, where she worked with senior citizens. Through attending conferences in the field of social work, "I got the idea about the work with senior citizens. And every time I'd go to a conference, I'd always be found at the table with the information about senior citizens. I just liked that kind of work" (p. 333).

A few months after she graduated from Simmons College, she be-

gan work at the YWCA, in charge of the senior citizens program, where she worked for 30 years. When she retired she notes, (Hester, 1991) "I decided to take my group to the Freedom House. We were known then as the Goldenaires" (p. 308). To help in forming the Goldenaires, she solicited from ministers names of seniors who might be interested. The Shaw House provided funding to promote and support the Goldenaires. Using this money, narrator Hester (1991) took the Goldenaires on mini-vacations. On one occasion she recalls taking them to New York to see Pearl Bailey: "it's such a little, to make them happy. They enjoyed Pearl Bailey. Anything interesting that would come along, I'd get an opportunity to take them. Sometimes, I would find that it was necessary to just have a quiet evening" (p. 335). When discussing her work with the seniors, she notes, "I enjoyed my work. I feel that I benefitted as well as they" (p. 335). The time that she had spent with her grandmother and older neighbors led to the community service in which she was involved.

Alfreda Duster

Because of Narrator Duster's (1991) commitment to her children and family, she got married and began a family as a housewife. She believed that her contribution to the community would be her children.

I decided not to do anything for the public or for the race or for the world. I was going to multiply my ability and my husband's by six, because I felt that in that way I could do more for the country than just to go out and work myself. (p. 153)

During her married life, she became involved in the everyday lives of her children through the Parent Teacher Association (PTA).

When her (Duster, 1991) husband died, she used her college education in social work to make a living. She discusses what happened before her husband left to go to the hospital: "Before he left home to go to the hospital, my husband handed me \$52, and with \$52 and five children I had to start all over again. Put them all through college, to get them all past the bachelor" (p. 153). This she accomplished through community work on projects like Camp Illini and working with the Chicago Area Project, sponsored by the University of Chicago.

Camp Illini was a camp that took underprivileged children to a state park in an effort to expose them to nature. "We took them from the concrete jungle of the city out in the open air. . . . They learned to work together, play together, study together. They took trips together as units and that unity, solidarity, was built in camp" (Duster, 1991, p. 166). The Chicago Area Project was something she got involved in as a result of her work with the government as a social worker. She notes, "the years I spent with the state of Illinois. . . . I worked in the field of the prevention of juvenile delinquency. This is where I've had contact with young people" (p. 163). This project was similar to Camp Illini in that both dealt with youth. However the Chicago Area Project dealt with the community intervention which they believed would aide in the prevention of juvenile delinquency. Her commitment to her children and involve-

ment in their lives led to an involvement in community work and activities that concerned youth.

Etta Barnett

Narrator Barnett (1991), an international singer and actress, began singing early. She suggests, "I had discovered early, in Oakwood really, that I had a voice, because my mother had a voice" (p. 144). She went on touring the country with the Jackson Jubilee singers; she used the money she earned to finance her education. She later went to New York where Eva Jesse was her mentor, and introduced her to producers on Broadway. After two weeks in New York, she was in a Broadway show. She was the first colored person to perform at the White House, where she sang for F. D. Roosevelt the song she had performed in the movie "Remember my Forgotten Man." Her early interest and experience in music and acting can be seen in her later involvement in community activities.

Her career as a singer tapered off as her husband grew sick; "when I tapered off from singing and not being away from home as much, I became more closely involved with organizations" (Barnett, 1991, p. 198). The organizations that gained her interest were closely related to her singing and acting career.

I began to get involved on board and in civic work there in Chicago, like with the Lyric Opera, and with South Side Community Arts Center, and with the DuSable Museum of Margaret Burroughs, and the National Conference of Christians and Jews. (p. 198)

Early life experiences in music and the arts lead this narrator to

community work which was directly related to her early life interests.

Audley Moore

Narrator Moore (1991) had the opportunity to have her maternal grandmother live with her when she was young. As a result of these interactions, she learned much about her history in America. Of particular interest to this theme is that her maternal grandfather had been lynched by white men, "he was a Black man, he was very Black, and he was lynched for standing up to some white people who wanted his land" (p. 121). Her grandmother and her children were then forced off her land. This has played a major role in the life activities of narrator Moore (1991), who became involved early in issues that dealt with racism.

Moore (1991) first heard of Marcus Garvey in 1921; "I was a staunch Garveyite, you see. And I remember telling everybody how proud we should be of our woolly hair and Garvey had taught us all that" (p. 126). She became active in all activities that she thought addressed the issues of Black people, and began to move across the country looking for the place where Black folk were free; Chicago, California, and finally to Harlem. When discussing the conditions for Black people in New York she notes:

I'll tell you I never was so disappointed in my life as I was when I came to New York. No Black men was driving the buses, the streetcars, no Black men on the subways, no Black people working in their own neighborhood in Harlem. Black women on the street corners and the Jewish women used to come and--almost just like slavery days--feel their muscles, look at their

knees to see if they had crust on their knees. (p. 127)

Moore (1991) later joined the Communist party because she believed that they were addressing issues that related to Black people. She argues that the Communist party gave her an understanding of capitalism and socialism and the troubles associated with capitalism. This was a learning experience for her, one that she accepted willingly; for this reason she was willing to struggle for the Communist cause. She argues that the Communists had many issues and concerns that directly affected Black people.

They were interested in freeing the Scottsboro boys and they were interested in an anti-lynch bill, they was interested in a voters' rights bill, they was interested in civil rights, they had a civil rights movement going. . . . All of that was good for me, you know, and I learned a lot, and I participated, I joined in with both feet; I struggle, every day, every day, every day. (p. 132)

Moore went on to organize rallies, sit-ins and many other activities for the communist party including her work on eliminating Jim Crow from the major leagues, where she was trying to get Black people into the major leagues. Reflecting on that situation, she sees the destruction created through the integration of baseball. The impact of the integration of the major leagues was felt throughout the entire Black community

when our teams played in the communities throughout the country. Our community was ablaze with activity; our hotels, we used to have hotels and all, we used to have taxis, shoeshine boys, old women selling candies and peanuts and everything. (p. 135).

She later resigned from the Communist party "because I realized that it was no longer moving in our best interest, and there were certain

forces within the Communist party that was racist" (pp. 123-124).

Moore's (1991) interest then turned to her concern with reparations:

I found in doing research. . . in this old Methodist encyclopedia which I haven't been able to find since, that a captive people have one hundred years to state their judicial claims against their captors or international law will consider you satisfied with your condition. (p. 155)

At this point she began to organize: she took a delegation to the White House to talk with Senator Kennedy about the centennial of the Emancipation Proclamation. She told Senator Kennedy,

we're on the eve of the Emancipation Proclamation. He put that in his inaugural address, just stuck it in there. We're on the eve of the Emancipation Proclamation. Then he come out with 'Ask not what your country will do for you, but what you can do for your country.' (p. 160)

Moore also presented President Kennedy with a plan for reparations:

on February the Sixth, I forgot to tell you I'd taken a delegation to the White House, presented him with 500 million, 500 trillion dollars. I told you it had to go to the fourth generation, had to benefit from it. I asked him for 500 trillion. I asked him for 500 million seed money, just to awaken our people to the realization that their centennial, a hundred-year centennial, which represent an epoch, this was not just any centennial, this represented a hundred years that we hadn't come together and analyzed our status. (p. 161)

As a result of her concern over reparations, she began to travel across the country to inform people across the US about reparations. While traveling, Moore (1991) informed people of the conference that she had arranged to be held in Philadelphia. At this conference they decided

that we're a nation and that we are entitled to reparations, and that we had no intention of having reparations given to no little clique, no little group, and do what they want with it. That it belonged to our people, and that it had to be in suf-

efficient amount that it would benefit the fourth generation, on to the fourth generation. The unborn, the unborn, that's our concept of what reparations should mean to us. (p. 162)

The early lives of all these women were instrumental in their involvement in community activities. As a result of a personal need, these women took action and not only identified the oppression but acted on it to the point where they began to build the Black community. The actions of these women varied, ranging from activities within their own communities to endeavors outside of their normal social environments. These activities also differed in terms of how the lives of these women became manifest in their work.

Community-Building

According to Clark-Hine (1994),

for centuries, Black women, during slavery and in freedom, played a significant role in the creation of social, cultural, educational, religious, and economic institutions designed to improve the material conditions and to raise the self-esteem of African Americans. (p. 109)

These women belonged to various cultural, educational, religious, or economic organizations, some as members and others as officers, many have held multiple positions within one organization over time. I found that there are two types of groups to which these women belong. The first type is preexisting social and community service groups, and the second type is groups that were founded by these women.

As previously indicated, these women joined community organization based on some life experience that had caused them to have in-

terest in a certain social issue. The women who joined organizations believed that their concern would be addressed in this preexisting group, whereas others thought that there was a need in the community that was not being serviced through those types of groups and hence formed their own group. Although their common interest was service to their community, they accomplished this differently.

Involvement of these women in various community service and social organizations is too extensive to list here but has been included in Appendix C. This discussion will be limited to those organizations where the narrator has identified her justifications for participation. Here I explore the reasoning behind involvement in community organizations.

Joining Pre-existing Organizations

This section is organized around the notion that these women became part of various organizations because they believed that they could make a difference in their communities. Appendix C shows the dedication that these women had to their community through their participation in numerous organizations. The women joined these organizations because of a commitment they felt towards the Black community. This sentiment is best expressed by Narrator Audley Moore (1991); when questioned about her membership in various community organizations she replies:

Listen, in the struggle, I had to affiliate with everything and everybody, everything my people belonged to. When the Elks or the Masons, when they split, I had to belong to both sides of the split, 'cause I refused to be split. I have one

objective, with 'em for freedom, and I joined everything my people did. . . sometimes I suffered through their meetings, all the time I suffered through, I'd go to the conventions, they're not dealing with nothing basic, they're not. . .and honey, I just suffered through that. But I got to be there with them. I got to be. So I joined everything. Mama belongs to everything you all had; everything you have, I belong to it. (p. 145)

Narrator Moore (1991) exemplifies the commitment that these narrators felt towards the Black community. They were not joining organizations for the sake of joining, but to be closer to the people in the Black community. She personally identifies a commitment to the liberation of Black people and, in an effort to facilitate this, she felt it necessary to affiliate with everything and everybody.

Other narrators specifically discuss their roles and reasons for joining specific community organizations. Narrator Lucy Mitchell (1991), whose community service interest led her to a concern with the operation of day care centers, discusses her involvement in organizations that dealt with these issues. She talks about the creation of the Associated Day Care Services of Metropolitan Boston (ADCS). A year after this agency was founded, she was asked to be the educational director:

in accepting this new position, I looked upon it as a challenge and an opportunity for an expanded range of service, and for thirteen years I was educational director and for one year, 1964-1965, was acting executive director of the agency. (p. 38).

She had been looking for an expanded range of service. After her many other organizational affiliations, she believed that this would allow her to explore another facet of service to her community.

Narrator Snowden, 1991, co-founder of the Freedom House, an

organization which contributes to the development of urban renewal programs and interracial understanding, talks about her reasons for joining various organizations. Many of the organizations that she belonged to were related to her work at the Freedom House:

except for two things that I belong to, most of my life, if you look at the kind of things that I have done in a civic sense, they have been related, they have been things that have been supportive of what Freedom House is trying to do. (p. 23)

When discussing her involvement in Babson college (Snowden, 1991), she clarifies the reasoning behind her involvement.

Again, it's a matter of trying to find out where the opportunities are for young Black folks. And being in a position where you have some clout, being a corporation member, perhaps, gives me an opportunity to talk about minority students, minority faculty, and some feeling about how Babson can better relate to the Black community. (p. 23)

Through this type of involvement, she believes that she was given the opportunity to represent the interest of those in the Black community. Her other memberships, similar to Babson, are organizations that address issues that in one way or another affect the Black community.

Narrator Alfreda Duster (1991) best summarizes her philosophy about the community this way: "My priority, if I have one, is to try to see a resurgence of caring by the community. Caring for themselves, caring for each other, and striving for excellence" (p. 164). She also indicates a commitment to youth within the community: "I believe in getting things started for young people because they need somebody older to give them that push, to give them the needed support when they start out" (p. 169). This commitment manifested

itself in her involvement in juvenile delinquency prevention programs.

Narrator Duster (1991) was involved in the Chicago Area Project developed by Shaw and Burgess at the University of Chicago. This project, concerned with community prevention of delinquency, worked to eliminate destructive forces within communities that influence Black youth. The responsibility of the community group was "to organize to fight those things, and secondly, to provide constructive activities" (p. 164). As a part of this program she, along with other volunteers, canvassed communities to recruit people who were interested in helping young people.

Narrator Mary Thompson (1991) was involved with both children and adults. She later became involved with the Mississippi Health Project, sponsored by her sorority. This project sent nurses, doctors, dentists, and other professionals to Mississippi to help those who didn't have access to medical services.

We went to different counties, and we would go to school or to the church. Sometimes we didn't have a table, so we'd take the door off and pad it with newspapers, and then put a sheet over it and lay out the medicines. (p. 490)

When asked which accomplishment she felt the most proud of, she responded:

I think I enjoyed the work on the Mississippi Health Project the most. When you think you've really helped some people that needed it. And that was a big sacrifice, because that was during the depression days, when you gave up whatever little money you could make at that time to work for nothing for them down there. Yes, I think of all the things I did, I enjoyed that more. (pp. 501-502)

Narrator Melnea Cass (1991) was involved in many political

organizations that advocated for the interest of the Black community. Of particular interest is her involvement in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). She recalls her early involvement in the NAACP: "My mother-in-law took me into the NAACP, and I worked with that, anything I could do. Getting members, attending the meetings, serving on the various committees" (p. 344). Later she became president and took the lead in organizing sit-in's at Boston's board of education meetings.

We'd go down there then to the Boston School Committee, and just go right in and talk with them, probably on a little something that we'd want to bring before them. And they never paid any attention to you anyway, so then when they'd get through with the meeting, we'd stay there. That's how you organize it, you stay there. (p. 347)

Springer-Kemp (1991) became a part of the union in the shop where she worked because of the poor work conditions in her shop.

The union was struggling. I had the courage to threaten the employer about our conditions. I had joined the union before the strike. In this small way, you come to the attention of the leadership of the union that was reaching out to try to get people who were like-minded, and so I was on the strike committee. (p. 56)

Through her commitment to this union work, she was recognized and asked to become involved in other union activity.

These women believed there were organizations that already existed that were dedicated to resolving the issues that they were concerned about. However, there were also others who saw a need in the community with no existing organizational support. These women took it upon themselves to create organizations to draw attention to these issues.

Creation of Organizations

Charleszetta Waddles

Narrator Charleszetta Waddles (1991) was the founder of the Perpetual Mission for the Saving of All Souls, which serves the poor community in Detroit. This is a mission that is founded on religious principles.

I had a vision to take Matthew 25: 31-46 [which] I quoted a few minutes ago, 'When I was hungry, you fed me; when I was naked, you clothed me,' et cetera, and used that as our, should I say, goal, to do some of the things that we felt was needed in our community. (p. 74)

Through the creation of this organization, narrator Waddles (1991) developed various community programs that attempted to meet the needs of the people.

Muriel Snowden

Narrator Muriel Snowden (1991) was the cofounder of the Freedom House, an organization that focuses on neighborhood improvement and the promotion of citizen participation in policy decisions. She and her husband founded this organization with the intent of representing the people of the community. They approached the members of the community and encouraged them to buy insurance for their community. Snowden (1991) goes on to state that

you buy insurance for everything, for some protection, so why not insure your community. It costs you fifty cents a month. If you will support Freedom House to that extent, then we will become the people who will be your eyes and your ears, and look after the garbage and the trash and the snow removal and community problems that most people cannot give full-time

attention to. (p. 20)

Audley Moore

After hearing that the Red Cross was serving doughnuts and coffee to white soldiers on their way to WWI, and not the Black soldiers, Narrator Moore (1991) and her sister began to mobilize. As Waddles (1991) states,

we went to the boxcars--they would put them in boxcars, the Black soldiers, to take out of Louisiana--and we went, and I remember getting the neighbors, the women, all around, and went from door to door asking, Will you make some coffee, will you make some coffee, will you make some coffee? And [we] had all the women bring in coffee and so on [for] the men who were lined up to depart. (p. 118)

When both sisters began to follow the boxcars with the soldiers so that they could help, she says that this was the first Black USO. She also talks about why she founded the Harriet Tubman Association. This organization was created after she heard that there were some African students working on their doctorates who had died of malnutrition, "so I opened up and had a big soup kitchen in the street for African students after school, to come, and I'd put on a pot of stew, or beans, every day, and they'd come" (Moore, 1991, p. 137).

Beulah Hester

Narrator Beulah Hester (1991) developed an organization for the elderly through her association with the Robert Gould Shaw House. She organized the Golden Leaf Club, an organization that catered to the elderly in the community. With funds obtained from the Shaw

House, this club went on mini-vacations to see musical Broadway shows and went on cruises.

I talked with many of the ministers in the area, and asked them to give me the names of some of the older people in their churches. And then from one to another they would tell me what person they think would be interested in the program. I would get a card and invite them to come to an organizational meeting at Shaw House, a special meeting for senior citizens. They came and we organized. Our first name was Golden Leaf. (p. 333)

Mary Thompson

Narrator Mary Thompson (1991), the first Black female dentist to practice in the Boston area, was also concerned about the youth in the community. She founded the Children's Dental Clinic, which she operated out of her home. Her commitment to children and the community in general is exemplified in her willingness to service people at her home: "I devoted just one day a week to them, but it got so that if some kid had a toothache, they'd come anytime" (p. 486). When she first started to practice she worked with children at Peabody school in Boston.

Lena Edwards

Although many of the narrators discussed thus far have helped within the Black community, their work was not limited to the Black community. Narrator Edwards (1991) saw a need within the migrant community in Texas. After teaching at Howard University for six years, she resigned and decided it was time for her to get involved in mission work. When discussing her commitment to this work, she

comments that she

went to live in a migrant labor camp, and give my money and my life to the poorest of the poor in the country, who are the ones that put the bread and the food on our table, and yet are treated worse than their cattle. (p. 354)

Dr. Edwards (1991) went to Saint Joseph's Mission in Hereford, Texas, remodeled the old clinic, and helped to develop a 25-bed hospital in the midst of the labor camp.

Narrator Edwards' (1991) dedication to her work can be seen when she discusses the attitude she had as she began her work in the mission:

I believe that if you go into a mission, you don't go there to make people like you; you go there to have some appreciation of their culture. I really learned my Spanish, and talked with them in their language, had our menus in our hospital that were like the things they liked. (pp. 354-355)

Her commitment was appreciated by those whom she served. She recalls being approached by a young lady migrant worker who questioned her commitment to the migrants.

When I went there, and had been there for nearly a year, a young lady came in to me, and she says, "You know my people can't understand you." I said, "Don't they like me?" "Well, yes, but they wonder what's in it for you. That you're doing so much for us." And of course I understood that, because of the fact that I know that people who have been trampled down are afraid to lift up their head for fear somebody'll step on it. And they figure that anyone who does something for them as much as I was doing had to have some ulterior motive. It wasn't long before they understood that it was just because I love people. (p. 355)

This type of work required considerable commitment on behalf of the founders of these organizations, commitment to both the people and the communities they were serving. Narrator Snowden (1991) talks about her commitment to the Freedom House, a commitment that can be

seen in the work of all the narrators, which typifies the commitment of the other women.

We had to make the decision about whether we were going to stay or not, and when we started Freedom House we made that commitment. We decided we weren't going anywhere, but this was for life, commitment for life, as long as we were able to do it, we would do it. (p. 49)

Religion as a Point of Organization

Religion played a major role in the lives of these women. Many of the narrators discuss the impact that the Black church had on their lives. During the early lives of these women, the Black church was one of the institutions totally run by blacks. As a result the Black church was the center for the social, cultural, educational, and political organizing efforts of the Black community. According to narrator Stokes (1991), "the church was the launching pad" (p. 137). She later identifies three roles of the Black church in the Black community: it was the center of social events for Black people, the source of the freedom movement, and the spiritual center. She further notes that the Black church was the psychiatrist and the cheap country club for Black people. A sentiment that is echoed through the narratives of these women. Hence, the social/cultural, political, and educational importance of the Black church will be examined in the following section.

One narrator was an ordained minister in a nondenominational church, and religion served as the basis for her organization. Narrator Waddles (1991), founder of the Perpetual Mission for the Sav-

ing of all Souls, discusses the reasoning behind the founding of her organization.

For narrator Waddles (1991), religion was the point of organization and the foundation of her mission. Religion, as indicated here, was the basis around which many community organizations were formed. However, the church also played a role in meeting people's social and educational needs, and it was directly involved in educating the Black community on various political issues.

Political Impact

Many of the narrators identified the Black church as the political center of the Black community, the place where Black people gathered to discuss and hear the latest news in politics. Black ministers during this time were crucial in terms of disseminating information on the political climate of the Black community across the country.

Narrator George (1991) recalls her experiences in her father's church in Chicago during the great migration of Blacks. When talking about the order of service in her father's church she says,

there was the traditional morning service and then he had big evening services because many of the people worked in private homes and couldn't come to the morning service. The evening service often took the form of a forum. He preached about civic matters in the evening. He tackled all sort of community and racial problems. (p. 276)

The Black church was also a place where noted Black intellectuals would go in order to speak to the Black community. Narrator Cass (1991) recalls spending time in local churches attempting to or-

ganize for the Pullman Porters.

When they started to organize here in Boston, they had meetings in the churches. I used to go to them, and all of us who were interested in civil rights. We would sit down and listen to what he [A. Philip Randolph] had to say, and tell the men what they need. (p. 329)

In many cases, there were simply no other places where meetings could be held. Narrator Cass (1991) recalls meetings held by Monroe Trotter:

The Trotter meetings were held in churches all around here, because he didn't have anywhere else to hold them, and we all would go to that. The whole community would go to hear, and to get plans and to see what we could do to help the blacks in the south who were getting lynched and whose houses were getting burned down. (p. 303)

Narrator George (1991) discusses how her father invited various Black intellectuals, such as Booker T. Washington, Nannie Burroughs, and Marian Anderson, to the church to speak to his members.

These people who came to this church came because of him as a person and as a friend and because he got them an audience. And whatever it was they were selling, whether it was NAACP membership, books, ideas, he helped them sell it. (p. 294)

Many used the church as an avenue to reach the community; however, others used the church to reach those who were separated from them, and in this way the church was seen as a political vehicle to reach others. Narrator Moore (1991) describes her reasons for belonging to religious organizations:

I no longer had any faith in Christianity. Long ago, long ago I put that down, but I had to become all those things in order to go to the prisons, go to the death house, you see, and when you meet with the people who were scheduled to die and everything, they allow you to go. You're a bishop you can go; the police brutalized somebody, you can go in the hospital that night, you're a bishop, you understand? You don't have to

wait till visiting day tomorrow or the next day. So it's an advantage. So that was why I got it, and no other reason. (p. 145)

Social-Cultural Impact

Not only did the Black church serve as a locus for political activity; it was also important in the social lives of the Black community which in the early and mid-1900's was centered in the Black church. Narrator Mitchell (1991) speaks to the importance of the Black church in her community when she observed that the "the social life in that community was identified a great deal with church activities" (p. 13).

This was the venue that has historically been used to display the talents of Black people; numerous Black singers, actresses/actors, and activists have their origins in the Black church. Narrator Springer-Kemp (1991), a native of Panama, notes the importance of the Black church.

The Black church in the United States was a great learning process for me. The church in the United States was the cultural center because Black Americans could not really show their talents in the theater, in the dance, in much of the cultural development in this country. (p. 48)

Because of limited access to other avenues to exhibit their talent, Black churches sponsored fairs, teas, and other activities where Black people showcased their talents.

Narrator Smith (1991) became involved in the church at an early age and recalls her father working in the church. "My father held every office in the church except the minister" (p. 383). She re-

calls the role of the church in the social life of the community:

Washington people had a church life that was very important to them, of various denominations--Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian, Episcopal; a few Roman Catholics, which, was a mixed group. But those churches were very important because they provided an opportunity for people to know each other and for social outlet with entertainments. (p. 382)

Smith discusses her mother's involvement in the church in Washington D.C. When they had fairs, her mother would knit various items and sell them at the church fair. This was a community effort where

the women would make the crafts and the men all helped to make up the different booths, and there was that nice, friendly rivalry of each one having a booth, each one trying to make their booth prettier than the other one, or as nice looking, with various colors. (p. 383)

She recalls that these fairs were well attended and lasted about a week; people went from church to church patronizing each one.

The Black church was respected within the Black community and was seen as a source of leadership. A number of powerful leaders came out of the Black church, as Narrator Snowden (1991), points out.

I don't think there's any way to deny that the Black church is the powerful source of leadership, whether it's Martin Luther King or Andy Young or whoever, that out of the Black church has come a great deal of the leadership, so that even though I don't think it occupies the spot that it once did, I don't think you can ignore the Black church. (p. 103)

This sentiment is echoed by narrator Stokes (1991) who suggests that "it is the church and the church institutions that have produced our leaders" (p. 156).

The Black church in the early 1900's recognized the needs within the Black community and filled them. Narrator Waddles (1991),

founder of the Perpetual Mission for the Saving of All Souls, describes the role of the church:

I believe if you are establishing a religious outlet, a direction for people in the urban areas, then you should mold your activities that they might encompass not only the spiritual but the physical needs of people. (p. 72)

Educational Impact

The Black church during this time was also critical in educational development of the Black community.

During the migration of blacks from the south to the north, the Black church served as a haven for many uneducated blacks who were in search of jobs. Narrator George (1991) recalls her father's role in the adjustment of the blacks who were migrating:

The people were coming from the South because of the war. They had already heard of him in the South. So they went to his church. And he got them jobs, had an employment service at the church which was really way ahead of its time. He had classes in English, reading and writing for people who couldn't get jobs because they couldn't write their names. (p. 278)

Narrator Stokes (1991) also recalls attending Abyssinia Baptist Church in New York. When discussing her involvement in this church she posits that

it was the first Black church in America with a master's degree educator who developed all kinds of programs, created after-school programs for us in Bible study, in music and art, in drama, in education--everything we wanted was at that church. (p. 138)

Narrator Waddles (1991) further acknowledges the importance of the church in the Black community. She suggests that the people in the church should be educated, not necessarily only formally, but

with knowledge about what is going on in the community. The church should have people who are

. . .trained to tell a woman what to do if she suspects that her child is taking pills, a woman who knows what or where to send her daughter if she's with an early pregnancy, a person who knows what to do if they are not satisfied with the verdict that the courts have given their son or daughter, if they fear that they are innocent. (p. 97)

Narrator Thompson (1991) discusses how important the Black church was in her development:

I think that the church has played a very important part because, I mean, from the very beginning your mother and father took you to church. You didn't know anything different; so you still do the same thing today. And I admired a great many of the old people that were in church. (p. 523)

For these women, the Black church was critical not only in their lives, but also in the evolution of the Black community.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Social scientists posit that there are numerous social forces that shape individual lives. For a sociologist, it is important to understand the impact of these social forces. Not only are these social forces important in our lives but we are active participants in this process. As social individuals we create, sustain, and change the environment within which we operate. Consequently the relationship between individuals and social institutions is critical to understanding various social experiences. The research presented here provides valuable insight into the lives and experiences of Black women and their communities. Through their narratives, these women have shared a unique perspective when discussing the development of the Black community. Through this analysis I have been privy to their observations about the impact and influence of social phenomena on their lives.

This analysis allows for a better explanation of the impact of society on Black women and the contributions of Black women to society. It further gives the Black woman the opportunity to describe these influences. Through the use of oral narratives, these women have been able to draw connections between various social institutions and describe the impact that these connections have had not only on their lives, but on the lives of the entire community.

The major purpose of this study was to identify commonalities as they existed in the narratives of the selected women. In this chapter I examine the relationships that evolved between Black feminism, notions of community, oral history, and the themes that are identified in this work.

Theory

I used Black feminism as the theory which guides my research. This approach to the study of Black women examines the intersections of race, class, and gender and the effects that they have on the lives of Black women. Using this approach allows for a better understanding of the events as they occur during the life of these women. Particularly the notions of self-definition and safe places are important when discussing the experiences of Black women.

Black feminism is a perspective with many concerns; primary to this discussion is the importance of resisting negative and controlling images. Black women occupy a position in society that has historically been marginal, possessing little power. Given this situation those who have power have taken the initiative to define who Black women are through the use of stereotypes and negative imagery. The development of Black feminism has reclaimed this power and challenged these images through the identification of safe places.

Safe places are not necessarily physical in nature but also psychological. These are places where Black women have felt comfortable expressing themselves and defining themselves. Hill-Collins

(1990) has identified these places: Black women's writing, their music, and their relationships with each other. Through writing, music, and relationships, Black women are able to express their true feelings about various issues and situations in their lives. This resistance is manifest through the act of self-definition.

Self-definition is vitally important when discussing Black feminism. The ability to realistically define self is critical when resisting negative images. However, Black feminists warn against replacing negative images with strictly positive images. Most important is that an accurate description of self is presented.

The notion of self-definition is one of the chief concerns when attempting to do research on a marginal population. In this study Black women were given the opportunity to examine their lives and draw various connections through the use of oral narratives. Oral narratives are used here as an instrument that allows Black women to reclaim their voice and hence their power. In the production of this analysis I have given Black women the opportunity to define and represent themselves; to this end, I use oral narratives.

Oral History

Using oral history as the source of data was critical in this analysis in that oral histories allow the narrators to create a picture of their lives on their terms. This method, within the field of history, has been argued to be as valuable as any other historical approach. Thompson (1978) suggests that oral history as a field

of study is as old as history itself, and one that can be traced back to native cultures. This method of study is used differently not only by historians but across disciplines. It has been used here to fill a current void in social research, and also to give voice to those who previously did not have the opportunity to tell their own story and create their own meanings.

Referred to by Plummer (1983) as documents of life, oral narratives are concerned primarily with the subjective world of the individual, and how they interpret their lives. This method allows the researcher the opportunity to consider the consistencies and ambiguities that exist in everyday life. Oral history views the totality of human life, the interrelationships of social phenomena, and its effects on individuals. Through this method individuals are allowed to reconstruct their lives considering social, political, and economic events that surround them. This approach has proved beneficial to the type of analysis presented here, where the interest is in their interpretation and views on their social surroundings.

Both Black feminist theory and oral history have proved to be critical in this discussion of the lives of these women. Black feminism has allowed for a unique look at the lives of Black women. It focuses on the intersections of race, class, and gender and the effects that this has on the lives of Black women. Black feminism brings all of these characteristics together and allows for a more complete picture of the simultaneous impact that these elements have

on the lives of these women. Black feminism also discusses the importance of self-definition in this attempt at addressing the concerns of Black women. In this research, it was accomplished through the use of oral narratives.

Oral history allows for the presentation of a more holistic picture of the lives of marginalized populations. History books, as they are generally written, present a narrow view of the lives of common people and those who have been marginalized. The use of oral narratives in this work complements Black feminism in that it allows Black women an opportunity to speak on their behalf, to voice their beliefs and concerns about various issues. These are ideas that are supported in this research. In the following section, I describe the themes identified in this research and then discuss the relationships between theory, method, and findings.

Themes

The identification of themes among the narratives is the focus of this research and after examining each of the narratives, I identified three major themes that exist among the women. Life-Informing Work discusses the reasoning behind the narrator's involvement in community activity. Community-building defines the way these women were involved in various community organizations. Religion discusses the importance of the church in the development of the Black community and in the lives of these women. These themes are identified in the previous chapter, where I reviewed the relationship between

these themes and the narratives. Below I discuss the relationship between the themes and the theory used in this research.

Themes and Theory

Important to this study is the relationship between what the data revealed and Black feminist theory. Below I expound on the relationships between theory and the lives of these women. Particularly, I discuss the relationships between the dimensions of Black feminist theory: interdependence of thought and action, legacy of struggle, safe places, self-definition, and the narratives.

Interdependence of Thought and Action

The theme of life-informing work, as identified in this research, is similar to Hill-Collins' (1990) concept of interdependence of thought and action. In this dimension of the Black feminist standpoint, Black women make "connections among concrete experiences with oppression, developing a self-defined standpoint concerning those experiences and the acts of resistance that can follow" (p. 28). In this case Black women not only recognize the inequality, but they begin to do something about it. I call this life-informing work.

Hill-Collins (1990) argues that although Black women experience oppression, it is not seen as an impossible situation. They develop ways to alleviate and in some sense overcome that oppression. For the Black women in this study, oppression is not viewed

as something that cannot be defeated; these women have not only identified the sources of oppression but they have also acted against that oppression.

The analysis of the narratives reveals that the life experiences of these women informed their community involvement. Narrator Springer-Kemp (1991), who worked in a garment shop, was concerned with her poor working conditions. As a result of her personal experiences in the garment industry, she became active in union organizing, joining the American Federation of Labor (AF of L), and becoming closely involved with the planning of the 1933 garment industry strike. She also traveled across the United States and abroad, addressing the concerns of not only the garment worker, but of all laborers. This woman identified her working situation as oppressive and yet not impossible to overcome; she then acted on that discovery, creating a self-defined standpoint by attempting to organize labor.

Legacy of Struggle

Hill-Collins (1990) also suggests that there exists for Black women a legacy of struggle. This struggle involves "actions taken to create Black female spheres of influence within existing structures of oppression" (p. 141). This is related to the theme of community building and developed in two ways.

First, some of these women saw a need in their community, usually through a personal need that was not being filled, and created

an organization to meet that need. Narrator Waddles (1991) created the Perpetual Mission for the Saving of All Souls. This mission serves the poor in Detroit, Michigan. Its initial purpose was to be a food and clothes pantry. This organization later developed to service as many needs of the community as it could. The mission has provided for funeral services, it has paid tuition for those in need, and even provided for more personal items.

Some women believed that there were organizations within their community that dealt with issues that they believed were important. As a result these women joined pre-existing organizations. Narrator Moore (1991) discusses her reason for becoming involved in various organizations in the Black community. She expresses a desire to be involved with Black people in general. She states that "I had to affiliate with everything and everybody, everything my people belonged to"; she further notes "I got to be there with them. I got to be. So I joined everything" (p. 155). So her desire to be close to the people in the Black community led to her commitment to join even some organizations in which she didn't believe.

The legacy of struggle for these women began by first identifying the source of oppression and led to taking action. This action is what I call "Community-Building." Community-building is then manifested through the creation of organizations or in identifying organizations within the community that served their needs. This community-building occurred in places where these women felt safe expressing and addressing their needs. These are spheres within the

community where Black women believed that they could make an impact.

Safe Places

In the following section I would like to discuss those safe places identified by the women in this study. Hill-Collins (1990) identifies music, writing, and Black women's relationships with each other as safe places. Several of the women in this collection are singers or authors: Etta Moten Barnett, Zelma Watson George, and Dorothy West. However, the overwhelming majority of these women talk little about the importance of music and writing in defining self. More important to these women have been religious and other community organizations in achieving self-definitions. It can be seen in this study that these narrators identify various religious organizations as outlets where they are able to express themselves freely. They discuss the important role of the church in the Black community and in their personal development.

The Church

These women became involved in churches and their communities in an effort to create an environment that was conducive to their development and the creation of self-definitions. In the recollections of many of the narrators included in this study, religion has been critical not only in their personal development, but also in the progress of the Black community. The church was seen as the point of organization for the entire community; it was the social,

political, and educational center of the community. Socially, the Black church was, according to Narrator Stokes (1991), a cheap country club for Black people. This is where people came together to exhibit their talents; they held various fairs and talent events that gave blacks opportunities that were denied them in mainstream society.

The social/cultural importance of the Black church can also be seen in the narratives of these women, for this was the place where Black people debuted their talent. Because of the lack of opportunities for blacks in mainstream society, the Black church became the institutional center of social activities for Black people. Not only was it important socially and culturally, but it was also important educationally.

The education gained in the Black church was both formal and informal. Many churches held classes that would teach the congregation to read and write. Narrator George (1991) recalls the importance of her church to the development of many southern migrants. She suggests that many could not read or even write their names. The church provided classes in English and reading with the hopes that this would help them find employment. Narrator Waddles (1991) stresses the importance of the Black church also as a source of informal education. She recalls that there were people in the church who were knowledgeable about various opportunities and resources in the community that could help those in need.

The Black church also educated the Black community on the pol-

itical climate within the country. This was the place where various political activists would come to address the Black community. Black people gathered here to hear the political concerns of the day and how these affected the Black community. Narrator George's father was a minister of a church in Chicago and she emphasized her father's role in this process. He would have regular morning services and services in the evening which took the form of a forum where he dealt with social issues that affected the Black community. This is something that occurred throughout Black communities in the north. Narrator Cass also recalls attending meetings at Black churches where A. Philip Randolph and Monroe Trotter spoke.

The churches in the Black community were viewed by these women as places where they were allowed to express themselves freely, where their talents were used, and where they organized various other church-sponsored events. This was the avenue used by Black women to exert their energy in a sphere where they were able to exert control over themselves and the situation.

Interdependence of Themes

From a theoretical perspective, the themes are interdependent; as a result of the interdependence of thought and action, Black women developed a legacy of struggle, which caused Black women to re-evaluate self through the process of self-definition, and through self-definition identify a need for safe places.

From the point of view of this research, the themes fit well

within this Black feminist perspective. Through a personal and internal need, the women acted externally, indicative of the interdependence of thought and action. Through their external action, various community organizations were created and the memberships of others increased. The creation of community organizations occurred in those places where Black women feel comfortable expressing themselves, mainly within the Black church and other existing community organizations.

Future Research

When using secondary sources, unforeseeable issues emerge as things develop out of the analysis, and this research is not an exception. Two issues are of concern for this research, although the impact these have had on this study are not measureable. The first is that many of the women used in this study either lived in the Boston area at the time of the interview or spent a significant part of their lives in this area. Secondly, I am concerned that although this project contained 68 narratives, only 20 provided enough information to conduct a meaningful analysis.

This research has provided some interesting insights and yet also posed many questions. Given the above limitations, there is a need to do a study similar to this one in terms of reaching Black women from all over the United States who were born in the early 1900's. This could serve not only to document the lives of Black women during this time, but also to examine their relationships to

various social, economic, and political institutions.

Religion, which for these women has been critical in their social, political, and economic development, is another field for further study. The women who identified the Black church as a safe place, were approximately 70 to 80 years old at the time of the interview. Is religion of similar importance to younger Black women? An examination of the role of religion in the lives of young Black women is necessary. If not, what has replaced the role that religion has historically played in the Black community? Who/What is now servicing the political, social and economic needs of Black women directly and the Black community in general?

My recommendations for future study would be to interview older Black women and younger Black women, and to examine the themes identified here and within Black feminism. From a Black feminist perspective, what are the commonalities and differences that exist among both groups of women? This question merits further investigation.

Appendix A
Interview Schedule

Hill, Ruth (1978) Interview Schedule. Unpublished document.
Schlesinger Library at Radcliffe College.

Interview Schedule

Preparing for the Interview

We suggest that the interviews will ordinarily total between three and six hours in length. We expect you to prepare for your interview by thorough research in advance and by having a preliminary, non-recorded discussion with your interviewee. At this time you might discuss the kinds of questions you will be asking so that she can think about her answers and any information she might not want to have recorded. Assure the interviewee that she will receive the rough transcript for editing and approval before it is finally typed. Also assure her that the information on the tape will be kept confidential until the transcript is available. The preliminary discussion also would be the time to review the three different options for the legal agreement.

Suggested Topics for Interviews for Black Women Oral History Project

These topics are suggested as guidelines for interviewers. They are not meant to be inclusive, but to serve only as a beginning. Their use should be based upon the interviewee's field(s) of activity and/or expertise, leading to a thorough exploration of her life and contributions.

1. Family Background

- A. Information about parents--education, occupations, etc., also grandparents and other forebears if the interviewee recalls or knows about them.
- B. Date and place of birth. If the interviewee does not wish to give her exact age, put on a card the time span or historical period through which she lived.
- C. Siblings--specifically, how many brothers; how many sisters; exact birth order of interviewee (e.g., fourth child of six, oldest of three daughters). Did all siblings survive childhood? Interviewee's relationship with siblings.

2. Childhood

- A. Geographical location--place, urban or rural, etc.; some indication of socio-economic level, if possible.

- B. Significant events and influential persons in childhood.
- 3. Education
 - A. Elementary, secondary, college, professional--where and when, including types of schools when not obvious (e.g., public or private, co-ed or single sex, large or small); parents' views toward the education of a daughter.
- 4. Significant influences on life including reasons or circumstances determining the choice of primary career or activity--persons, events in personal life, local or national events, etc.
- 5. How being Black and female affected options available and choices made.
- 6. What do you consider your most important achievements?
- 7. Attitude toward the women's movement.
- 8. Was religion or the church important in the interviewee's life?
- 9. Memberships and involvement, including offices held in:
 - a. Community organizations, civil rights groups, etc.
 - b. National groups, professional groups, sororities, etc.
- 10. Awards and honors.
- 11. Hobbies.
- 12. Travel.

Not necessarily to be approached directly, but any information which can be worked into the interview on the following might be desirable:

- 13. Personal circumstances. If single, attitude toward marriage, reasons for not marrying. If married, marriage(s), divorce(s) widowhood(s), children, closest friends, etc.; husband's occupation, attitude toward wife's career or activity.
- 14. What effect skin color had on life, e.g., not just Black or white but also color of skin (light/dark).
- 15. Attitudes toward illegitimacy.

Photographs

If you have or can borrow a camera, take pictures of the interviewee at the time of the interview. If she doesn't want you to take her picture at this time, or if she has a photograph that she would prefer your using, ask her to give or lend it to you. If she would like to have the original photo returned, let us know, so that we can have a copy made.

Appendix B
Narrator Biography

Narrator Biography

Narrator Frances Albrier, a woman who worked hard against racial prejudice, has been in the front of many racial struggles; as the only Black and woman in many organizations, she has struggled for equality on many fronts. Coming from humble upbringing in Alabama, narrator Albrier moved to many positions within the civil rights movement. She was once a maid for the Pullman Company, and was later responsible for the location and hiring of Black teachers in California. As a result of her civil rights involvement, organizations began to solicit her help for various causes; not only did she become involved in the NAACP and the YMCA, but she traveled extensively to represent America abroad.

Narrator Etta Moten Barnett (1991) is most widely know for her work as a singer. While in college, she toured with the Jackson Jubilee singers; with this money she funded her college education. She would also be remembered as the first colored person to sing in the White House, where she entertained President Roosevelt. At the White House she performed a song from a movie in which she appeared. Another major accomplishment is the film Remember My Forgotten Man; she was the first Black person to appear in a movie role that was not written for a Black person.

Narrator Melnea Cass (1991) began her community service with her work with the Friendship Club, an organization that started with mothers of kindergartners at the Shaw House. Through this initial involvement with the Shaw House she later became involved with other

community service programs including the In-Migrant Program and the NAACP. While president of the local chapter of the NAACP, she led sit-ins at the Boston Board of Education, protesting their policies on desegregation.

Narrator Alfreda Duster (1991), the daughter of Ida B. Wells, the civil rights activist of the early 1900's, was a resident of Chicago, and became involved in the Chicago Area Project, which began with the work of Shaw and Burgess at the University of Chicago. In this program she was involved in attempting to address the issue of juvenile delinquency in the Chicago Area. Her interest was to get the community involved in the prevention of juvenile delinquency; to this end she participated in Camp Illini, a program that introduced city kids to the outdoors.

Born in 1900 with a father who was a dentist, Narrator Lena Edwards (1991) decided early that she would be a doctor. She graduated from medical school in 1924 and then began her residency. She was the first Black woman to complete a residency in obstetrics at Margaret Hague hospital in New Jersey. Dr. Edwards (1991) had a strong sense of community commitment. She spent five years in Texas, where she founded a maternity clinic that served 5,000 migrant workers, using her own personal savings.

Narrator Zelma George (1991) studied under Park and Burgess, received a doctorate in Sociology, and later went on to head the Cleveland Job Corps Center. She was also involved in the United Nations during an important time in its history. Her year with

the UN was significant in that this was the time when they voted 17 new countries into the UN, 16 of which were from Africa. Not only will she be remembered as a sociologist and UN delegate, but she was a singer who performed in various Broadway musicals.

Narrator Dorothy Height, a noted civil rights leader and activist, was extensively involved in various community service activities. Many activities share the commonality of helping Black women in the United States and abroad. She was a staff member at the YWCA for over 40 years and eventually moved up to the position of director of the Center for Racial Justice. She worked with Job Corps, the United Christian Youth Movement, the National Council of Negro Women, and various other community service agencies; in these positions her primary concern was with the development of young women.

Narrator Beulah Hester (1991) received a degree in Social work and soon after graduation began working at the YWCA. She developed an interest in the elderly and out of this interest organized a group of elderly through talking with ministers in the community. She retired from the YWCA and took her group to the Shaw House where she began to get funding and take the seniors, now known as the Goldenaires, on mini vacations.

Narrator Springer-Kemp (1991), a native of Panama, moved at a young age with her family to New York. As an adult she worked in the garment district in a non-union shop and noted the unfavorable conditions in which they worked. She threatened her supervisor by

saying that she would go to the union if these unfavorable conditions persisted. Not only did she follow through on her threat by complaining to the union, but she joined the union. Later in her career she became greatly involved in union activities and was sent abroad by the American Federation of Labor (AF of L), to conferences and, as an organizer, to represent the U.S.

Narrator Miriam Matthews has been involved in the collection and organization of information on "Negro" history for many years. Educated as a librarian, she held many positions in the library system in both Los Angeles and New York. In these positions she made a concerted and successful effort to build the libraries' collection on "Negro" history and literature. She also developed a lecture series and book club where she introduced the community and 'Negro' literature. As a result of her love for books and history, she was also instrumental in the battle against censorship.

Narrator Lucy Mitchell (1991) began as a mother looking for day care for her children and after being approached by the director of the day care center, she decided that she would only work a few hours at the day care center. Concerned with the conditions in the day care centers in the state of Massachusetts, she became involved in legislation which would regulate the conditions of day care centers. She took on many positions within the day care field, and later went on to become the educational consultant to the national Head Start program.

Narrator Julia Hamilton Smith (1991), a well-traveled woman,

was born to a family who were extensively involved in the Black community. Her father was a graduate of Boston University , class of 1879, and exhibited a keen interest in the Black community. On many occasions she traveled with her father, who took pictures of the Black communities he visited. As a result of parental influence, narrator Smith (1991) became an educator. She was greatly influenced by her mother's drive to teach Black youth and her father's love for the Black community, and this is manifest in the community organizations where she held many positions. After retirement she began to travel to college campuses and lecture on Black history and the pictures that her father took of different parts of the United States.

Narrator Snowden (1991) is well known as the co founder of the Freedom House, concerned with the development of the neighborhood. She co-founded the Freedom House with her husband Otto Snowden, because they saw their community deteriorating and believed that they could do something to make things better. In an effort to get started, they attempted to convince the community to purchase "community insurance," and looked out for the best interest of those within the community.

Narrator Olivia Pearl Stokes is the descendant of a prominent family from North Carolina; this family owned land and were a large part of the community life of Middlesex, NC. After her father's death, she moved along with her mother to New York. She later received a doctorate in religious education from Columbia University,

and went on to become the educational director of over 100 churches in the state of Massachusetts.

Constance Allen Thomas was an accomplished actress who worked almost 20 years as a speech therapist in Washington state. Her interest in the theater and this was further developed in college, where she majored in speech and minored in drama and sociology. Her interest in drama was exhibited in her work with the American Negro Theater in Harlem. She spent a considerable part of her life collecting information on early Black settlers in the state of Washington.

Narrator Mary C. Thompson (1991) was one of the first Black women to graduate from Tufts School of Dentistry and to practice in the Boston Area. Upon graduation she began work in an elementary school and later opened a children's dental clinic, for those who could not afford to go to the dentist. Her work with the Mississippi Health Project demonstrates her commitment to the Black community. The Mississippi Health Project, sponsored by Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority, gathered various health professionals and traveled to Mississippi to provide free health care for the poor.

Narrator Charleszetta Waddles (1991) migrated to Detroit from the South. She became involved in a Bible study with a group of women, which developed into the Perpetual Mission for Saving Souls of All Nations. The interviewer describes her as a one-woman war on poverty. Through the mission, narrator Waddles (1991) served the changing needs of the community through providing food, clothes, and

guidance.

Narrator Dorothy West, a noted author who was influenced by and participated in the Harlem Renaissance, grew up writing; her first short story won a prize. At a young age Dorothy moved to New York because of the contests sponsored by various magazines; she comments on the fact that many writers came to New York after hearing about these contests. This is one of the more difficult narratives to draw from in terms of community, since Narrator West ran the interview and chose not to talk about certain topics, noting "I don't want that on record."

Narrator Deborah Cannon Partridge Wolfe received a doctorate in education from Columbia University. She has taught at both Tuskegee University Teachers College and was later appointed as professor of education at Queens College in New York. She has had many roles, she introduces herself as a teacher and a preacher, in that she was ordained as a minister in 1970. She then followed in her father's footsteps and served as associate minister at the First Baptist Church of Cranford. Her community involvements are extensive; she was also involved in the movement for the women's suffrage and other community service organizations seek to create safer community environments.

Appendix C
Community Organizations

COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

Frances Mary (Redgrey) Albrier -- Nursing

Universal Negro Improvement Association
 Alameda County Democratic Central Committee
 California Association of Colored Women's Clubs
 East Bay Women's Welfare Club
 National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
 (NAACP)
 Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA)

Etta (Moten) Barnett -- Actress

Radio Personality
 Appeared in Broadway productions
 All-African Peoples Conference
 International Women's Conference
 Links
 Alpha Kappa Alpha
 Delegate to International Women's Year and International
 Decade of Women

Melnea Agnes (Jones) Cass -- Robert Gould Shaw House

Friendship Club
 National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
 (NAACP)
 Women's Service Club
 Board of Action for Boston Community Development
 Freedom House
 Board of Overseers of Public Welfare for Boston

ALFREDA (Barnett) Duster -- Social Worker

Camp Illini
 Parent Teacher Association (PTA)
 Citizens Schools Committee
 Rural Advancement Fund

Lena Edwards -- Obstetrician

Migrant Labor Camp
 American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology fellow
 International College of Surgeons
 American Medical Association
 American Medical Women' Association
 Delta Sigma Theta
 Volunteer-Alcoholics Anonymous
 American Cancer Society
 Project Head Start
 Senior Companion Program
 Third Order of St. Francis

Zelda (Watson) George -- Member of the U.S. Delegation to the
15th General Assembly of the United Nations
Cleveland Job Corps Center
The Links
Board member of World Federalists
Board member International Peace Academy

Beulah (Shepard) Hester -- Robert Gould Shaw House
Board of Overseers of Public Welfare in Boston
Roxbury YMCA
Freedom House
American Associations of Retired Persons
National Association of Social Workers
North Carolina Council of Social Workers

Dorothy Irene Height -- Pennsylvania State Federation of Girls' Clubs
United Christian Youth Movement
Harlem Christian Youth Council
World Youth Congress
Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA)
Emma Ransom House
Phillis Wheatley YWCA
Council for United Civil Rights Leadership

Maida Springer Kemp -- International Ladies' Garment Workers'
Union (ILGWU)
Educational Director of Local 132
Business agent
NAACP
NOW
Coalition of Labor Union Women
National Council of Negro Women

Miriam Matthews -- American Library Association
California Library Association
Delta Sigma Theta
NAACP
National Council of Negro Women (NCNW)
National Urban League

Lucy (Miller) Mitchell -- Robert Gould Shaw House
Associated Day Care Services of Metropolitan Boston (ADCS)
Educational Director and executive director (ADCS)
Peace Corps
National Head Start
United community services of Metropolitan Boston
Boston YWCA
Boston Association for the Education of Young Children
Freedom House

The Links
Alpha Kappa Alpha

Audley Moore -- Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA)

Communist Party
Founder and President of Reparations Committee of U.S. Slaves
Universal Association of Ethiopian Women
Ethiopian Orthodox Coptic Church of North and South America

Julia Hamilton Smith -- Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA)

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
(NAACP)
Board Member for Museum of Afro-American History

Muriel (Sutherland) Snowden -- Freedom House

Urban League Fellow
Civic Unity Committee
University of Massachusetts
The Associated Harvard Alumni
Radcliffe College Alumnae Association
Board member of Babson College
Shawmut Bank Board member
Board of Overseers of Harvard College
Racial Imbalance Committee of the Massachusetts Department of Education

Olivia Pearl Stokes -- Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA)

Associate Director of Baptist Educational Center
New York State Christian Youth Council
United Christian Youth Movement
National Council of Churches
Greater Harlem Comprehensive Guidance Center
Massachusetts Council of Churches

Mary Crutchfield (Wright) Thompson -- Children's Dental Clinic

Alpha Kappa Alpha
Mississippi Health Project
Fair Housing Committee
National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
(NAACP)

Constance Allen Thomas -- Works Progress Administration's Federal Theater

American Negro Theater
National Education Association (NEA)
Seattle Teachers Association
Washington Speech and Hearing Association
National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
(NAACP)
National Urban League

Delta Sigma Theta

Charleszetta (Campbell) Waddles -- Perpetual Mission for Saving Souls
of All Nations

Dorothy West -- Harlem Renaissance

Deborah Wolfe -- Volunteer - Migrant Laborer Camp in Maryland

Educational Chief for US House of Representatives Committee on
Education and Labor

National Alliance of Black School Educators

Advanced Education Committee for the Graduate Record

Examination

American Association for the Advancement of Science Commission
of Science Education

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
(NAACP)

National Association for Children and Youth

Zeta Phi Beta

Parent Teacher Association (PTA)

National council of Negro Women

American Association of School Administrations

Kappa Delta Pi

Delta Kappa Gamma

Association of University Women

Non-governmental representative to the United Nations

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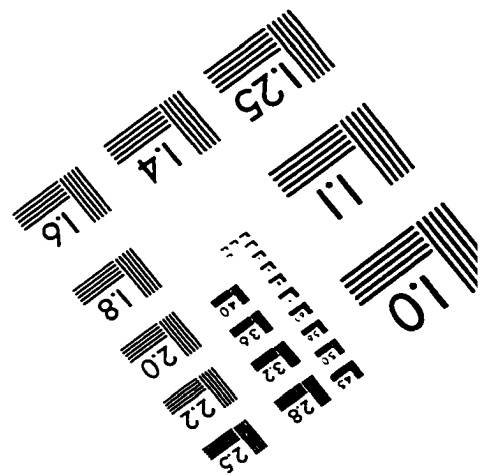
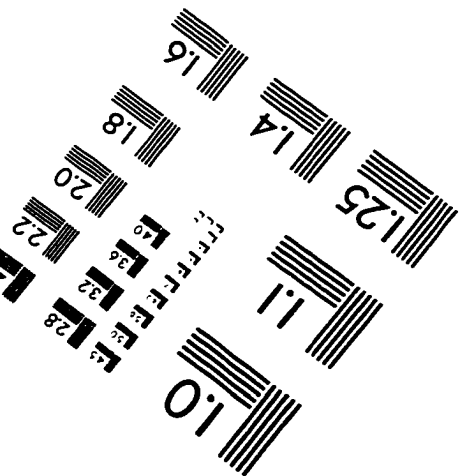
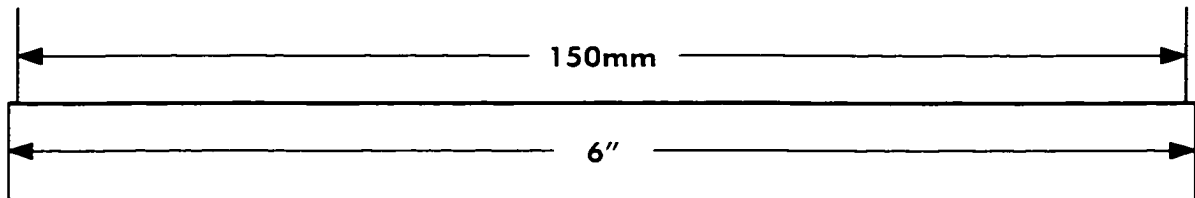
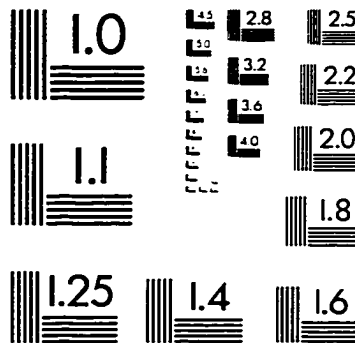
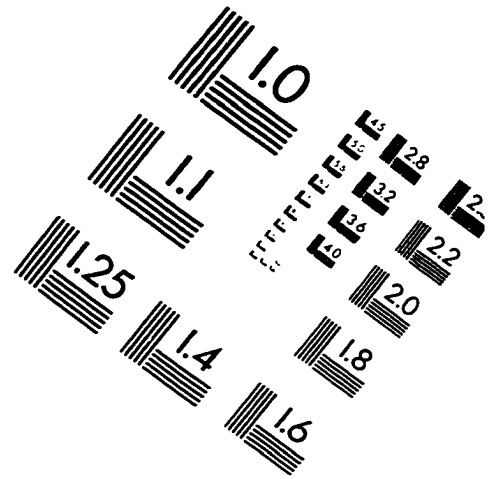
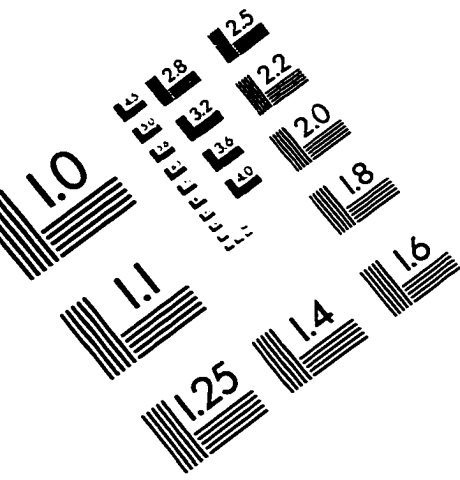
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