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Teaching to the Spirit: The “Hidden” Curriculum of African American Education

By

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A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education in the Graduate Division of the University of California, Berkeley

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Teaching to the Spirit: The “Hidden” Curriculum of African American Education

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by

Maxine McKinney de Royston
Abstract

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Discussions about gaps in achievement and opportunity, educational debts, and educational inequities, point to the lingering salience and pernicious role of race in schools (Hilliard, 2003; Ladson Billings, 2006; Noguera, 2003). Yet, reforms are often characterized by a “quick-fix mentality and single-solution approach” (Lee, 2008, p. 208) that do not explicitly address racism nor attempt comprehensive shifts in approaches to education or schooling. Racial inequalities and racism, however, are historical issues African American youth and families have struggled with relative to education (Ladson Billings, 2006; Morris, 2002; Wells & Crain, 1997). In a post-Brown v. Board of Education context the periodic emergence of African American private, independent, and charter schools, and the myriad of reasons why African American families attend them and opt out of traditional public school options, should be a call to educators and educational researchers to rethink the “problems” of education, reconsider the impacts of schools on African American students’ educational and non-educational well-being, and more deeply consider what types of social change are and are not possible through schools.

Culturally relevant pedagogies and curriculum (i.e. Afrocentric) claim to address issues of access, inclusion, and racism in schools by empowering “students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (Ladson Billings, 1992, p.382) to cultivate a strong academic base, and foster students’ positive self-worth and racial and cultural identities (Asante, 1991; Ladson Billings, 1992; Mudhabuti & Mudhabuti, 1991); protective factors believed to help children cope with and combat racism (Boykin & Toms, 1985). This study examines the enactment and perceived impacts of such an approach through an in-depth examination a 31 year-old African American elementary school that has a racially diverse teaching faculty and over an 80% college-going rate by alumni. Using ethnographic observations, surveys, and interviews, this study analyzes: 1) What are the pedagogical philosophies and practices within this school that are intended to challenge racism?; 2) How does racial socialization occur at this school?; and 3) What are alumni and parents’ perceptions about the school’s attempts to challenge racism and socialize students into positive racial identities? The analytical lenses of African-centered pedagogy (Lee, 2008) and racial socialization (Boykin & Toms, 1985) are employed to highlight the politically relevant pedagogical philosophies and practices enacted at this northern California school.

Findings indicate that parents and alumni positively evaluate the schools’ philosophies of teaching to the “whole child,” to the teaching style, and to the school’s commitment to an expansive notion of Education. Specifically, parents and alumni perceived the greatest impact of the school as fostering a nurturing community, cultivating student responsibility and accountability, developing students’ positive racial identities and tools to handle racism,
elements perceived as affecting alumni’s educational success and personal development. This study can help to inform the process of preparing and mentoring more culturally competent and politically relevant teachers and school leaders (King, 1991; Tatum, 1992); revolutionize policies around education and schooling; and more fully build upon the innate capacity and desire to learn of all children, particularly those who have been disserved by schools and society.
This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Alexander and Roni McKinney: my first and greatest educators. Thank you for the Education.

Good, better, best. Never let it rest. ‘Til your good is better, and your better is best!
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CHAPTER I

Making a way out of no-way:
The African American Struggle Against Mis-education and Towards Liberation

Introduction

Starting with the barn-like exterior whose gate greets the visitor with a hand painted placard portraying Harriet Tubman with a shotgun and broken shackles at her feet, Marshall Langston School begs you to consider what type of school it is. The lack of institutional architecture and sterile aesthetic symmetry that marks schools is among the first breaks from form. It’s quickly apparent that Marshall is a veritable one-room schoolhouse, from its main room that is broken into different areas of activity for multi-aged students, to its maximum capacity of 30 students. It resides in one of the most densely populated neighborhoods in a Northern California city, yet stepping down into the brightly colored school shaded by the freeway, one wonders if they hadn’t rabbit-holed their way into a long-gone classroom somewhere in a wooded township.

Marshall is a small, private elementary school founded by an African American schoolteacher, Gwen Marshall—who many alumni, parents, and co-teachers indicate is “a force of nature.” Scanning the room, one is not immediately captured by rows of the latest computers, electronic whiteboards and other cutting edge resources that are the accoutrements de jour with private or other well-funded schools. Here, construction papered cork boards lining the walls highlight student work, African civilizations homework assignments, and the lives of Historic Abolitionists. Art projects dangle slightly above the head across passageways and ceilings, decorate windowsills and grace the walls. Board games, puzzles, and drums of different sizes peek out from behind colorful textiles that are pulled across shelves and hang down below cabinets. Inquisitive students approach and probe visitors, “Are you a new teacher?,” or “you must be so and so’s auntie.” The uninitiated observer is left wondering where these kids are supposed to be or what the main activity is that they should be engaged in.

Initially intended as a politically progressive small school for students of all racial backgrounds, Marshall soon began to cater to African American families seeking out schooling environments that taught political awareness, tolerance, as well as African American culture and history. That demographic of families still frequents the school and has been joined by families who have had unsuccessful, and often racist, experiences in other public and private school environments. Some of these families fully embrace the cultural and political orientation and curriculum of the school, while others express varying degrees of comfort with it. Consistent across families was a desire to find a school where their child(ren) would not be stereotyped, labeled, tracked, or otherwise dis-regarded because they are African American.

Over the years, Marshall has attracted a range of families spanning the spectrum of racial and familial compositions, and income levels that make up the Bay Area’s geographically scattered African American community. Gwen Marshall has remained the lead teacher and has at varying times been assisted by other teachers. Currently, several African American and non-African

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1 Pseudonyms are used for all people and places. Identifying geographic markers or certain persons may be altered to protect the anonymity of the focal site and community. Such changes are minimal and are intended to maintain the subjectivity of the individuals and idiosyncrasies of each location. The school will heretofore be referred to as Marshall.

2 Information courtesy of the US Census Bureau, 2000 and 2010.
American teachers come 1-2 days per week to teach particular courses. These teachers have an average of 11 years experience at the school with the newest being in their 2nd year and the oldest being in their 20th year at Marshall. A relatively steady teacher retention rate is a critical predictor of student achievement, but only one among many. Currently valued quantitative measures of student and school achievement, i.e. standardized test scores and grades, cannot be used to evaluate the school across time because the school does not take standardized tests and letter grades have not always been used and are not consistently used across classes. Yet, survey and interview data indicate that many of Marshall’s graduates go on to academically prestigious public and private middle schools and high schools, with the majority of them later matriculating onto 2 and 4-year colleges and universities. Many parents partially attribute their child’s academic success to Marshall, just as many of the alumni themselves cite Marshall as having academically and/or socially prepared them for later success in and out of schools.

Alumni also indicate that there are two somewhat distinct sets of Marshall alumni. One set of alumni indicates that Marshall’s cultural, racial, and/or political orientations were not useful and may have hindered them because those orientations and schooling practices were not validated (or explicitly undermined) in other school environments. They felt disconnected from the structural and political realities of the African American students and communities they encountered in other schools. The responses of this set of alumni indicate a variety of perceptions about their academic development at Marshall, from laudatory to highly critical.

A second, larger set of alumni considers Marshall to be “the most transformative educational experience” (alumni interview, 3/12/11) they’ve ever had. Alumni cite that they rarely had seen such a deep, loving investment by teachers nor a school where they were pushed harder academically and where expectations were higher. If they had encountered these elements in other schools, they saw them as isolated to experiences with particular teachers or administrators, and not reflective of larger institutional or interpersonal relationships or philosophies.

Parents’ perceptions can also be parsed into two, sometimes overlapping perspectives about their children’s academic and non-academic (social, cultural, political) development at Marshall. Nearly all parents articulated that at Marshall their child became “self-possessed,” “learned to love learning,” or that their child’s success at Marshall hinged upon the “high expectations” of teachers and the communal bonds that allowed teacher’s to get to know their children rather than to quickly “label” or “stereotype” them. However, some of these parents questioned the strength of the school’s academics, and/or the quality of the physical, technological, or other educational resources provided. These parents maintained that they would still send their children to Marshall for the value of having a school reinforce what they taught at home, and believed that it to some degree helped to “inoculate” their child from the “toxins” of racism, or at least gave them an introductory schooling experience that “nurtured” them and let them be a child versus a statistic. As one parent says, “I feel like they [the student] can pick up the academic stuff later, but the fundamental positive feelings about their identity, you know, are much more fundamental in a way…… it’s much harder to make them whole again” (parent interview, 3/4/11).

These perceptions mark some of the critical decisions that African American parents and

3 More information about the composition of the teaching staff and the courses they teach is provided in Chapter III.
4 In the last few years, scalar grades (A, B, C, etc.) have been given for certain classes, but not consistently across all classes. In the past written evaluations were at times given, as were public evaluations of performance following each class session. The practice of public evaluations of individual student performance continues today for some classes but not all.
5 An online survey of Marshall graduates was conducted and the results of the survey are presented and discussed in Chapter V.
students have to make in choosing schools (Apple, 2006; Bush, 2004; Fields-Smith & Williams, 2009). Do they choose academics over the social environment, a non-racist social environment over the quality of facilities or educational resources, or even, do they eschew educational institutions altogether and teach their children themselves? Despite the choices they make, whether to send their children to public schools, charter schools, private schools, and/or to home school, African American families are faced with making nearly impossible trade-offs that may significantly affect their children’s futures. In its recruitment materials, Marshall situates itself within this dialogue by arguing that it helps to “solve Black parents’ dilemma: finding an academically challenging school that also cultivates their children’s self-respect. We build students’ strength through a holistic approach, teaching the whole child” (website, downloaded July 27, 2010).

For the scores of African American families that have chosen Marshall, and for many African American youth and families within other schooling contexts (Ladson Billings, 2006; Morris, 2002; Wells & Crain, 1997), racism is the issue they are struggling with relative to schools. The very existence of schools like Marshall, and the myriad of reasons why some African American families attend them, should be a call to educators and educational researchers to move beyond a “quick-fix mentality and single-solution approach” (Lee, 2008, p. 208) towards educational reform. Instead, we—educators, researchers and other members of society—must reconsider what the “problem” of education is and how we should understand the impacts of schools on African American students’ educational and non-educational well-being.

What, then, can be learned from Marshall, or from other African American schools? I argue that we can neither view Marshall as an idiosyncratic small school, nor as simply a case of school choice, or a school with an iconoclastic founder and lead teacher. Those elements certainly factor into the schooling environment and experiences of its students. In and of themselves, however, they are devoid of context. Just as African American students’ schooling experiences are not the same as their white peers, African American perspectives about education and traditions as educators do not parallel those of whites. There exists a tradition of African American educational thought about the structure of schooling, about pedagogy, about curriculum, and about the possibilities and constraints of education, particularly schools, towards addressing racism in American society.

This case study of an African American elementary school is thus a contemporary analysis of a historically situated phenomenon—the legacy of the African American struggle to use education as a tool against mis-education and towards liberation. My aim is to consider Marshall Langston—its founder Gwen Marshall, its students and families—as socio-historic subjects that reflect a tradition that is continually responding to past and current-day social and political contexts. Specifically, this dissertation seeks to add to the literature documenting African American’s attempts to use education as racial uplift (Anderson, 1988; Bond, 1934; Butchart, 1988; Franklin & Anderson, 1978; Perlstein & McKinney de Royston, in process; Perry, Steele & Hilliard, 2003; Walker, 1996, 2009), to our understanding of an African American pedagogy, and to our reconsiderations of the goals and possibilities of schools.

Empirically, this dissertation highlights the cultural competency and responsiveness (Delpit, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1997; Lee, 2001) of teachers at Marshall and recasts this approach as politically relevant teaching (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 1999), identifies the role and impact of racial socialization practices in schools, and how educators attempt to counter racism through schools. African American scholars (e.g. Edwards, Morris, Sowell, Walker, among others) have been fundamental in examining the history of African American schools, their unique attributions,
networks, and successes. This dissertation seeks to open the window into such a school to look inside and see what’s happened and continues to happen, and how school community members, past and present, interact with the school and evaluate its impact.

These conceptual and empirical contributions are timely and necessary. In contrast to the educational “crisis” portrayed by the academic literature and the media, which center around issues of “equity” in academic preparation, student performance, teacher quality and educational resources—a.k.a. the “gaps” or debts in achievement or opportunity (Ladson-Billings, 2006)—African American parents and alumni decisions about and perceptions of Marshall challenge the notion that this “crisis” can be decoupled from racism. Nor can it be fully accounted for by deficit perspectives of African American youth and families, of low-income communities’ educational aspirations, investment, social and cultural capital, or of African American institutions themselves. Finally, this “crisis” is not unique, but is a culmination of concerns that African American scholars and educators have been decrying for over a century. Therefore, understanding the contours—the possibilities and constraints—of African American schools like Marshall can help to inform the process of preparing and mentoring more culturally competent and non-racist teachers and school leaders (King, 1991; Tatum, 1992); revolutionize policies around education and schooling; and more fully build upon the innate capacity and desire to learn of all children, particularly those who have been disserved by schools and by society.

In this first chapter, I describe four frames for understanding racism and the use of education for racial uplift. African American scholars have conceptualized these frameworks and have used them to posit potential methods for resolving the complicated issues of being “Black in school” (Ginwright, 2004) and for advocating for African Americans’ racial advancement more broadly. These frames are used in later chapters to provide a macro-analysis about what is occurring at Marshall and to situate it within a broader dialogue about the possibilities and constraints of education and/or schools. This is coupled with a micro-analytic lens of politically relevant teaching that is used to analyze Marshall’s pedagogical philosophy and practices and to evaluate their impact. What follows is a discussion of these four frames, after which I turn to discussing the role that African American schools have played in the educational landscape, namely their attempts towards racial justice and against what Vanessa Siddle Walker unearths as “second-class integration” (2009). Finally, I end this chapter by providing an overview of the layout of the remaining chapters.

**Struggling against racism: The paradox of liberation in and through schools**

This section presents the debates and recommendations of African American scholars that have considered the use of education as a vehicle for racial uplift and analyzes them through four frames of racial inequality. These conversations and contributions of African American scholars and educators occur within a context of national dialogues regarding the development of a uniquely American system of public education, of policies of inclusion and exclusion, and of perspectives and decisions that define humanity and citizenship of those within American society (Anderson, 1988; Franklin, 1978; Tyack, 1976). The African American struggle for education predates the popular education movement, yet I begin here to mark a pattern of lost opportunities to validate African American’s rights and full inclusion into the formal system of American education that continues until today.

Advocates of popular education (e.g. Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, John Dewey, Horace Mann) were emphatic that education “for all” was morally and politically necessary for
the development of an active citizenry and for economic prosperity (Franklin, 1978; Tyack, 1976). Public schools were needed to develop a moral, active citizenry, with an emphasis on “Americanizing” the poor, ignorant, and immigrant (Dewey, 1897; Frazier, 1957). Education as a universal institution supported American nationalism, enlightenment, moral purpose, prosperity, equality, and prepared individuals to engage in a more harmonious and successful society. Because of these ideological roots, strong and lasting associations were made between humanity, morality and citizenship with ideas about the purpose of schooling and who most needs to be schooled (Franklin, 1978; Tyack, 1976; Richardson, 1980).

In the late 19th century the popular education movement began to bear fruit. Sharing the same space and time with these advances were debates about the policies and structures of Reconstruction. This convergence presented an opportunity for popular education advocates, and American leadership, to make real their claims of social inclusivity to incorporate previously enslaved and non-enslaved Africans. Instead, Jim Crow policies rhetorically and physically freed the government from the legal obligations to provide these individuals with social and political benefits and protections (Omi & Winant, 1994). Ironically, the very same leaders who promoted popular education “for all,” embraced an opposing tradition for Blacks versus for Whites (Anderson, 1988). The exclusion of African Americans at such an inclusive political moment, interwove racist ideologies about their humanity and citizenship into the fabric of the American institution of education (Anderson, 1988; Franklin, 1978). This exclusion was also in direct contrast with African Americans’ own desires to participate in dominate society’s newly developed public institution (Anderson, 1988; Tyack, 1976).

Aware of the inclusionary rhetoric and exclusionary realities of American schools, African Americans have repeatedly fought for inclusion to publicly legitimize their humanity and citizenship (Anderson, 1988; Brown v Board of Education, 1954; Butchart, 1988; Darling-Hammond, Williamson, & Hyler, 2007; Franklin, 1978; Newby & Tyack, 1971). African American scholars have discussed the utility of using education as a principal means of racial advancement (e.g. Anderson, 1988; Bond, 1934; DuBois, 1903; Lee, 2008; Lee, Lomotey, & Shujaa, 1990; Walker, 1996; 2009; Washington, 1901; Williamson, 2005). Their support for particular strategies of “racial uplift” through education and the promise of such approaches, relate to what they conceptualize as the primary catalyst for the reproduction of racial inequality: moral refinement, cultural depravity, individual pathology, or lack of political rights.

The frames of racial inequality and racial uplift, and the educational models based upon their assumptions, are briefly outlined below. Multiple frames may be simultaneously at play within a scholar’s arguments, but the focus is placed on the frame that the scholar proposes as the primary source of racial inequality and principle area of redress. Frames are presented in roughly chronological order relative to their appearance within the historiography of African

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6 The use in this section of the term “Africans” rather than “slaves” or “freedmen” recognizes these individual’s humanity and prior affiliations despite the oppressed condition they were under at that time.

7 The term “African American” and “Black” are used alternately to refer to U.S. citizens of African descent or to the institutions associated with their experiences. The conventions I used are two-fold. First, the respective term is used depending upon its usage in the cited texts or relative to the political and social norms during various historical periods. Second, I use the term “African American” to describe a demographically racialized group of people and the term “Black” to refer to a cultural or political affiliation African Americans themselves may identify with.

8 For a fuller discussion see Perlstein & McKinney de Royston, in process.
American thought. Each is accompanied by examples of research, policies, curriculum and/or pedagogies advocated by African American scholars.9

**Moral suasion: African Americans’ Resilience in the Face of Adversity**

This first frame considers the morality of African Americans relative to their bids for racial equality. The argument assumes that African Americans, individually and as a group, were morally deprived during slavery and following its abolishment. Morality, or dignity, is an inherent feature of humanity and the failure to cultivate the building block of humanity—the soul—has left Blacks susceptible to perpetual ignorance and indecency (DuBois, 1903; Frazier, 1957). The use of rhetoric or other means of persuasion are used to articulate the moral wrongness of slavery and the moral rightness of abolition. For some, the endeavor of moral suasion was explicitly political and involved agitation, while for others it was considered a less aggressive way to convince Whites of Blacks’ capacity to possess moral sensibilities (Douglass, 1845; DuBois, 1903; Frazier, 1957; Scott, 1997; Washington, 1901).

Throughout the moral suasion frame runs a thread of comparison between the morality of Blacks and Whites, arguing for the resilience of Blacks’ capacity to be moral and maintain shreds of humanity, despite the dehumanizing effects of slavery and oppression. Slave narratives, like that of Frederick Douglass (1845) and Booker T. Washington (1901), that examined the brutalities of slavery and enslaved Africans’ moral resilience and continuous desire to move out of ignorance through education were among the initial texts that articulate moral inferiority as a cause of racial inequality. Frederick Douglass was one of the first proponents of moral suasion. He recollects, “From the time that I can remember having any thoughts about anything, I recall that I had an intense longing to learn to read. I determined, when quite a small child, that, if I accomplished nothing else in life, I would in some way get enough education to enable me to read common books and newspapers” (p. 2). Douglass (1845) used moral suasion to prove the educability of Blacks because of their resistance to slavery’s dehumanizing intentions. For him, establishing African American’s morality was the stepping-stone to political freedoms. Although many White abolitionists supported Douglass, this position underestimated how deeply embedded in the social and economic structure slavery was (Frazier, 1957).

Washington (1901) agreed with Douglass that the humanity and spirit of African Americans was undemigrated by slavery. By avoiding indolence and laziness, Blacks would learn to appreciate the dignity of labor and eventually would benefit economically, then politically from their work. He argued that, “Nothing ever comes to one, that is worth having, except as a result of hard work” (1901, p. 188). Washington argued for industrial training programs that engaged Black teacher education students in learning content by also in manual labor (Darling-Hammond, Williamson, & Hyler, 2007) because "there is as much dignity in tilling a field as in writing a poem" (Washington, 1901, p. 100). Washington, however, believed less in the power of agitation to provoke change. Instead, he believed that Blacks must make themselves indispensable economically to southern Whites such that they would be beneficent in their interaction with and protection of Blacks. He encouraged Whites to use Blacks instead of immigrant labor by saying, “you can be sure in the future, as in the past, that you and your families will be surrounded by the most patient, faithful, law-abiding, and unresentful people that the world has seen” (p. 221).

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9 It is important to note that these frames, although distinct, often share similar authors who make multiple arguments about the perpetuating forces of racial inequality. The arguments of these scholars often collude together in present day rationalizations of racial inequality and the need for reform.
Central to his argument was that racial inequalities could be erased via commerce and mutual material necessity, i.e. economic power was a prerequisite to political power.

Washington has often been admonished for having a moral and economic focus that accepted the White rules of the game versus upsetting the very rules and ideologies of racial prejudice (Darling-Hammond et al, 2007; Frazier, 1957; Newby & Tyack, 1971). It is argued that Washington portrays African Americans as being unable and unwilling to “pull himself up by his bootstraps,” a characterization that justifies ideological and structural assaults on African American’s humanity and citizenship as being based on their own moral insufficiencies versus those within the social and political fabric of American society. Nonetheless, his principles of dignity, self-reliance, self-determination and economic advancement have been influential to various African American movements for racial equality in and out of schools. Economic self-determination as a means for racial advancement and political cache resonate through the Civil Rights and Black Nationalist movements into modern day movements for racial uplift in schools.

One endeavor that builds upon this frame is the Algebra Project, the brainchild of civil rights leader Bob Moses. Moses & Cobb (2001) condemn the disparity in the types of mathematics and science education students of color and students in low-income areas have access to, arguing that this effectively bars students from valued forms of knowledge and skills that are increasingly necessary for advancement to college and for participation in a technology driven economy. If given the proper resources and access to algebra early in the middle school years, students will be able to participate in advanced high school mathematics and science courses, the gatekeepers for college entrance. These students will be prepared, competitive candidates for careers in higher demand and higher paying fields that require mathematical and technical skills. Moses, Mieko, McAllister Swap, & Howard (1989) outline their program as having teachers act as learners to increase students’ willingness to ask for help and to help the teacher understand students’ difficulties, to involve parents in school administration and curriculum development, increase individual and small group instruction, and cultivate students’ goal setting strategies to develop patience and perseverance in approaching their daily math work.

Moses & Cobb (2001) argue that access to mathematics and its subsequent possibilities relate to political concerns about the life chances for historically oppressed people in the U.S. This argument mirrors that of moral suasion in 4 significant ways. First, the desired outcomes follow the logic that African American representation in an endeavor or activity can equate to power. Moses’ project aims to get more students from oppressed groups into college and into careers that will provide them with economic opportunities. He proposes that through increasing non-dominant students’ access to mathematics, we increase their access to college, and subsequently improve their quality of life and access to economic and institutional resources. He views this both as a political gain in itself, and as leading to additional political gains.

This strategy certainly allows for individual success, e.g. Colin Powell, Lani Guinier, Barack Obama, and can even land a symbolic blow against racist ideologies. For example, Barack Obama’s presidential victory gives historic support to African Americans long-standing attempts to convince their children that they could one day become president of the U.S.A. At the same time, his accomplishments and attempts to increase the institutional representation of non-dominant persons in his administration and elsewhere has not significantly altered the structural inequalities facing most African Americans. In short, the dream of being president of the U.S.A. seems more tangible but the actual possibility of it may not change despite his victory.

Second, Moses’ et al (1989) express a strong belief in the power of “human dignity,” arguing that every student is resilient and inherently able to do algebra as long as they have the personal
motivation and work ethic. This ability proposal fundamentally hinges upon the students’ belief about themselves rather than that of their teachers or others they will encounter that may or may not believe in their ability or potential. This model can also serve to position those African American students who have not done well in mathematics as unmotivated, inefficacious or not hard working. Individual students may exhibit these behaviors, but an ability lens obscures the possibility of racialized expectations and actions that may have tracked them into lower-level math classes and have limited their opportunities to form discipline-specific or school identities or dissuaded them away from feeling compelled to engage with school.

A third shared aspect is a vision that citizenship requires having access to key resources—like industrial education or math and science literacy—that are the gateways to economic opportunity. Access to these resources itself is a political victory, as is being self-motivated enough to attain a social position where they can exercise power and where others come to expect high quality work and thusly advocate for that individual. In the classroom that could be viewed as the teacher developing high expectations and willingness to advocate for a student as a result of the student’s positive performance versus having a general expectation and supportive approach to all students from the outset. Moreover, the preparation of students to become skilled workers who go on to become invaluable components within the economic framework does not itself challenge traditional inequalities of wealth, power, or racism (Anderson, 1988; Darling Hammond, Williamson, & Hyler, 2007). Rather it reifies these structures by assuming that the inequalities can be overcome within the current system and thus encouraging students to “play by the rules of the game” versus disrupting the game.

A fourth element of overlap is Moses’ (1989) explicit invocation of Washington in the principles of the Algebra Project where, he urges activists to “cast down your buckets where you are” (p. 425). Moses et al (1989) use the metaphor to advocate that community members should organize in their own communities and work around issues found in the context where they live and work. At the crux of this principle is the belief that change needs to occur from the bottom up and is started by individual actors who are empowered to become leaders of their community. Although the development of the leadership of the individual student and possibility for greater numbers of youth of color to attend college is critical, this is not the same as large-scale community advancement. In Moses’ project, wherein individual student achievement may be a sign of or lead to community advance, a trickle down metaphor of development seems more apt.

The moral suasion frame of what is required of and for African Americans to address their bids for racial equality and the desired outcomes assume that African Americans, individually and as a group, retain their moral resilience despite oppression (slavery for Washington, Jim Crow and institutional racism for Moses). This frame views the power of human dignity and self worth as inherently necessary for individual African Americans to succeed and utilizes the persuasive power of hard work and motivation as supporting racial uplift by convincing others—Whites—of Blacks’ humanity, capacity, and of their educability.

_Psychological damage: Contempt and pity_

In the historiography of African Americans in society, this second frame of racial inequality and racial uplift—psychological damage—came about in the late 19th century as industrialization and urbanization took hold and the American discourse became less religious. American’s psyche and personality, rather than moral character, became viewed as the essential element to success (Scott, 1997). Countering the moral frame, the psychological frame argues that African Americans are not fully resilient, but are psychologically damaged because of the oppression of
slavery and determinations about their inhumanity and inferiority to European Americans. This frame has been used to make generalizations about African American mental health—e.g. pathologies and psychosis, described as behavioral problems of individual African Americans (Scott, 1997), and/or used in arguments about African Americans’ internalization of racism (Brown v. Board of Education, 1954; Clark & Clark, 1950; Davis, 1940; DuBois, 1903, 1935; Frazier, 1957; Scott, 1997; Steele, 1999). In education, debates about segregated versus integrated schools, the role of the teacher in the psychological preparation of youth, and tensions of identity and stereotypes in schools often employ the logic that constitutes this frame. African American scholars and activists have used this frame to argue that White domination provokes adverse affects on the African American psyche and has implications for what this means for education (Brown v. Board of Education, 1954; Clark & Clark, 1950; Davis, 1940; DuBois, 1903; Frazier, 1957; Scott, 1997; Steele, 1999).

W.E.B. DuBois in The Souls of Black Folk (1903) was one of the first to charge the racial oppression of American society with resulting in social pathology, particularly the psychological damage of Blacks (Scott, 1997). He captured this through his concept of African Americans’ contradictory two-ness; of being simultaneously Black and American, an insider and an outsider. He notes the stark contradiction between the promise of the American dream and the emptiness of African American opportunity. His metaphor of a “veil” represents these tensions of identity. Blacks without proper schooling remained within the veil, i.e. ignorant of the larger world. By contrast, a liberal arts education, not a compensatory or vocational one, would connect Blacks to philosophies about human nature and allow them to see through the veil to understand their situation, society, and how other people viewed them. In being able to see their own oppression, Blacks would become “painfully self-conscious” and develop a morbid sense of personality (DuBois, 1903, p. 142).

From the early 1900s, DuBois made various literary attempts to compel White liberals to engage in service towards the equalizing of the races (e.g. DuBois, 1903, 1935). His essay Does the Negro need separate schools? (1935) sought to use White liberals’ sympathy and compassion to push them towards action by demonstrating the potential for the psychological damage of African American youth within integrated schools where there was a lack of “sympathetic touch” and social equality between teachers and students. In trying to advocate for structural changes in the education system, DuBois tried to show how oppressive ideologies, as embedded in pedagogical practices and schooling structures, could be internalized by students.

In critiquing DuBois and the psychological frame more broadly, Scott (1997) argues that psychological arguments result more in contempt than pity from White liberals who are more concerned with their own mental well being than that of African Americans. For example, even though DuBois focused on the social pathology of America, what resonated with White liberals was the psychological damage of the Black community. This confirmed Whites’ sense of superiority, with racial conservatives arguing that psychological degeneration resulted from Blacks inability to compete with Whites and racial liberals supporting the idea that Blacks suffered from being the subordinate group (Davis, 1940; Scott, 1997). Subsequently, African Americans’ access to education, including the types of curriculum they had in schools, became limited. Vocational education for low-skilled jobs was presented as an alternative to the “dangerous and unnecessary” liberal education that was sought after by African Americans (Darling-Hammond, Williamson, & Hyler, 2007).
Scott’s critique can also be applied to Brown v. Board of Education (1954). In advocating for integrated schools, Thurgood Marshall and his team used the Clark & Clark (1950) doll study as evidence that African American children had internalized racism caused by being discriminated against through segregation, part of which occurred in schools. Invoking the psychological damage argument highlighted the stigma of segregation, yet the legendary legislation allowed Whites to avoid managing institutional change and reorganizing their lives. Also it did not question the social pathology of Whites (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). By contrast, the message to Blacks was that their institutions, teachers, and students were second-rate and could only be improved by association with or replacement by their White complement (Fairclough, 2007; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Morris, 2001; Sowell, 1974; Walker, 2000).

The work on “stereotype threat” provides an insight into how the psychological damage of African Americans, and particularly of students, is still considered an issue. Stereotype threat occurs by triggering a stereotype about a particular group that disrupts the performance of individuals who identify with that group and the domain in which the stereotype is relevant. For example, triggering negative stereotypes about African Americans and mathematics can negatively affect those African American students’ mathematics test performance who identify with mathematics simply because they fear confirming the stereotype. The additional cognitive load of trying to overcompensate because of the fear of confirming the stereotype in fact makes such students perform worse. In addition, the frequent triggering of this threat can diminish a student’s valuing of the domain in which the stereotype was triggered (Steele & Aronson, 1995).

Steele’s (1997) recommendations to reduce the effects of stereotype threat involves developing potential-affirming teacher-student relationships, reducing teacher’s biases and increasing their acceptance of multiple perspectives, building student self-efficacy, providing students with more challenging work, offering same group successful role models, and affirming students’ sense of belonging. These strategies, however useful, mainly locate the source of inferiority as existing within the individual mind of the stigmatized student, e.g. the African American student, and to some degree that of the individual teacher. Obscured is explicit redress of the racialized and oppressive ideological and structural foundations of American schools and society that likely led to the possibility of “threats” being “triggered.” Again, this approach accommodates White fears about the inferiority, in this case psychological fragility, of African Americans rather than the requiring teachers, administrators, and the greater society to fundamentally challenge their ideologies of superiority and to engage in widespread institutional change.

Baldwin (1963) also speaks to the psychological damage of Blacks in ways that resonate with DuBois, yet his treatment is distinct in that it neither seeks to elicit contempt nor pity from individual Whites, but rather to incite rage at the social structure. He viewed psychological damage as stemming from African Americans’ interaction with a society whose purpose, structure, and substance are paradoxical. Within education, Baldwin locates the paradox in its purpose to both civilize children into obeying the rules of society and to create individuals who can look at the world for themselves, ask questions of the universe, and make their own decisions. In an address to teachers, Baldwin (1963) pushes on the tensions of identity and learning to call out the racialized tenor of schooling and the difficulties of trying to combat its legacy because what “confronts us here is that the whole process of education occurs within a social framework and is designed to perpetuate the aims of society” (p. 220) and therefore “the paradox of education is precisely this—that as one begins to become conscious one begins to

10 Kenneth and Mamie Clark were a married team of well-known African American psychologists.
examine the society in which he is being educated” such that “precisely at the point when you begin to develop a conscience, you must find yourself at war with your society” (p. 226).

Baldwin views this struggle between education as a liberatory endeavor versus an act of survival within an oppressive structure as instigating schizophrenia in African Americans engaged in the educational system. Such a dilemma enters the African American child’s consciousness when he/she is in school and realizes that he/she is being defined one way by society and is defining him/herself another way. As Baldwin (1963) proposed, you realize that “a whole country believes I’m a ‘nigger’ and I don’t!” (p. 223). African Americans become conscious that they really aren’t what they’ve been told they are, and they realize that Whites aren’t what they’ve been told they are. Baldwin views this as indicative of American society being in a crisis over its own identity. Baldwin argues that change has to come, not through the pity of Whites acting as ‘missionaries,” but through changes in curriculum to include the African American and other oppressed peoples’ contributions to society so that even White students would know better their own history. Baldwin views the teacher as integral in developing students’ self-worth, agency and a critical mind—their weapons against the conspiracy to destroy them and make them criminal.

Locating the mechanism of damage not solely in the individual mind of the child, but also in society, Baldwin circumvents claims of inherent student inferiority and instead shows how they were previously not damaged, came to realize they were viewed as damaged, and have limited options as to how to respond to this conscious awareness. In deviating from DuBois, Baldwin (1963) argued that the student is shaped by the society, yet while they have limited options they still have some degree of agency to advocate for change. Like DuBois, Baldwin highlights the power of self-awareness of the student about the system of oppression, but Baldwin does not seek pity or attempt to placate contempt or fear; he presses for change. Like DuBois and Moses, Baldwin advocates for changes in the curriculum to bring in students from all backgrounds, especially those whose contributions have historically been excluded, so that all students have access to future opportunity. As with Moses and Steele, Baldwin views the teacher as an integral actor in instigating changes in the students’ self-perception, and pushes teachers to cultivate students’ critical minds in order for them to see and act as agents of change and their own self-evaluators.

This frame of psychological damage encompasses African American scholars who examine the notion that African Americans suffer serious problems related to inferiority because of the historic recurrence of discrimination and domination. Generally the focus is on the pathology of the individual African American and is represented in the larger social pathology of the African American community. These authors offer that this social pathology extends to the whole of American society, but largely the focus is on its internalization by individual African Americans. The work of these scholars, past and present, puts forth arguments about the role of the teacher, what type of teacher (Black or White) can best educate Black students, the type of schools—segregated or integrated—are best suited to educate African American youth, and most saliently, focus on the identity issues that African Americans youth struggle with in schools around self-worth, acceptance, and expectations of educability and success.

*Social structure: The power and limitations of schools*

The third frame of racial inequality and racial uplift, social-structural, focuses on an analysis of the stratified social order. Here the reproduction of racial prejudice becomes decidedly institutional rather than an individual moral or psychological phenomenon. Central to this
perspective is a sentiment that social and political change must occur, yet whether education can be the primary force or if a focus on schools suspends critique of other more fundamentally oppressive institutions is debated (Bond, 1934; DuBois, Newby & Tyack, 1971; Perlstein; 2002; Rustin, 1971). A main sticking point is whether education, and the medium of schooling, can serve liberatory purposes or if it’s inherently an assimilatory institution. Much of this debate centers on what is being taught, who is doing the teaching, and what types of power (e.g. economic, political, social or ideological) are considered to be prerequisites for the fundamental goal of racial uplift and liberation (Anderson, 1988; Baldwin, 1963; Bond, 1934; DuBois, 1935; Moses, 2001; Newby & Tyack, 1971; Rustin, 1970; Sizemore, 1973).

Relative to education, this frame’s critique dates back to the movements for universal education when a parallel debate was going on about which students (poor, Black, White, immigrant, etc.) should be included in the schools. Anderson (1988) frames the relationship between popular education and citizenship as simultaneously one of social and economic liberation for Whites—which he calls “schooling for democratic citizenship”—and of the inverse oppression for Blacks—which he calls “schooling for second-class citizenship” (p. 1). There exists, as with earlier frameworks, a disjunction between the goals that society has for education, to socialize and assimilate individuals, with African Americans’ goal for education as liberation.

Horace Mann Bond (1934) critiqued this reliance by African Americans on using schools as liberatory institutions. He contended, “the school has never built a new social order; it has been the product and interpreter of the existing system, sustaining and being sustained by the social complex” (13). Instead, “contemporary public opinion sets the only limits to the extent to which government may go. In other times it was not seriously believed by any considerable portion of our population that women should be allowed to vote or to hold office” (p. 4). He thus viewed the ideological and physical oppressiveness of capitalism that encourages skirmishes among those least served by its institutions as the main obstacle to racial equality. For example, the emancipation of enslaved Africans also freed poor and indentured Whites, yet their competition for a place within the new means of production heightened the struggles between them. To establish a new social order, Bond argues, this relationship of struggle has to change because “no ‘freedom’ can be achieved by any one group without being shared in by the whole of our citizenry” (p. 8).

Unlike scholars (e.g. Asante, DuBois, Washington, etc.) that focus largely on the dehabilitating effects of oppression on African Americans, Bond argued that “there does not exist great difference between the activities which are best suited to translating our common ideals into teachable form, where Negro and White children are concerned” (Bond, 1934, p. 9). Focusing on a class struggle that all could unite under, students should be taught about the power dynamics (economic, political, etc.) to which they are subject in social relationships and about the history of the diversity of American peoples. The African American community should not accept responsibility for teaching its children; American society must provide “education for all” (p. 10) at elementary and secondary-levels. His view was a reaction against attempts to “take education out of politics” that reinforces institutional racism (Newby & Tyack, 1971).

Nevertheless, Bond recognized that there was a “fine shade of popular discrimination” for African Americans that “conceives of them not as Americans, but as American Negroses” (p. 8). In noting these delineations of citizenship he avoided theories of damage about the African American moral fiber and psyche to attack systemic racial and class discrimination he viewed as dehumanizing to all that came into contact with them. “If there is hatred for the Negro among that class of the population in the South known as ‘poor whites,’ the only unreason in that
bitterness is that one victim should despise the other victim of a system, and not that system itself” (Bond, 1934, p. 6). Racism, therefore, is an ideological barrier designed to discourage inter-racial class alliances and hide the real antagonist—capitalism. America’s ideals and its reality would have to come to terms and develop a new social order by redefining society’s economic functions such that racial groups’ interests would be in solidarity, not in competition.

Structural arguments like Bond (1934), and to some degree Baldwin (1963), are the theoretical predecessors for liberatory education and social justice models. Freedom schools are an example of a model of education based on a structural frame. Their aim was to develop a model of education that Blacks in the South did not have access to and to bring to the fore the politically charged nature of education as a humane endeavor and a right of citizenship. Launched out of the “freedom summer” of 1964, the Mississippi Freedom Schools had the explicit goal to move American society towards racial justice. Mainly white volunteers from Northern colleges and cities traveled to Mississippi to aid the Students for a Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) with direct action campaigns of mass voter registration and political education (Mississippi Freedom School Curriculum, 1964/1991). The presumption was that if students were able to express and understand their experiences (i.e. become “educated” rather than “schooled”), then they could examine and change the oppressive world they lived in. Learning was not viewed as separate from the uses made of it; rather awareness dictated action. For SNCC activists and their partners, this required developing schools that included a curriculum and pedagogy centered around thinking about the struggle for social justice and focused on the relationships between teachers and students, and students to learning (Mississippi Freedom School Curriculum, 41). These schools were an attempt to disrupt the oppressive social order by holding America accountable to its rhetoric of egalitarianism within education (Newby & Tyack, 1971) and through altering the experiences of schooling for Blacks in the South.

Evident in the curricular units were attempts to expose racialized forms of oppression experienced by the Black in America and the capitalistic power structure that undergirds and reinforces broader America’s stratified social order. The Freedom School pedagogy sought to engage students in the act of questioning to foster students’ individual self-expression, their understandings of the oppressive social order, and develop their individual and collective participation in the movement for social change (Mississippi Freedom School Curriculum, 1964/1991). The curriculum required that teachers and students interweave two sets of questions: Basic ones about the political movement they were a part of and secondary ones that sought to ensure their communal orientation towards collective advancement and a principled vision of society (Mississippi Freedom School Curriculum, 1964/1991). These questions were interwoven into conventional subjects (e.g. English and mathematics), into a citizenship curriculum, and into artistic, recreational, and cultural activities.

Freedom schools emphasized understanding how American society plays on the fears of individuals—Black and White—to maintain the status quo, sustain racial and class antagonism, and develop barriers towards social critique and change. The freedom schools also tried to address how individual teachers and students might work towards the goal of collective racial and social uplift. Similarly, contemporary social justice and liberatory models of education are attempting the collective advancement of oppressed communities. Their curriculum and pedagogy draw inspiration from the freedom schools and from Paulo Freire’s (1970) vision for “critical consciousness” (Apple, 2000). For example, Ladson-Billings (1995) argues for a liberatory pedagogy that will “produce students who can achieve academically, produce students who demonstrate cultural competence, and produce students who can both understand and
critique the social order” (p. 474). Echoing Bond, Ladson-Billings pushes for educators to move beyond discourses about equity to actively connect schooling to the larger sociopolitical context. This approach aims to cultivate students’ consciousness and allow them to realize the dialectical relationship between a movement for broader social justice and their individual learning.

This social justice approach is distinct from Moses’ (1989, 2001) in that it is not a “pipeline” approach but one requiring a broad political critique. It does, however, recognize the need for access to higher education and economic power as a critical component. Less clear is how to address oppressive discourses students bring into the classroom, either those they may have about themselves or have concerning others. Likewise, the social justice literature has paid insufficient attention to the everyday pedagogical practices needed to teach it, much less the learning process that occurs on the part of the teacher given their own ideological and experiential constraints. Dealing with students’ internalized oppressive discourses and cultivating teachers to engage and challenge those discourses were also a main difficulty for the Mississippi Freedom Schools. Resonating the earlier concerns of DuBois and others, it became unclear if it was healthy for Southern Blacks to be taught by Northern Whites with distant and contradictory experiences and racial backgrounds (Mississippi Freedom School Curriculum, 1964/1991). Present-day liberatory and social justice classrooms have to address similar issues of racial, economic, and cultural concordance between teachers and students. More than sixty years after Bond (1934) stated that schools have “never built a new social order” but have “been the product and interpreter of the existing system” (p. 13), we have yet to figure out how schools ideologically and structurally can “function as coordinate elements of a unified system, and not in utter isolation from the world of action and social change” (Bond, 1934, pp. 12-13).

A Cultural Approach: Deficits, deprivations, and differences

“Since the 1960s, explanations of school performance that have the greatest popularity tend to emphasize the importance of cultural differences…….. African Americans, along with Native Americans and Latino students, are perceived as being held back by their culture. Oppositional attitudes, a poor work ethic, and, in some instances, a culture of poverty frequently are identified as causes of lower academic achievement for students from these groups.”

Noguera, 2003, p. 43

A fourth frame about racial inequality and uplift involves cultural approaches. Two major perspectives exist in this frame: one that views African Americans as culturally deficient in relation to larger society with respect to the practices of the family and in connection to American institutions, and a second that sees African Americans as having been deprived of the pride of their connections to Africa and the strength of their contributions to the nation-building efforts in the U.S. The former perspective is characterized by viewpoints that argue that African American family life and issues of poverty have caused oppositional and ineffective attitudes while African American values and practices have depressed social status because of racial prejudice (Clark, 1983; DuBois, 1903; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). Within the latter perspective African Americans are viewed as having a legacy in America beyond the oppression of slavery and have a cultural and historical connection to African civilizations. Students must be taught this to give them a sense of race pride and strength of identity (Asante, 1991; Baldwin, 1963; DuBois, 1935; Woodson, 2005). Both viewpoints deal with questions of assimilation versus cultural independence, and integration versus segregation. Likewise, each viewpoint is argued to have particular repercussions for African Americans identities in and out of schools,
especially as relates to African American students’ performance.

In the 1960s in particular, concerns about the ideological power of American institutions to instill in African Americans a sense of racial inferiority were prevalent as were critiques of schools as intentionally miseducating Black children (Williamson, 2005). African American scholars also began to react to studies (Myrdal, 1944; add citations) that used “culture of poverty” or other cultural deficit arguments to effectively discount the structural realities of racism and justified African American’s oppressed social position. Reginald Clark, a psychologist, aimed to refute that problems of low-achieving students came from their race, class, familial structure, level of education, or other socio-demographic factors that were assumed to dictate their mental capacities and “activity patterns” (p. 2). In comparing the developmental strategies of single-parent and dual-parent families of high-achieving students vs. those of single-parent and dual-parent families of low-achieving students, Clark (1983) found that socio-demographic variables or social status were not significant.

Salient to the discrepancies between high and low-achieving students in single and dual parent families was the cultural styles and quality of interaction of the family. This included things such as how communication behavior works within the family to produce children’s motivations, expectations, and social competence in roles that might exist in schooling environments. Basing his analysis of the African American families in his study on aspects of parenting typologies used in a research study of largely White, middle to upper-middle class families (Baumrind, 1967), Clark (1983) determined that a family needed to equip a school-aged child with necessary “survival” and “success” knowledge. These types of knowledge were influenced by the parents’ own upbringing, the parents’ relationships and experiences with institutions, the parents’ networks and relationships outside the home, the parents’ relationships inside the home, and the parents’ satisfaction with themselves and with their home conditions.

Despite his intent to dissuade teachers and researchers from making categorical statements about members of particular socio-demographic groupings, Clark unfortunately reaffirmed the already suspected deficiencies of individual African American families and households. Although allusions were made to the presence and burden of social stratification on the families, the source of damage was still determined to be parental attitudes and behaviors that while identified as cultural differences largely served as racial tropes that effectively made race-specific assessments. Fordham & Ogbu (1986) likewise tried to avoid racial associations through using cultural arguments. In Black Students’ School Success: Coping with the Burden of Acting White, Fordham & Ogbu argue that it is the culture of poverty and the structure of Black families that maintain racial inequities in society. As with all arguments in the cultural frame, their study is principally concerned with the question of the identity of African Americans in the face of White dominant society. They propose that African American students from different class backgrounds develop “oppositional identities” that lead them to view schooling as a form of forced assimilation (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). Thus, African American students position themselves as outsiders and equate academic success with “acting White.” These students subsequently engage in self-defeating behaviors that reduce their possibilities for succeeding academically (Noguera, 2003).

Culture here is viewed as influencing schooling processes, with certain students’ home cultures being seen as deficient relative to what students need to succeed in school. This fails to

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11 Reginald Clark, not to be confused with Kenneth or Mamie Clark, is a well-known African American psychologist and consultant whose research is on African American students’ academic success in out-of-school contexts.
examine the impact, if any, that structural disparities or ideologically rooted micro-aggressions might have in fueling students’ feelings of being “pushed out” or not valued in schools such that they become oppositional or simply disengaged. The locus of the problem, instead, is presumed to be within the cultures of students and their families. As with the moral and psychological damage frames, the cultural deficit argument resembles rationalizations of differential treatment for African Americans on the basis of their race and presumed inferiority (Noguera, 2003).

Rather than finding African Americans’ cultural forms to be deficient, another strand in the “cultural deprivation” literature suggests that the problem is that African Americans have been denied full access to their own cultural history. This perspective critiques the institution of education as forcing a mono-cultural lens of White domination onto African Americans. Scholars like DuBois and Carter G. Woodson argued in favor of fortifying separate institutions for African Americans that appreciated African American culture, identity and history. Woodson (1933/2005) argued that Black students in desegregated schools, and even in some segregated schools, were conditioned to idolize Whiteness and despise their own Blackness because they were only taught about the degradation and oppression of Blacks in America and were encouraged to engage in Black self-abnegation. DuBois (1935) and Woodson argued that this was a mis-education that forced Blacks to accept an inferior social status and left them prone to the virulent racist intentions of White peers, White teachers and society.

Woodson advocated that a main function of education for African Americans should be to inculcate “race pride” in their heritage and the legacy of their people’s contributions to American society and the world. This pride would prepare African American youth to move into American political and economic life and compete with others for society’s limited resources (Franklin, 1978a; Woodson, 1933/2005). DuBois, and later Baldwin, added that to challenge racial prejudice, the task of schooling should be to aid students into developing a consciousness of their own oppression. Out of these theories emerged a view of schooling for African Americans students that would empower their identities as African Americans and as Africans who have a much broader history of accomplishments. For DuBois (1935), Woodson (1933/2005) and Baldwin (1963), this meant having teachers that fundamentally understood the Black experience in America as well as including aspects of Black history in the curriculum. They saw the role of the teacher as both the arbiter of academic development, but also as a role model that would positively socialize students into being both Black and American.

Building from Woodson and others, Afrocentrists view education as a social phenomenon designed to socialize learners into becoming a part of larger society and to respect their own self-worth as Black people (Asante, 1991). The goal is to break the cycle of Black self-abnegation that decenters and dislocates Black identities and to diverge from the Eurocentric orientation of American schools that reinforces that dislocation. Asante (1991) states that, “the kind of assistance the African American child needs is as much cultural as it is academic. If the proper cultural information is provided, the academic performance will surely follow suit” (p. 179)

Afrocentric curriculum and pedagogy questions a Eurocentric view as universal and/or classic, demonstrates the indefensibility of racist theories, and projects Afrocentricity as a humanist, non-hegemonic perspective (Asante, 1991). The curriculum seeks to eschew systems that assume superiority based on racist notions and doesn’t allow for the devalorization of any ethnicity or history at the expense of other groups’ perspectives. The aim is to place the student at the “center of the context of knowledge” (Asante, 1991, p. 172), and to position him/her as active participants in history. For this reason, a “multicultural education is thus a fundamental necessity for anyone who wishes to achieve competency in almost any subject” (Asante, 1991, p.
Harkening Bonds’ perspectives, Asante argues that Whites are also affected by a lack of cultural history about themselves and others.

Contemporary versions of multicultural education still aim to decenter the curriculum from Whiteness to bring in voices from throughout the world (Ladson-Billings, 2005). However, they critique Afrocentrism’s promotion of an African-centered worldview in the curriculum as being too narrow and not being the same as a centric education. In a centric education there is not a cultural focus on one group over the other, rather the contributions of all groups are significant and equal (Ladson-Billings, 2005). Another critique is that Afrocentrity can be essentializing because it is based on “the perspective of the African person” (Asante, 1991, p. 171), which can assume that there is a perspective that all Africans or African Americans share.

Multiculturalism itself has struggled to convey the true intra-diversity of every group. It is susceptible to being appropriated into dominant ideologies where “multicultural” and “diverse” represent anything from a multi-hued crayon set to the symbolic act of having multicultural posters, school assemblies about Black History, and cultural festivities like “Mexican Food Night” (Ladson-Billings, 2005). Such appropriation distorts the historic and social realities of marginalized groups and further marginalizes their full inclusion. These tensions within Afrocentrism and multiculturalism highlight the potential for how narrow conceptions and implementations of these educational models can interfere with their more liberatory intent.

Other approaches more explicitly seek to capture inter-cultural and intra-cultural diversity of groups to avoid their essentialization and commodification. Like other cultural approaches, ethnomathematics challenges Eurocentric perspectives and the disciplinary neutrality of the field of mathematics to reconsider what counts as mathematical knowledge (Powell & Frankenstein, 1997). In addition, ethnomathematics builds upon the “dialectical interconnections’ (p. 3) of global communities’ knowledge and draws from multiple disciplines, including mathematics, mathematics education, history, anthropology, feminist studies, and cognitive psychology. It aims to move away from ideological rigidities that have rationalized the spread of slavery, colonialism and imperialism (Powell & Frankenstein, 1997). For example, ethnomathematics would try to understand the mathematical rationale and historic global purpose of the hierarchic numeral system and its limited use of the concept of zero in ancient Egypt (Lumpkin, 1997) or the mathematical knowledge needed to execute the conical architectural designs of the round house by Native peoples of the Great Plains (Zaslavsky, 1997).

In line with Woodson’s and DuBois’ original vision, and Asante’s later intention, this approach aims to raise the awareness of teachers, other evaluators of knowledge, and of students as to the problematics of determining what knowledge is, of evaluating the beliefs and values of other people, and about how to develop these beliefs into systems of knowledge and institutions of power. Ladson-Billings credits McLaren’s (1994, 2000) and King’s (2001) visions of “critical multiculturalism” and “deciphering knowledge,” respectively, with reshaping multiculturalism. Such a reshaping would, like ethnomathematics, seek to understand and shift the social constructions of knowledge and institutions through raising the consciousness of students and teachers. Consciousness raising is viewed as the essential mechanism to reduce prejudice and advocate for social change, not just about race but also about other –isms (e.g. class, gender, language, coloniality, sexuality, disability, religion, etc.), their intersections, and the connections to systems of power (Ladson-Billings, 2005).

This vision requires that teachers and students engage in a curricular and pedagogical approach that shifts our ways “of thinking about, negotiating, and transforming the relationship among classroom teaching, the production of knowledge, the institutional structure of the school,
and the social and material relations of the wider community, society, and nation-state” (McLaren, 2000, p. 35). This approach would seem to achieve that which the policies, pedagogies and curriculum based on moral suasion and psychological damage arguments have not yet been able. Ladson-Billings (2005) points out, and the Mississippi Freedom Schools demonstrate, that the development of this approach is not simple. Teachers need to be trained in a way that few if any teacher preparation programs do. Such endeavors have been attempted with mixed results (King, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 1997; McDonald, 2005; Sleeter, 1993; Tatum, 1992; Weiner, 1993). Likewise, researchers and educators seeking to assess (e.g. effects on teachers’ and students’ ideologies, structural effects, etc.) this approach would have to have a similar form of training that would push them to challenge their own ideologies and biases.

In this section, four frames were presented to capture what African American scholars have identified as the primary source for the reproduction of racial inequality and how they have applied those frames to developing educational methods and considering the potential of racial uplift through schools. These frames, and the solutions proposed, set up the macroanalysis of Marshall that occurs in later chapters. This makes this dissertation more than an examination of one school, one teacher, or one set of families, but as a contemporary case of African Americans’ historical attempts at addressing society’s racial inequalities through schools. These frames thus serve to analyze Marshall within the recurring “big” questions of African American educational thought, namely: What is required for the racial advancement or liberation of African Americans? Is it possible to use the educational system for either of these purposes or is it an inherently an assimilatory, racist institution? Relatedly, if advances or liberation is possible through the system of education, what progress can be made (i.e. social, economic, and/or political) and what educational models, approaches, etc. are needed? Finally, does this require separate schools or can this occur within racially integrated schooling environments? The next section explores how African American schools, in particular, have consciously endeavored to address these questions that define the African American struggle for education and racial uplift.

The need for Black schools? Equity vs. racial justice, Education vs. schooling

Many African Americans scholars have demanded inclusion in a fully realized America including all its institutions, such as education. At the same time, African Americans have often developed separate Black educational projects. DuBois’ essay, Does the Negro Need Separate Schools? (1935), speaks to this simultaneous and incongruous tradition. He decry the inhumanities of the social stigma that separation imposes upon Blacks and the inhumanities of subjecting African American youth to a disingenuous second-class integration (Walker, 2009) during a critical period in the African American child’s self-development, racial socialization, and learning process. DuBois, Bond, and Baldwin, and many African American educators and scholars (e.g. Delpit, 1995; King, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 1997; Tatum, 1992; Walker, 1996, 2009), have exposed concerns about the dehumanizing effects that discrimination has on all exposed to its toxicity, including White teachers who approach their Black students with a sense of superiority (contempt) or missionary concern (pity) that reinstitutes the oppressive structures of schooling that political gains seek to undue. Speaking to these concerns, DuBois suggests that separate schools “are needed just so far as they are necessary for the proper education of the Negro race” (328) and “because otherwise the Negro will not be educated (329).”

At the crux of these arguments about segregated versus integrated schools is what is meant by “education” and which schools will provide it. Discussion of the frames of racial inequality and
advancement brought up the competing purposes of education as an assimilatory versus liberatory institution, and African Americans’ investment in pushing the educational system to “educate” versus “school” African Americans. This push argues for an education that develops students academically and legitimates students’ humanity, rights of citizenship, and social mobility. Rather than the “othering” of African Americans that ideologically and institutionally casts them as socially and culturally deviant, un-American, inferior or sub-human, an expansive notion of education acknowledges African American’s educability (i.e. equal intellectual capacity and ability), morality (dignity, resiliency, and hard work), and encompasses the history of the group’s cultural legacy as pivotal contributors to American society and acknowledge society’s oppressive tendencies. I call this expansive notion of education big “E” education, and a narrow view focused solely on academic development as little “e” education. This convention of big “E” versus little “e” education will be used throughout this dissertation to distinguish between these two perspectives.

The “hidden” curriculum of Education has frequently been the goal of Black-controlled schools pre and post-desegregation. Even during the period when enslaved Africans’ access to mainstream institutions and resources was prohibited there were more than 500 schools that were staffed and financed by formerly enslaved Africans (Anderson, 1988). They taught literacy, arithmetic and other content, and educated individuals and communities about defending their emancipation and exercising their citizenship. With the Emancipation Proclamation came an influx of White, Northern missionaries and aid societies to the South who were shocked that such institutions or learning communities existed, and more so that many of their constituents resisted attending the less expensive, newly established, White-controlled common schools (Bush, 2004).

The arrival of common schools in the South via the Rosenwald Fund, the Anna T. Jeanes foundation and others, diminished the number of Black independent schools. The common schools received funding from these philanthropic agencies and local White philanthropists and citizens, but the majority of funding came from the property taxes, private contributions, and labor of local Blacks (Anderson, 1988). The common schools were White-dominated administratively, but as with the Black independent schools, they were community controlled at the local level. In effect, before and during the period of the “separate but equal” doctrine (the late 1800s-1954) Black controlled institutions, public and private, were the predominate medium through which African Americans were educated. Black control of these schools was retained partially due to White neglect or disinterest, but more importantly was influenced by Blacks’ desires for self-control, self-determination, and uplift, as well as suspicions about the intentions and perspectives of White teachers and institutions and their affects on African American youth (Anderson, 1988; Bush, 2004; DuBois, 1935; Walker, 1996; Woodson, 1933/2005).

These latter suspicions by Black educators, families, and community members relate to African American schools’ convention of covertly and overtly using schools for positive racial socialization purposes to prepare African American youth to develop positive racial group

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13 The use of “desegregation” rather than integration is intentional. In agreement with other African American scholars, I critique the efforts at integration as more concerned with shifting demographic representation across schools than with the structural and ideological shifts that would be required to begin a process of true integration.

14 This figure does not include “Sabbath schools” or schools run by African American churches that were conducted at night or on weekends, mainly with the purpose of fostering literacy (see Anderson (1988) for more information).
identities, deal with prejudice and bias, and understand how to function in American society given these biases. As opposed to the assimilatory goal of socialization in mainstream schools, racial socialization in Black schools has been used as a subtle form of resistance through mentoring individual’s African American students’ sense of self-respect and racial identity, and as a collective act of resistance in preparing students to understand and combat discrimination.

As a quick aside, the notion of racial socialization is a common theme within African American educational thought, but there are few empirical studies that document its implementation or impact. Racial socialization (often based on Boykin & Toms’ 1985 framework) generally uses the home or family as the unit of analysis (Bowman & Howard, 1985; Brown, 2008; Hughes & Chen, 1997; Spencer, 1983). However given the communal bonds documented within Black schools (Morris, 1999) this dissonance between a practice that reverberates so loudly within these institutions and the lack of empirical studies examining it is surprising. To be sure, some empirical studies in and about schools and schooling do mention racial socialization. The focus there has been to examine how schools adversely affect students’ identity development, student performance or sense of efficacy, or do not effectively recognize students’ positive attributions to foster success (Boykin, 1986; Connell, Spencer & Aber, 1994). Few studies consider the potential for schools as sites of positive socialization and student development and less examine it empirically.

Returning to the discussion of Black schools’ use of racial socialization, their attempts to do so relate to their philosophical focus on Education, and a corollary concern about “mis-education” (Woodson, 1933/2005) in White institutions. Post-Brown concerns such as this led to the opening of new independent and Black private schools despite African American’s hopes for eventual equality in public education. These schools range in their curricular approaches (college preparatory, Afrocentric or African centered, social justice or democratic citizenship orientations, etc.), methods of instruction (culturally relevant, project oriented, traditional, vocational, etc.), and internal policies (year-round classes, uniforms, behavioral policies, etc.). Binding these schools together is a deviation from the race-neutral language and position of mainstream schools to embrace a charge of racial justice that attempts to reverse the trend of racial and class-based inequities by racially socializing children into understanding their social position in society and fostering their sense of agency to resist it.

In fact, many of these schools (some which have closed in recent years to due lack of funding) were created between 1964 and 1984 and were founded by either individuals influenced by the Civil Rights and Black Power movements or groups of parents who struggled with the realities of public schooling post-Brown (Bush, 2004). The rise of these schools, and parent’s choices to opt out of public education and send their African American children to Independent Black Institutions (IBIs), or to private or parochial schools, in part occurred because of desegregation’s dismantling of the Black controlled schools and the mass firings of Black teachers in public schools (Bush, 2004; Foster, 1997; Walker, 2009). These blows to the Black educational infrastructure also derailed African Americans’ hopes of achieving Education as liberation within a public education context.

The racialized problematics of education’s past “flow[s] into our own present” (Anderson, 1988, p. 2) and affects how African American students experience schools and inform their

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15 The schools mentioned here are distinct from those schools not created by African Americans but that largely serve African American students such as KIPP schools, Edison Schools, etc.
parents’ expectations and selections of schools, nevertheless they’re obscured by discussions about “equity,” “gaps” in achievement, opportunity, or social advancement (e.g. Darling-Hammond, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Noguera & Wing, 2006; Orfield & Lee, 2005; Sleeter, 1995; Steele & Aronson, 1995). These allegedly non-identifying racialized and classed terms and their kin (“at-risk,” “urban,” “underrepresented,” “inner-city,” “low-performing, “diverse”) obfuscate the pernicious character of racism in schooling (Hilliard, 2003; Noguera, 2003; Pollack, 2005; Sleeter, 1995). They also codify White performance and existence as the “norm,” and reify racialized inferiority perspectives that are conveyed to students through the curriculum, tracking mechanisms, teacher and school disciplinary practices, and teacher-student interactions (e.g. Clark, 1983; Ferguson, 2001; Hilliard, 2003; King, 1991; Tatum, 2003). By reframing the educational debate surrounding African Americans around “equity” rather than racial justice, the possibilities of broad-scale reforms are undermined and structural inequalities remain.

This can be seen in the disturbing patterns of underrepresentation of African American students’ achievement, engagement, graduation rates, access to educational resources like gifted education and high-level courses as well as a parallel trend of overrepresentation of African American students in special and alternative educational programs, disciplinary and behavioral activities and in schools with limited facilities or educational resources. Outside of academia, films like Waiting for Superman abound with images of African American children who are searching for a better education. Some families are turning towards private or parochial schools, or more recently charter schools. Still others are fully eschewing formal schooling to home school their children (Apple, 2006; Fields-Smith & Williams, 2009). This disconnect between African Americans’ desires for Education and society’s ability to deliver are not new. However, there is a need for additional empirical studies in a post-desegregation context that examine how African American schools take up this goal of racial justice, how these approaches affect African American students’ schooling experiences and outcomes, and what can be learned from these schools that might be applicable to today’s public educational system.

Outline of chapters

This dissertation is comprised of six chapters. Chapter II, “Examining the Complexities of Racial Justice through schools: Marshall as a case study,” I introduce the reader to the research site and how it was selected. I discuss how the dissertation developed as a project and the data sources and collection methods I chose to use. Building from the macroanalytic framework presented in this chapter, the second chapter introduces the microanalytic framework used in later chapters to understand the philosophical and pedagogical underpinnings of Marshall and how parents and alumni evaluate its implementation and impact.

The third chapter, “Improvisation within Structure: Making visible the polyrhythms of Black educational practice” is a hybrid conceptual and empirical chapter. I share insights into the upbringing and cultivation of Gwen Marshall as an educator in order to show how her story feeds into her founding of Marshall and how she determined what the school needed to be. I explore Gwen’s position as part of family of teachers and how this informed her own philosophies around teaching, and later her decision to create her own school. Using the survey and interview data from teachers, the microanalytic beliefs/pedagogical goals framework is used to analyze the philosophy of Marshall teachers relative to Black educational practice, with the macroanalytic frames situating those philosophies within African American educational thought.
Chapter IV, “It looks like freedom,” analyzes Marshall parents’ perceptions and evaluations of Marshall’s attempts to challenge racism and provide an alternative approach to educating African American youth. It begins by presenting the survey data from Marshall parents to describe who these families are and how the demographics of this group have shifted over time and compare with the teaching faculty. Interview data is then used to explore Marshall parents’ reasons for choosing Marshall and the networks through which they found out about Marshall. This discussion sets up the analysis using the microanalytic framework to talk about how parents perceive Marshall’s pedagogy and practices, compare them with their own and their child(ren)’s schooling experiences, and how they evaluate the impact, if any, of Marshall. This chapter concludes with some discussion using the macroanalytic frames to consider what types and the extent to which racial uplift is and is not possible through schools.

Chapter V: Alumni perceptions about Marshall begins by sharing the survey data that explains how alumni perceive Marshall relative to their other schooling experiences and what pedagogical practices and other activities at Marshall were salient for them. It also explores how Marshall alumni evaluate the intention of these practices and activities and their impact. Alumni interview data expound upon the survey findings and bring in their voices and perspectives. The final chapter, Chapter VI: “1st class schooling, 2nd class education,” mirrors the first chapter in exploring the possibilities of moving from mis-education to liberation through schools, especially given the experiences and implications of African American schools like Marshall.
CHAPTER II

Examining the Complexities of Racial Justice through schools: Marshall as a case study

“Children Are the Future”

Marshall Langston School is a unique community school. It offers an elementary education to gifted children of color designed to encourage academic excellence as well as racial and cultural affirmation. By encouraging respect, pride and social responsibility among students—regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation or ability—the school aims to empower our children and nurture the coming generation of leaders for social change.

MLS’ learning environment is built on the assumption that if students take responsibility for their own learning, as well as for teaching their peers, students’ achievement, self-confidence, and solidarity blossom.

- Marshall Langston School pamphlet, 1988

While I was scouting out schools for my dissertation research, a fellow graduate student introduced me to Marshall. Distinct from other schools I visited, I felt a palpable investment from and connection between the students, alumni, volunteers, parents, and teachers the moment I walked in. That first day, there was a loud buzz of activity as students worked by themselves or in groups, some with a teacher and one with a teenager I later found out was an alumnus. There was a lot going on in this small space, yet everyone seemed to know what he or she was supposed to be doing. Two adults talking near the door reprimanded the second-grader I walked in with for being late. Sending him on his way, they—one a parent, the other a college volunteer—greeted me and pointed out the principal/founder (fieldnotes, September 16, 2009).

Before reaching Gwen, two male 6th graders introduced themselves and inquired why was I visiting (was I someone’s relative, a parent of a prospective student, a new teacher?). Again, the adults shoed them back to their respective tasks. Lightheartedly grumbling that they were being helpful, the students walked away from the adults’ “I know you’re really trying to get out of some work” look. Witnessing these quick interactions, something at Marshall seemed just beneath the surface and deserving of further consideration. Initially seeking to examine the links between pedagogy, identity, and African American students’ learning of mathematics in multiple school settings, preliminary observations at Marshall led to its selection as the sole research site and to a shift in my dissertation focus. Below I outline the main four reasons for these shifts.

First, the literature on identity and schooling generally focuses on adolescents, yet middle childhood (ages 6-12) is a critical developmental period of socialization, identity formation and academic engagement (Burhmester, 1990; Casey, Tottenham, Liston, & Durston, 2005; Lieberman, Doyle, & Markiewicz, 2003; Selman & Byrne, 1974). From kindergarten through 6th grade children are introduced and inducted into the system of formal schooling, a time span

16 Thank you Shikiri for being a great journalist. I am not alone in having benefited from your tremendous work.
constituting nearly half their compulsory k-12 schooling experiences. During this period, children undergo significant physical and cognitive developments and are increasingly admitted into more participatory roles within the communities they engage, e.g. home, school, friendship networks, etc. (Middle Childhood (CDC), 2010). Middle childhood can thus be foundational for the development of children’s in-school, out-of-school, racial and non-racial self-concepts, and related practices. Marshall was an ideal site to look at this critical developmental period because it was an elementary school with an explicit mission of cultivating the “whole child”—academic, social, emotional, physical—and of promoting African American students’ positive racial and academic identities.

This vision of teaching to the “whole child” and cultivating students’ cultural awareness also relates to the second factor, Marshall’s alignment with the recently revised California Standards for the Teaching Profession (CSTP) that seeks to promote a holistic and culturally responsive vision of teaching (Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 2009). In this tense educational policy climate where improving quantitative measures of achievement is the central focus, the State of California also advocates for preparing teachers to have a deep understanding of the multiple dimensions of child development, of students’ individual needs, and knowledge about students’ diverse communities and families. In addition, these culturally competent and content knowledgable teachers should also have an “ethical concern for children and society” (Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 2009, pg. 1). Marshall’s “afro-centric, child-centered, peace-based educational philosophy” (website, downloaded July 27, 2010) that drives its pedagogical practices aligns with the CSTP standards in its attempts to build from and cultivate students’ cultural knowledge, recognize individual students’ needs and strengths, and to teach students to be informed, active, and responsible citizens. Marshall’s experience putting into practice similar pedagogical standards for over three decades may provide insights into how teachers can be prepared or mentored into understanding and engaging in such practices.

The third factor, SES levels, economically aligned Marshall with public schools that serve mainly African American populations despite it being a private school. Most of the current families’ income\(^{17}\) was below the poverty line or solidly working class,\(^{18}\) and resided in densely populated and economically depressed areas in and around the city. Many came to Marshall out of dissatisfaction with their previous schools, and were receiving tuition support from external agencies or engaging in work exchange programs with Marshall. Most students took public transportation to school, either alone or accompanied by an adult or teenage relative.

Another similarity with predominately African American elementary schools, shifts in teacher-student racial concordance, became the fourth factor. Distinct from most schools founded by and for African Americans, particularly those with an Afrocentric focus, there was a trend of having both African American and non-African American teachers at Marshall. Teacher-student racial and economic concordance in schools with high African American student populations has continuously declined over the last decade and has been cited as feeding into the disconnects between students and teachers that may have affects on expectations, student performance, and other types of in-school and in-class interactions (Kozol, 2005; Sleeter, 2000).

\(^{17}\) Initially determined from the percentage of Marshall students that are eligible for external and internal tuition support to attend Marshall and later confirmed by surveying participating parents about their incomes. Parents’ educational levels and reasons for choosing Marshall were determined via a survey and are reported in Chapter IV.

\(^{18}\) Students from low-income families are able to attend the school despite the $700/mo. tuition largely because of grant money that the school has or from grants that the school encourages parents to apply for. More than 80% of the students receive full or partial support. To reserve a space for the next academic year, a $100 deposit is required.
The faculty and student composition at Marshall potentially presented an opportunity to examine cases of non-African American teachers and African American students developing positive relationships and of non-African American teachers more effectively using culturally relevant approaches. There was also the potential to capture powerful examples of African American and non-African American teachers working in concert and/or mentoring one another in the service of educating African American children.

Preliminary analyses of school observations and informal conversations suggested that parents and alumni made repeated references to the cultural environment at Marshall and credited it as being a welcoming, non-discriminatory learning space that fostered a positive sense of self beyond just academic content. The frequency with which Marshall’s community members (teachers, parents, and alumni) highlighted Marshall’s nurturing environment and oriented to it as critical to their future success, made it equally important to understand Marshall’s social environment and practices. Fieldnotes documenting teacher-student interactions, teacher-teacher conversations, and class lessons, likewise drew attention to school activities and teacher practices that appeared to be intended to foster students’ diverse development needs. Building upon these recurring themes, the following research questions became the focus of this study:

- What are the pedagogical philosophies and practices at Marshall that are intended to challenge racism?
- How does racial socialization occur at Marshall?
- What are alumni and parents’ perceptions about Marshall’s attempts to challenge racism and socialize students into positive racial identities?

A case study design was employed to allow the socialization and pedagogical philosophies and practices underlying Marshall’s culture, its system of relationships, and how the members of the school community made sense of it to emerge (Yin, 1994). Considering Marshall’s 30-year history, it could serve as a revelatory case (Yin, 2000) about in-school attempts to alter the schooling experiences of African American students and evaluations of their effects on students’ educational and non-educational experiences in and beyond that schooling environment. An in-depth understanding of how participants “experienced, interpreted, and understood” Marshall’s mission, practices, and impact within their own historical time and context (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008, p. 80) could also inform present-day and future educational reform efforts and policies.

To facilitate this analysis, there were four sources of data: 1) participant observations; 2) an alumni survey; 3) semi-structured interviews with teachers, parents, and alumni; and 4) document analyses. This chapter explains these sources and the collection methods, discusses the positionality of the researcher, and presents the framework used for analysis. Before delving into this, it is important to introduce the focal site—Marshall Langston School.

Description of the Research Site

Marshall Langston School is located in a Northern California city, a region that is known for its active, politicized, and diverse populace concerned with combating various injustices. Since the 1960s in particular, this region has often been a pioneer in matters of race and education, from locally initiated desegregation plans (Noguera, 2003) and freedom schools (Williamson,
2005), waves of Afrocentric schools (Ginwright, 2004; Ogbu, 1999), debates about Ebonics (Perry & Delpit, 1998), and more recent conversations about social justice and equity in curriculum and schooling practices. The Afrocentricity movement, in particular, sought to denounce schools as miseducating and dehumanizing Black youth through a curriculum that degraded Blacks and actively ignored their contributions to the advancement of American society, and through a pedagogy that conditioned Black students to accept either an inferior social status or a schizophrenic consciousness (Asante, 1991; Baldwin, 1963; Mudhabuti & Mudhabuti, 1991). At the center of this approach is a belief that if African American students were “fully aware of the struggles of our African forebears they would find a renewed sense of purpose and … would cease acting as if they have no past and no future” (Asante, 1991, p. 177).

Aware of these social movements and reacting to the rigidity and lack of cultural and political awareness she experienced as a teacher within public schools in Kansas and later in private schools in her new home in Northern California, in 1979 Gwen Marshall founded her own small, community-like school with less than 30 students that would allow her curricular and pedagogical flexibility. Although intended for students of all racial and ethnic backgrounds, Gwen’s own cultural and political orientation and its resonances with the African American community quickly attracted a largely African American student body, including students of multiracial heritage that have some African American parentage. White, Asian American and Latino students have also attended the school, many against the counsel of their racial or ethnic counterparts who were concerned that their attendance at a Black school would turn them into confused “wanna be’s” or make them “anti-white” (teacher and parent interview data, Fall 2010).

To the contrary, Marshall has always had a critical multicultural orientation (Ladson-Billings, 2005) intended to combat racism (along with other –isms) and teach tolerance and justice. Its pedagogical approach endeavors to empower students’ consciousness about the mechanisms of oppression, and develop their sense of racial self-worth and identity. The founder of Marshall articulates that their school seeks to override negative racial narratives with positive ones and provide students with an understanding of how to recognize and combat injustice (interview-9/7/10). She argues that all students should have access to schools where the curricula and practices are reflective of their history, culture, and ways of knowing and being.

Over time the school more explicitly aligned itself with other Independent Black Institutions (IBI’s- see www.cibi.org for more information) in identifying itself as “Afrocentric.” Like other Afrocentric schools, Marshall seeks to develop students’ positive racial identities and create a schooling environment that is uplifting, humane, and socially and politically empowering (e.g. Asante, 1991; Baldwin, 1963; DuBois, 1935; Lee, 2008; Lee, Lomotey, & Shujaa, 1990; Mudhabuti & Mudhabuti, 1991; Woodson, 1933; Williamson, 2005). In its recruitment materials, Marshall identifies itself as educating African American children to “reach their full academic, social, emotional, and creative potential” (website, downloaded July 27, 2010).

All twenty-two of Marshall students identified as having African American or Black ancestry (fieldnotes, 10/14/09 and 10/27/09). These students range from the ages of 5 to 12, from grades kindergarten to sixth grade. Most of the 2nd or 3rd graders have attended the school since kindergarten or 1st grade. For the students in the 4th through 6th grades, there were students for whom this was their first year at the school because they recently moved to the area or because their parents were dissatisfied with their previous school. There were also students who

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19 This includes multiracial students whose ethnic backgrounds include African American ancestry among others. Although no non-African American students are presently enrolled, they are still welcomed.
had attended the school since kindergarten or first grade, or who had attended the school until they moved away and started back at the school when they returned to the area.

The faculty includes Black and non-Black male and female teachers of whom 3 are Black men (African Civilizations, African Percussion, African Dance (co-taught), and Tennis\(^{20}\)), 3 are Black women (Language Arts, Yoga, and the founder—who teaches History/Geography, Math, Reading, Recitation, Spelling, and Swimming), and 4 are White women (African Dance (co-taught), Art, Mathematics, and Science)\(^{21}\). Aside from the lead teacher, the teachers generally stay for half a day and alternate which group of students—little kids, middle kids, or big kids—that they see first. These groupings are mainly constituted by age and grade (little kids- K-2\(^{nd}\) grade; middle kids- 3\(^{rd}\) & 4\(^{th}\) grade; big kids 5\(^{th}\) & 6\(^{th}\) grade), but depending on a students’ skills they may temporarily participate in another group for a given subject or class.

Some classes are taken jointly by all of students; this includes Tennis, Yoga, Dance, Singing, Recitation, and Swimming. Within those classes there may be differentiated instruction such as age or developmentally appropriate tasks but all students are expected to participate and are often encouraged to work together or assist fellows students of a different age, grade, or size. Outside of the formal classes, there is independent work time where students work alone on homework, engage in independent or small group learning activities\(^{22}\), receive more individualized or small group support around particular topics or assignments, or can provide student-aide support such as tutoring of other students or engaging in school related administrative tasks.

**TABLE 1: Marshall Class Schedule, Academic Year 2009-2010**

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<th>MONDAY</th>
<th>TUESDAY</th>
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<td>Morning Meeting</td>
<td>Morning Meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African Civilizations</td>
<td>History/Geography</td>
<td>Language Arts</td>
<td>Art</td>
<td>Recitation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>African Percussion</td>
<td>Special Math</td>
<td>Singing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spelling</td>
<td>Independent Work</td>
<td>Independent Work</td>
<td>Independent Work</td>
<td>Independent Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lunch/Recess 11:35 am – 12:30 pm</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Afternoon</strong></td>
<td><strong>Afternoon</strong></td>
<td><strong>Afternoon</strong></td>
<td><strong>Afternoon</strong></td>
<td><strong>Afternoon</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:35 pm-2:40 pm</td>
<td>12:35 pm-2:40 pm</td>
<td>12:35 pm-2:40 pm</td>
<td>12:35 pm-2:40 pm</td>
<td>12:35 pm-2:40 pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>Science</td>
<td>Tennis</td>
<td>Swimming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spelling</td>
<td>Independent Work</td>
<td>Independent Work</td>
<td>Independent Work</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Independent Work</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>20</strong> The weekly tennis class costs an additional $5/class and is given to the tennis instructor before class. Swimming is taught at a local pool, and each student pays the $1 entrance fee.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>21</strong> In addition to the teachers, there are volunteers at the school, some that come more sporadically and others that have a weekly schedule. Most are family members and alumni. There is also a reading tutor that comes once a week and works with individual students’ whose parents request additional support.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>22</strong> These activities are less structured and can be chosen by the student(s) or initiated by teachers. They include, but are not limited to, students working on puzzles or educational board games, memorizing poems for recitation, independent or group reading, math or geography flashcards, and self-directed research.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
In addition to the teaching faculty, there is a White male social worker\(^{23}\) who comes weekly to provide counseling to students whose parents have requested it for their child and/or for themselves. Engagement in counseling is not a required activity at the school. Almost half of the students utilize the counseling services, as do some parents who have individual sessions and/or joint sessions with their child(ren). The costs of the counseling services are reduced for the school community and are distinct from school tuition. Most families paid for the services via health insurance and/or some combination of insurance and co-pays. Students who meet with the social worker do so in Gwen’s office and usually during their independent work time.

Most of the school’s course offerings are taught at the school. Tennis and Swimming are taught at a nearby tennis court and swimming pool. During the lunch break, students and teachers walk from the school to the tennis court or pool and eat lunch and have recess at the adjacent parks before beginning the class. Lunch and recess are normally taken at the park next to the school. This is a newer park and has many play structures, as well as large concrete and grassy areas to allow for kickball, dodge ball, 4-square, hopscotch, double dutch and other recreational activities common during recess.

Marshall’s facility consists of a shared main room, two adjoining classrooms, Gwen’s office, a classroom in the back of the building, a storage area, a bathroom, and a small reading area (see Figure 1). Spelling, African Civilizations, Mathematics, and Reading were conducted in the main room near the blackboards. Music, African Dance, and Yoga were taught in the main room as they had space to accommodate the entire student body and the class’ activities. Of the two adjacent rooms, one is used as a classroom for Language Arts and Art, or for independent or group work. The other is the “Desk Room,” where each student has a desk. Students used the “Desk Room” to store their school materials or do independent work or research. Classes were not usually taught there. Special Mathematics and Science were taught in a smaller, stand-alone classroom located across from the Storage Room. Students would use that space to work on group projects; as did teachers if they were working with a subset of students and if their activities might prove disruptive to others’ work (e.g. a drumming circle, choreographing a dance, etc.). In the back of the school was a small reading area with a bench and some books that students used for quiet reading. Next to the reading area was a piano that was used by the piano teacher, an alumni’s grandmother, who taught a few students after school once a week.

Since most of the classes were taught in the main room, or in the adjacent classroom, I was able to observe multiple interactions between school community members, even while engaged in a focused observation of a class. This configuration cultivated a communal environment of involvement and engagement. Students were aware of what one another were working on or were being taught, and were encouraged to inquire about one another’s work or offer help. Likewise, teachers saw one another’s practices and lessons, and engaged in real-time conversations to modify lessons or build upon one another’s lessons. This had real implications for the possibilities for across-teacher mentorship and support.

\(^{23}\) The social worker is the school founder’s husband. He has worked with the school on and off since it began. For the last 2 years he has come weekly to provide counseling to students during the school day.
FIGURE 1: Aerial layout of Marshall Langston
Data Sources

Participant Observation

During the 2009-2011 school years, I was a participant observer (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995) 1-2 days per week at Marshall. In the fall 2009, I volunteered at the school on different days of the week to experience the school schedule and meet the entire faculty. In staying for the entire school day, classroom and whole-school settings (e.g. morning meetings, recess, etc.) during the school day were observed, as were other activities and events held before and after school. In spring 2010, I volunteered on Mondays and alternating Fridays. During the 2010-2011 academic year, I volunteered on Thursdays and occasionally volunteered at the school on other days. My work initially involved aiding students one-on-one or in small groups with mathematics or language arts, and eventually shifted into academic support in other subjects. This allowed me to become part of the school community and attend school events that occurred outside of the regular school day. During all observations, I paid particular attention to teacher-teacher, teacher-student, student-student, and teacher-parent interactions.

TABLE 2: Fieldnotes by Category

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fieldnotes by Category</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>In-school activities</strong></td>
<td>• Compliments &amp; Complaints Circle (morning meeting)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• A.m. drop-off &amp; p.m. pick-up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Class lessons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Recess</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• One on one parent &amp; student orientations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>In-school practices</strong></td>
<td>• Elder system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Student weekly charts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Count offs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Push ups or Jumping Jacks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Public performance evaluations (academic and non-academic)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>School events &amp; activities</strong></td>
<td>• Steppin’ Up and Steppin’ On (graduation ceremony)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Fundraising Events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• School cleanup activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Informal conversations</strong></td>
<td>• Notes from observations of teacher conversations occurring during school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Notes from observations of teacher-parent conversations occurring before, during, and after school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Notes from conversations between teachers and the researcher</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

24 As shown in Table 1, at Marshall different subjects are taught everyday.
Participating in the school activities allowed me to establish relationships with teachers, students, parents and visiting alumni and assured them of the integrity of my research. The mutual engagement also afforded opportunities to clarify the purpose and utilization of distinct school activities, structures, or artifacts, probe teacher’s thinking and beliefs, pilot interview questions, and view real-time pedagogical practices used by teachers. This on-going rapport with parents, teachers, and other members of the school community facilitated my role as a recognizable school community member. It was not uncommon to encounter families and teachers outside of the school while I attended events in and around the city, utilized public transit, or frequented local businesses.

Throughout in-school and school-related interactions and observations, extensive fieldnotes were taken. A small notebook was used for hand-written “jottings” (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995) or fieldnotes, depending on the physical circumstances or visible comfort of the participants. These methods were used to capture direct quotes, incidences, or record activities as they unfolded. Gaps in jottings or notes would usually be filled in within the hour. That same day, the notes would be transcribed into a richer narrative that included preliminary interpretations. These fieldnotes ranged from 4 to 10 typed, single spaced pages per daily observation (see Appendix A for an example).

Alumni survey

A 30 question, multiple-choice survey (see Appendix B: Online Survey Protocol) was used to gather data from a broad range of alumni. Text boxes after each question allowed respondents to expound upon their responses. The survey took an average of an hour to complete. All alumni were eligible to participate, but distribution of the survey was limited to alumni for whom contact information could be found. Of the approximately 170 former students (including students who attended Marshall for short periods of time) identified through school records, over half were contacted to participate. To recruit different generations of alumni, several tactics were used. First, an online format hosted by Kwik Surveys allowed alumni that no longer resided in the Bay Area to participate and afforded greater anonymity than face-to-face or survey mailings. Second, hard copies or email versions of the survey were also made available. Third, contact information was garnered through face-to-face interactions at the school or at school events. Fourth, Google searches, the school website, and online reviews or comments about the school were used to contact additional alumni. Fifth, Facebook was used to contact alumni that listed Marshall as their school or that visited the Marshall page. Finally, snowballing measures were used that requested that alumni, current and alumni parents, current and former teachers, and other members of the school community to pass on the researcher’s contact information or survey link to alumni.

My notebook became a true “artifact” of the school as students often asked what I was writing or commented if they did not see me writing or holding my notebook. Students asked to write notes or draw pictures in my notebook, a request I often granted unless it was disruptive. A recurring joke among students was if you needed a pencil or paper, ask Maxine because she always carries some around.
The survey helped to account for shifts in perceptions, interpretations, and experiences that Marshall students had across time and to see if there were corroborating aspects of Marshall’s philosophy, practices, or courses that alumni oriented to as being aimed at challenging racism, engaging in racial socialization, or having had a distinct impact. To understand the context of Marshall and alumni responses from students that experienced Marshall at different periods in its history, I divided the alumni into generational cohorts (see Table 3): Cohort I (primary attendance dates from 1979-1992, Cohort II (1993-2002), and Cohort III (2003-2010). These cohorts represent a population of alumni that range from 12 to 37 years of age. Cohort divisions represent groups of students who attended Marshall at the time and were structured to balance out the numbers of alumni across generational cohorts. While initially serving 10 students and remaining around that number (+/- 1 or 2) for several years, over time the school size increased to serve up to 30 students, with an average number of 19 students in the last ten years.

Via the survey alumni identified the core practices and beliefs of Marshall’s approach and what they perceived as their function and/or impact. The survey also allowed alumni to indicate if they were willing to be interviewed. The table below represents the survey distribution across alumni cohorts. Alumni responses to survey items are discussed in Chapter V.

TABLE 3: Alumni survey distributions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alumni</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N= 52</td>
<td>(52/170= 31% of alumni)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Semi-structured Interviews

Interviews were conducted with interested teachers, parents, and alumni. It was explained that the purpose of the study was to understand the teaching philosophy, practices, and schooling environment at Marshall. The researcher was introduced as a graduate student who was conducting research about African American students’ experiences in schools. Participants were informed that their participation and information was confidential and would not be shared with other members of the school community. All interviews were audio recorded at the permission of the participant(s) and lasted between one to three hours. Interview audio recordings and notes were later transcribed to allow for analysis.

Depending on the interviewee(s) preference, interviews were held at cafes, parks, and at individual homes. Three interviews were held at the school, two when the researcher and the interviewee were the only ones at the school, and a third during the school day alone with the interviewee. Before the interview, parents and teachers completed a brief demographic survey (Appendix C: Parent & Teacher Demographic Survey) regarding race, income, and educational background information. Parents were also asked to identify the main caretakers for their child and their occupation. Alumni parents were asked if their current income matched their income.

26 The first alumni cohort also spans a larger period of time to balance out the sample bias of the first two years of the school when most students came from one school source, the private school where Gwen Marshall previously taught. By grouping them with the students that came from other schools during those beginning years at Marshall, it’s clearer how the first cohort of parents and students perceived Marshall.
when their child(ren) attended Marshall. If not, they were asked to clarify what it was at that time. Those results are shared in Chapters III and IV.

Teacher interviews

Individual teacher interviews were conducted to make explicit teachers’ pedagogical philosophies and practices, experiences of mentorship at Marshall, and to differentiate how teachers viewed their practice at Marshall relative to other schools. In individual teacher interviews, (see Appendix D: Teacher Interview Protocol) teachers’ were asked to describe the school’s philosophy and pedagogy and their enactments of it. General questions were also asked about their credentials and teaching experience. All current teachers (10) and 3 past teachers were interviewed. Gwen, the founder and lead teacher, was interviewed 3 times over the course of the research period.

Before the interview began, teachers completed a brief survey about their educational background, race or ethnicity, and income level. The survey’s purpose was to have a sense of the level of professional training of the teachers and to verify the racial and economic concordance or diversity between Marshall’s teachers and families. Among the teachers, 6 identified themselves as “Black” and 7 identified themselves as either Caucasian, Jewish, White or Caucasian/Jewish. The percentage of Black teachers at Marshall (46%) is slightly less than non-Black teachers (54%), with Black teachers teaching nearly 70% of Marshall classes.

All current teachers (not including the founder) have been at Marshall for at least 2 years and an average of nearly 11 years. Their experience at Marshall ranges from 2 to 22 years. Economically, Marshall teachers’ average household incomes indicated that their economic status was relatively consistent with that afforded by an average teacher’s salary- $60,641- for the school district in which Marshall resides. Outside of their teaching income, some of these teachers have other professional pursuits and/or have partners who contribute to their household income. This suggests that the teachers at Marshall earn about the same as other teachers in the same district. In comparing their incomes with that of Marshall parents (see Chapter IV for details) on average the teachers have higher incomes than the families they work with, which is consistent with current trends in education (Kozol, 2005; Sleeter, 2001).

Teachers attributed their retention at Marshall to the high level of support and trust as educators that they experienced, in addition to their sharing or respecting the vision of the school. Other key factors for their remaining at the school depended upon the relationships they developed with families, other teachers and the founder, and the flexibility Marshall provided as an educator to teach what they wanted and how they wanted. Some teachers appreciated the part-time nature of their employment as an opportunity to teach elsewhere or have greater flexibility with their schedule. Others indicated it would be more advantageous for them to work more hours or get paid more at Marshall. All teachers indicated that working at Marshall “was more than just a job” and involved being part of a community in and out of school, and beyond their tenure at Marshall. For many teachers, namely all the Black teachers, working at Marshall was tied to their desire to contribute to the educational advancement of Black youth and the Black community—aspirations they indicated were harder to meet at non-Black schools or at schools without a strong presence of Black teachers or administrators.

Parent interviews

27 In addition to teaching, some of Marshall’s teachers are also attorneys, musicians, and different types of visual or performing artists and may receive other income from those pursuits.
Parents were recruited through face-to-face interactions at the school, school events, the school website, and via online reviews or comments about the school. In addition, snowballing measures were used that requested that other members of the school community pass on the researcher’s contact information to current and former parents. Of the parents who expressed interest, “purposeful sampling” (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2003) was used to capture a range of experiences at Marshall, including the time period in which their child(ren) had attended and their level of involvement with the school. When appropriate, both parents were invited to participate in the interview but the majority of the interviews were conducted with one parent.

Parent interviews were conducted to determine parents’ reasons for choosing Marshall and their interpretation of the impact of their child(ren)’s and their own experiences there. Interviews were conducted with 18 parents (4 from Cohort I, 5 from Cohort II, 5 from Cohort III, and 4 parents of current students). Because some parents sent multiple children to Marshall, or had other family members or friends attend, the views expressed by those sampled may represent a broader percentage of parents.

Results from the brief survey indicate that parents’ educational levels outpace their income levels, with the majority having some college exposure or collegiate degrees. Most parents identified as Black. The non-Black parent population includes White parents of multiracial children and White adoptive parents of African American children. The views of Asian American, Latino, and Native American parents of multiracial children are captured in the fieldnotes but none were interviewed.

Alumni interviews

Alumni that participated in the survey indicated if they were interested in being interviewed. Of the alumni who expressed interest, “purposeful sampling” (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2003) was initially used to select alumni who represented different cohorts of students and a different range of experiences, from those that attended Marshall from kindergarten through sixth grade, to those that attended for one to two years only. Ultimately all alumni that expressed interest and scheduled an interview within the data collection timeframe were interviewed.

TABLE 4: Alumni interview distributions

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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The purpose of alumni interviews was to triangulate teacher and parent’s interview responses and to verify or disprove observations made at the school site and at events, as well as to get rich first-hand accounts (see Appendix F: Alumni Interview Protocol). Alumni interviews were done as focus groups (ranging from 2-6 participants) in order to probe individual student experiences and document group experiences within a similar cultural context (Carter, 2005). During the focus groups, I asked alumni which classes they took, which teachers they had, about particular pedagogical practices they might have experienced, the philosophy of the school, their academic

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28 Alumni and parents also include those students who did not graduate from Marshall and their parents. It is important to find out why they left Marshall and if it had anything to do with racial socialization and/or issues of racism.
and non-academic experiences at the school, similarities and differences between their experiences at Marshall and other schools, and to share if they perceived Marshal to have had any impact on their academic or non-academic lives. For out-of-town alumni that could not participate in the focus groups, interviews were done individually (N= 4).

Document analysis

Several secondary sources were used to gain perspective about the school’s philosophy and pedagogy, student and parent experiences at the school, and provide some historical context about the school outside of that given by school community members.

TABLE 5: Sources of data for document analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Electronic sites</th>
<th>Archival data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marshall Langston School website (includes student and parent testimonials)</td>
<td>School newsletters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yelp reviews of Marshall</td>
<td>School records and class photos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greatschools.org reviews of Marshall</td>
<td>Brochures and other Marshall recruitment materials</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Handouts to parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Newspaper articles about Marshall</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Newspaper articles about private schools</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Newspaper articles about Black schools and/or Afrocentric schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>District level, state-wide, and national educational data</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To supplement the school observations, informal conversations, and interviews that were conducted, over the course of the research I conducted monthly online searches to find additional reviews and articles about Marshall. Various electronic sites allowed for parents and students to post reviews with anonymity. These reviews provided some thematic ideas that were later incorporated into interviews or were probed in informal conversations with school community members. Being a small community, these forums provided an opportunity to examine the frustrations, joys, and experiences of segments of the school community that may or may not have been willing to participate in interviews or were no longer formally associated with Marshall. The school website provided some positive testimonials about the school and captured how the school was positioning itself in the educational marketplace of school choice. Once downloaded, these documents were coded and analyzed using the coding scheme described later in this chapter.

Online and newspaper articles were used to gain a broader perspective about how the school has positioned itself and/or has been perceived by external entities. This also included researching articles about private schools and African American students and/or schools to
situate my discussion of what was occurring at Marshall within a broader context of present-day non-academic African American educational discourse. Informal conversations with current and alumni parents suggested that the media was one of the ways in which they found out about Marshall. It was thus likely that news articles, as well as online reviews, gave context to the types of information that prospective parents would have access to and the climate in which Marshall was asserting itself. Likewise, district, state, and national educational data from governmental and non-governmental agencies were used to provide a quantitative sense of where Marshall fit in relative to school cost, teacher salaries, racial and economic composition of its students and faculty, and to document the demographics of its host city.

School archives were used to analyze past and present publicity about the school, descriptions of its African centered vision and its enactments in the school, and to analyze if there had been shifts or modifications over time. Since the school has been around for over 30 years, school records and pictures were used to aid in the compilation of lists of former teachers and alumni that were later invited to participate in the alumni survey or in alumni or teacher interviews. These records also provided insight into key activities and events that had occurred previously and required further investigation about their existence in the present. When reviewing these materials, members of the school community (teachers, current students, parents, and alumni) that happened to be present would reminisce and provide historical information about past events, activities, or persons. These were great opportunities for understanding the complexities and structures of the school community that were not easily discernible or had not yet been observed yet still bounded participants’ behavior and meaning making in critical ways.

Complexities and Limitations of the Research Approach

The intensity of my research collection activities, including the close proximity with the focal school community that it entailed, made my own positionality key to the research process. As a lighter-skinned African American woman who has attended both predominately white and predominately Black public schools and later more prestigious white private institutions, I have always had to negotiate the real and perceived boundaries of race, class, and educational access. Within the schools I attended, I learned that racialized perceptions about students’ background and economic stature had a tendency to shape institutional authorities’ assumptions about students’ educational ability and could critically influence students’ schooling experiences and the educational opportunities they were afforded. In graduate school, I examined this by researching teacher-student interactions, the effects of teacher positionality on their implementations of reform-oriented policies, and analyzed if different conceptualizations of equity and diversity allowed for teachers to reconsider their own racialized notions or pedagogical practices. This research pointed to teachers’ beliefs about race, their identity and affinity as a member of a racial group, and their political goals as educators and about the purpose of education as key factors influencing students’ school experiences and performance.

Entering into my dissertation research, the aforementioned perspectives informed my subjectivity relative to what I observed, my interactions with participants, and the way in which I designed my study. My work as a volunteer allowed me to become part of the school community as well as observe the ways in which my own pedagogical style was received by students, parents and teachers alike. While this afforded real-time feedback about teachers and students expectations of one another, and supported the development of relationships with
parents, it also required juggling the role of researcher and community member. I made a concerted effort to maintain my role as a volunteer rather than as a teacher or institutional figure with authority. I did not teach or design lessons; rather I provided the type of assistance that would be expected of a parent or other volunteer. If a parent noted that they heard that I had worked with their child, I limited my comments to their child’s engagement or affect relative to the task (e.g. “Tim really enjoyed working on fractions today!”) rather than giving academic or other assessments, or providing academic support or guidance that would be expected of a child’s teacher. Being engaged as a volunteer also satisfied my ethical obligations as a researcher to avoid “extracting” from marginalized communities, and instead attempt to make some immediate, tangible contributions to the community during my research process.

I was also careful not to align myself with any particular social groups and tried to remain neutral relative to school-related issues. I rotated which teachers, parents, alumni or students that I spoke or worked with during the school day or sat nearby during events or activities in order to not establish a pattern of interaction with any one person or group in particular. In my fieldnotes I recorded which students I worked with, who I sat next to at events, and the nature of our conversations. Despite my best efforts, my continued presence at the school, my style of interaction, and other personal idiosyncracies still likely shaped my positionality at the school. For example, as a mother of a young child and as an educational researcher, I was oriented to as someone who cared about African American children’s educational future and was afforded a level of trust and access that may have not been afforded to others whose perceived personal investments were dissimilar to those of the parents and teachers. Similarly, as a lighter skinned African American woman whose racial identity may not be readily discernable, I openly shared my mixed race heritage with participants and engaged in African American cultural activities at the school (e.g. singing Stevie Wonder’s version of “Happy Birthday” during students’ in-school birthday celebrations, or jumping double dutch at recess). This disclosure shaped the ways in which I was perceived by members of the school community and influenced the types of information they shared with me. Some African American members of the school community were initially hesitant or uncertain about my research intentions or the process of research; however, when they found out I was African American, they were more willing to participate. At the same time, mixed race parents and alumni, inter-racial parents and White parents and teachers were more forthcoming than they may have been otherwise.

I also took seriously my role as the “dumb” outsider, a new parent and a “book smart” researcher, and frequently asked participants to educate me about issues they’ve dealt with in schools and in choosing schools, how they understood the philosophy and practices at Marshall, and other school-related topics. Throughout the research and writing process, I had to negotiate the tensions of having been an African American student in schools, and of being a parent of an African American child, an educator, and a researcher examining issues of race in schools. These multiple roles complicated an already intense process, yet these tensions presented key opportunities to question my subjectivity and to re-consider alternative perspectives. During the research and analysis process, I shared raw data or reflections with colleagues and advisors, all of whom provided alternative explanations, questioned my subjectivity, and/or pushed me to explore new literature or ways of conceptualizing what I was seeing.

Several fundamental decisions about the research project were made following such conversations, two of which are worth mentioning here. The first was to use pseudonyms for the people and places in my study. Because of the small size of the school community and the interconnectedness of its members, it was essential to maintain the anonymity and confidentiality
of those that chose to be interviewed or participate in the survey in order to encourage their sincere responses and avoid any concerns that their decision to participate (or not to participate) would have any affect on their relationship with the school or its community members. Second, to further preserve the anonymity of individual persons, I have used more generic descriptors rather than detailed personal markers about participants, e.g. A thirty-something, single African American father who has a 4th grader and 6th grader might be changed to “an African American father” or an alumni of Argentinean and African American heritage would be described as “multiracial.” This method may not speak to the full life experience, positionality, or racial/ethnic background of the participant, yet it generally retains the demographic they represent and situates them within the larger school community. Likewise, when there were quotes that were easily identifiable as having come from a particular person, I shared the text with them and asked their permission to include it.

Despite these efforts, like any research endeavor, my study has several limitations. First, Marshall is a very small, private school. As such the teachers and students have degrees of freedom that may not be available in larger public schools. This small environment allows for a level of nurturing and trust throughout the school community and across generations of students that would be hard to develop and maintain within more institutionalized environments. This limits the extent to which Marshall’s practices or students’ experiences there can be directly compared to other schools, especially given the differences between the schooling philosophies and structures. If wider scale, more comprehensive shifts were embraced that challenged the way we think about the purpose and structure of schools in order to explicitly challenge issues of racism and other dynamics of power, then this limitation would to some extent be mitigated.

Second, despite my best attempts to solicit parents and alumni that were not as involved at Marshall or that were less satisfied with their experience there, there is an overrepresentation of those who were regularly present, still engaged with the school, or were willing to participate because of their positive experiences. I conducted exhaustive searches to garner contact information for parent and alumni who had “a less grand experience” (Parent interview, 5/3/11) or whose dissatisfaction I observed or had access to via online reviews. I even probed the more content parents and alumni about some of the limitations and drawbacks they struggle with, or have seen others struggle with, at Marshall. These perspectives are present within the fieldnotes, as well as the interview and survey responses. They are key to providing a critical analysis of what was happening at Marshall and its perceived impact. At the same time, the experiences and perspectives of parents and alumni who have been more involved or positive about their Marshall experiences gives insight into which practices, schooling structures, or type of schooling environment they see as “working” and helpful towards fostering their or their children’s success. Given the frustration of policy makers, teachers, parents, and of African American students themselves, about the education of African American students this type of positive information is much needed.

Third, being a case study, this research is drawing from a relatively small sample of interview and survey participants. I hope to expand this research out to other African American schools in and outside of California to be able to analyze on a larger scale the unique trends as well as pervasive patterns that stretch beyond individual schools, regions, curricular orientations, and historical time. However, it is necessary to first engage in an in-depth analysis of one African American school in order to identify and analyze what constitutes the politically relevant teaching philosophies and practices that have been and continue to be enacted at Marshall and how they may draw upon the broader frames that define African American educational thought.
Analyzing racial socialization and counter narratives in school

After a first analytic pass through the observation data and fieldnotes from other informal conversations and school activities, what stood out was the way in which many of the practices at Marshall, and the assumptions that undergirded them, were reminiscent of a particular macroanalytic frames (moral, psychological, structural, or cultural). An observation from the first day of class for the middle kids in the African Civilizations course, highlights this point: Adebiyi [a Marshall teacher] transitions from talking about how human existence began in eastern Africa to talking about the dispersion of humans across the continent, beginning with those that followed the Nile River by foot or used it to sail to other parts of Africa where they set up different civilizations. He is beginning to explain that there’s over 6,000 years of human history on the continent, when Tyresees interjects, “Is that when they became slaves?,” referring to the migrations that Adebiyi had just described. Adebiyi sighs and shakes his head before responding, “No. Slavery only lasted 500 years.” He calls up Van and has Van stand in front of him, also facing the students. Adebiyi takes hold of Van’s wrists and opens Van’s arms out as wide and as high as Van’s shoulders. With Van standing there with his arms out to his sides, Adebiyi says, “African civilization lasted this long.” Bringing Van’s arms back together until Van’s palms are facing each other and only 5 or 6 inches apart Adebiyi says, “And slavery lasted this long.” Looking at the students Adebiyi continues and says, “Do you see the difference? You are not slaves. This class is not about slavery.” (fieldnotes, 9/10/10)

In this excerpt, Adebiyi’s comment “You are not slaves” and his embodied demonstration with the help from Van, point to the influence of the cultural frame’s argument that if African American students were aware of their strong history and impressive legacy then, “they would find a renewed sense of purpose and vision in their own lives. They would cease acting as if they have no past and no future” (Asante, 1991, p. 177). Teachers, parents, and alumni also made explicit comments about Marshall or about the educational needs of African American children that reflected distinct or overlapping investments towards particular frames. At lunch one day, I asked a teacher what she liked about Marshall and she responded,“Well I think a lot of kids that come to Marshall are coming from situations that- where they have felt completely alienated, like culturally alienated or racially alienated or alienated based on socio-economic status [or] something about that experience has made them feel less than, and angry........At Marshall, Gwen is so careful to make sure that kids feel good about themselves. Not like sort of ‘feel good’ good but proud of themselves, right ‘cuz they’re valuable, not just like ‘Oh you’re a nice exception we’ll take you pat pat [mimics patting a kid on the back]’ but like you and where you come from and who you are in terms of your family and your ancestry is invaluable. We can’t be without you. And then they start to come out of that mean little shell that they were protecting themselves with and then you can see them relax and they’re able to learn which they weren’t able to- in places where they felt scared or wrong or [their person] was wrong.

Here, this teacher blends the cultural and psychological frames to talk about how the environment at Marshall, and how Gwen’s approach has a calming and academically valuable affect on students. In both examples, identifying and cataloging these interactions and statements as demonstrations of particular and blended theoretical frames was somewhat
straightforward. Less clear were the pedagogical philosophies at Marshall and the schooling structures or practices used to enact these frames.

To get a more nuanced understand of what I was seeing and what participants were sharing as central to the pedagogical philosophies at Marshall and their experiences there, I looked to the African American educational and developmental literature. Two frameworks seemed particularly well-suited to allow for in-depth analyses of Marshall’s pedagogical philosophies, practices, and participants’ reactions to them. The first was Lee’s (2008) principles of effective African centered pedagogy and the second was Boykin and Toms’ (1985) framework for racial socialization. Lee’s (2008) principles of African centered pedagogy were useful for examining the culturally oriented curriculum and practices directed primarily at educating African American youth, while Boykin & Toms’ (1985) racial socialization framework gave insight into the social and developmental goals embedded within these principles. Ultimately, I developed a hybrid framework that incorporated the overlapping elements across the frameworks, yet maintained the unique contributions of each. Before explaining the hybrid framework, below I explain the respective affordances and constraints of each of the individual frameworks.

Lee’s (2008) principles identify the beliefs and goals that an educational environment using African inspired philosophies and practices should build upon and that are prerequisites for its effective implementation. A number of the principles resonate with culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1992, 1995) but are distinct in their orientation to the curricular goals and philosophies of an African-centered approach. Lee’s (2008) principles are (p. 215):

1) The social ethics of African culture as exemplified in the social philosophy of maat [Kemetic concept of truth, balance, order, law, morality, and justice];
2) The history of the African continent and Diaspora;
3) The need for political and community organizing within the African American community;
4) The positive pedagogical implication of the indigenous language, African American English;
5) Child development principles that are relevant to the positive and productive growth of African American children;
6) African contributions in science, mathematics, literature, the arts, and societal organization;
7) Teaching techniques that are socially interactive, holistic and positively affective;
8) The need for continuous personal study [and critical thinking];
9) The African principle that “children are the reward of life”;
10) The African principle of reciprocity; that is, a teacher sees his or her own future symbiotically linked to the development of students.’

Lee’s principles make explicit that racial inequalities within schooling approaches are achieved through exposing students to a curriculum that reflects the contributions, practices, and history of African ancestors, through enacting a pedagogy that appreciates students’ innate capacity and potential, through viewing students as valuable members of the community and political sphere, and through developing student-teacher relationships that are genuine and mutually beneficial. Taken as whole, Lee’s principles largely fit within the cultural frame. The curricular components illustrate that African inspired educational institutions attempt to combat the racism within schools by providing African American students’ with opportunities to learn about African diasporic history and related cultural practices. These methods are believed to foster African American students’ positive racial identities, and empower their sense of self-worth as well as their personal and political purpose in and out of schools. Looking at principles
2 and 6, and to some degree 4, clear recommendations are made about the types of content and linguistic forms that African centered schools should support.

Reflecting the complexity of how these frames are taken up, some principles also resonate with aspects of the moral, psychological, and political frames. For example, principles 3 and 8 identify the political and collective commitments of African centered pedagogy as seeking to analyze the political intentionality behind the interactions, activities, curriculum, and artifacts, etc. within a school. This type of analysis resonates with the critical thinking and social critique of the social structural frame. Invoking the cultural and psychological frames, principles 5, 7 and 10 highlight the centrality of identity development, teacher-student interactions and the goals of socialization within education. These beliefs are also explicit within Marshall’s mission.

Lee’s framework was useful for understanding the cultural aspects at Marshall, but these tensions of identity, interaction and development required a more focused psychological analysis. Boykin & Toms (1985) conceptual framework of racial socialization is therefore useful for understanding how particular activities or practices at Marshall might serve social and developmental goals. Boykin & Toms (1985) propose that African American children’s resilience to hostile or racist encounters stems from the protective features of racial socialization. Building upon DuBois’ (1903) notion of “double consciousness,” Boykin & Toms suggest that the essential educational challenge for African Americans is one of internalized racism. African Americans must figure out how to reconcile the contradictory promise of the American dream and the starkness of African American life—of being simultaneously Black and American, an outsider and an insider. African Americans have to integrate three complex racialized aspects of consciousness or a “triple quandary” of concurrent competing and contradictory identities as members of: 1) mainstream America: an individualized, competitive society, (2) a minority group: someone discriminated against, viewed as subordinate; and (3) Black culture: African Americans are not limited to a history of slavery, but are part of a legacy of societal contributions, successes, and experiences of African and African American ancestors that are distinct to their communities. A healthy identity, and the ability to combat future racism/discrimination, rests upon the negotiation and reconciliation of these identity domains.

Similar to the cultural approach of African centered philosophies, Boykin & Toms’ psychological perspective views racism as being challenged through individual children’s internal reconciliation. Both frameworks argue that African American youth need to be inculcated into “a firm and unshakable belief that twelve million American Negroes have the inborn capacity to accomplish just as much as any nation of twelve million anywhere in the world ever accomplished, and that this is not because they are Negroes but because they are human” (DuBois, 1935, p. 333). This requires African American youth having an understanding of their cultural history that is not limited to experiences of inferiority. A tension here between Lee’s principles and Boykin & Toms framework, and that between the cultural and psychological frames, is whether this “unshakeable” belief can make African American youth resilient to internalizing dehumanizing deficit perspectives about themselves or other African Americans and enable them to engage in structural critiques of White domination and African American’s societal position, or if this process of becoming socially aware has the potential to make them more susceptible to being damaged by the contradictions they begin to notice. These tensions will be later examined within the context of Marshall and its perceived impacts.

Synthesizing the beliefs and pedagogical goals proposed by these authors into meta-categories developed a hybrid of these two frameworks (see Figure 2). This framework was used to develop a coding scheme to capture sub-themes that were associated with racial socialization or the
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pedagogical Belief/Goal</th>
<th>Components of Effective Schools for Educating African American youth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Schools should provide an “E” education</td>
<td><strong>Appreciation of African American youth as humans first, students second.</strong> Acknowledge students’ humanity by treating them as individuals with a diversity of needs and experiences (physical, emotional, social, cultural, etc.) defined by human biological conditions and shaped by human societies. Black children are not more or less needy because they’re Black; they’re children living within racist social conditions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Lee principles #1, #2, #4, #5, #7, #8. Boykin &amp; Toms’ identities: 2 &amp; 3)</td>
<td><strong>Potential-affirming teacher-student relationships and techniques</strong> Maintain high expectations, recognize that all students desire to learn and are capable of expanding their knowledge, skills, and self-efficacy to succeed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools should be guided by a principle of reciprocity</td>
<td><strong>Legitimize students’ academic, domain specific, and non-academic identities.</strong> Recognize and cultivate students’ individual and collective strengths and interests.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Lee principles #1, #3, #7, 8#, #9, #10. Boykin &amp; Toms’ identities: 2 &amp; 3)</td>
<td><strong>Shared effort, responsibility &amp; success</strong> Mutual understanding of teachers, volunteers, parents, students and other community members that his or her own future and success, and that of the community or society, is linked to the development of others- namely youth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teach and reinforce students’ racial and cultural pride</td>
<td><strong>Community as an extended family</strong> Act in a manner that acknowledges that children in a community are the responsibility of everyone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Lee principles #1, #2, #4, #5, #6. Boykin &amp; Toms’ identities: 3)</td>
<td><strong>Foster students’ understanding and identity as part of a racial group</strong> Appreciate and encourage African American cultural beliefs, practices, and activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teach students about racism, injustice, and activism</td>
<td>Provide a world history and curriculum that focuses on the diverse contributions of the African continent and diaspora, including that of African Americans.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Lee principles #1, #3. Boykin &amp; Toms’ identities: 1 &amp; 2)</td>
<td>Recognize and build upon the connections between students’ racial and academic identities and their academic performance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Develop students’ awareness of racial &amp; social injustices and discrimination</strong> Critically examine American society; its history, institutions and practices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Discuss the benefits of and practice using tools for community and political organizing and individual civic engagement.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
challenging of racism at Marshall. The framework later helped to trace which pedagogical practices or schooling structures observed or discussed by participants were associated with particular beliefs/goals or their sub-themes. A process of refinement was used to analyze individual practices and instances, compare it with the analytical framework, and create or modify the sub-theme codes. In subsequent passes these codes were further refined. This involved defining the parameters of each code and reassessing where it fit into the analytical framework. This initiated a process of combining like codes and creating new codes that better retained the salience of a practice, micro-level instance, or utterance to the analytical framework.

Through this process, there were aspects that participants oriented to as significant to Marshall’s philosophy and practices that were not accounted for in the framework. Chief among these were comments and attributions about it being a small school with small classes. Participants saw this as allowing for a degree of flexibility for the school community, particularly the teachers and the curriculum because it was a private institution with little accountability to standardized federal and state curriculum, testing, and professional conduct policies (e.g. like not being able to hug students, and other professional boundaries that limit interactions with families and students). This flexibility was usually viewed positively and was often connected to the cultural norms of African American families and communities where levels of trust and accountability are established.

The following figure presents an outline of the finalized coding scheme. Each code has two dimensions, positive or negative. For example, the first code “African American children benefit from separate schools” could be coded with a “+” to indicate a participants’ belief that such schools were beneficial or with a “−” to indicate that they did not believe that such schooling environments were beneficial. In the same way, a code of “institutional care +” would indicate the participant or data suggested its presence at Marshall and “institutional care −” would mark its absence. Unless noted, codes assumed that Marshall was being referenced. If a school or environment other than Marshall was being referenced that was documented.

FIGURE 3: Coding scheme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Beliefs/ Pedagogical Goals</th>
<th>Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Schools should provide an “E”ducation</td>
<td>Academic development Let’s Black children be children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Child-centered/Cultivating student independence or individuality Life skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Citizenship/good Samaritan/Civic education Link between expectations &amp; student performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Critical thinking Link between relationships &amp; student performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cultivates love of /for learning Performing or Creative Arts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Educating a child = raising a child Physical/athletic development/health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Empowers students Positive self-concept/identity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

29 The results of the coding scheme are presented in Chapters III, Chapters IV and V, which deal with the pedagogical philosophies of Marshall, parents’ perspectives, and alumni perspectives, respectively.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Schools should be guided by a principle of reciprocity</th>
<th>Expressive, honest discourse between teachers and students</th>
<th>High expectations</th>
<th>Humanizing</th>
<th>Self-reliance/self-determination</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community/village environment or interactions</td>
<td>School context affects identity or whole person</td>
<td>Whole child</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural wealth</td>
<td>Personal responsibility/accountability</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family or family-like connections</td>
<td>Teacher beliefs/pedagogy related to their identity or upbringing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal interactions</td>
<td>Teaching or learning by example</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interdependence/intergenerational or inter-student support</td>
<td>Teacher self-confidence/security</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal interactions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal care</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teach and reinforce students’ racial and cultural pride</th>
<th>Acting Black</th>
<th>Acting White</th>
<th>Interpersonal care</th>
<th>Cultural history/validation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Afro-centric</td>
<td>Cultural/racial isolation at other schools</td>
<td>Internalization of racism is a problem in schools</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-White</td>
<td>Cultural/racial pride</td>
<td>Need to culturally reprogram children at home</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black children benefit from Black schools</td>
<td>Political views at home same as at Marshall</td>
<td>Preparation for racial bias</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black students need Black role models</td>
<td>Self-worth/self-possession/self-confidence</td>
<td>Social reconstruction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge Euro-centrism</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenging stereotyping/labeling</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture at home same as at Marshall</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teach students about racism, injustice and activism-</th>
<th>Conflict resolution</th>
<th>Culturally flexible navigators</th>
<th>Discrimination at other schools</th>
<th>Fairness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gwen</td>
<td>Political agency or action</td>
<td>Political clarity</td>
<td>Preparation for bias</td>
<td>Speaking out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Modeling activism</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tolerance/open-mindedness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Additional categories &amp; codes</th>
<th>Force of nature</th>
<th>Has a “formula” for success</th>
<th>Part of a legacy of teachers</th>
<th>Gives credit to Gwen</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gwen</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How found Marshall</th>
<th>A friend</th>
<th>A Marshall family</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marshall</td>
<td>Through Gwen</td>
<td>A newspaper article</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>characteristics</td>
<td>Major’s Community Center</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marshall characteristics</th>
<th>Affordable</th>
<th>Quality of resources</th>
<th>One room school house</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feminism/gender equity</td>
<td>Small school/small classes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Posthoc analyses, however, revealed that the African centered pedagogical framework that guided the coding had to be problematized further to reflect the cultural and political intent of Marshall that wasn’t always bounded by an African centered vision. The coding remained the same, yet in analyzing the data it became apparent that the lens of culturally relevant pedagogy afforded by focusing on African-centered pedagogy alone did not fully capture the full-range of the political spirit of the pedagogy at Marshall. The codes were sufficient, but the way in which I began to understand what they meant for the teachers, parents and alumni, shifted. Rather than only analyzing the entire school within a legacy of African American schools, I realized that I also had to view its parts—i.e. the philosophies and ideologies of its educators—as also part of a legacy—one of African American pedagogy. To capture this tradition, I have recast what I initially viewed as Marshall’s “culturally relevant” teaching (Ladson-Billings, 1990) as “politically relevant” (Beauboeuf-LaFontant, 1999) teaching. This conceptual move recognizes the political clarity and notions of collective reciprocity and racial advancement that scholars have distinguished as being a fundamental part of the pedagogy within many successful African American schools pre-desegregation (Beauboeuf-LaFontant, 1999; Siddle-Walker, 2000) and that I argue continues in many contemporary African American schools, whether or not they formally identify their curriculum or pedagogical philosophies as culturally relevant. It is this “hidden curriculum” underpinning Black educators’ pedagogical practices that differentiates African American students’ schooling experiences within their classrooms, and that the communities orients to as extending beyond them. Below, I further distinguish culturally relevant from politically relevant.

Culturally relevant, politically motivated, and liberation bound

Culturally relevant pedagogy is a model for effective pedagogical practice that attempts to empower “students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes.” (Ladson Billings, 1992, p. 382). Its development came out of a need to address issues of student achievement and inclusion, and is based on the premise that if learning structures and stimuli are grounded in a cultural context that is familiar to students, there is a greater potential for cognitive expansion and knowledge growth (Allen & Boykin, 1992; Ladson-Billings, 1992). The goal of this model is to provide a framework in which to address the discontinuity that exists between the cultural background of African-American students and the methods of teaching and curriculum present in classrooms. As with critical pedagogy (Giroux & Simon, 1989), culturally relevant pedagogy tries to influence what knowledge (e.g. student experiences, cultural and racial communities, etc.) and identities are valued and produced within a learning space, and to develop critical perspectives.
that challenge institutional inequities and the status quo (Ladson-Billings, 1995). One key difference is that critical pedagogy focuses on developing individual students’ social critique and will to action, while culturally relevant pedagogy aims to develop students’ cultural understandings and ways of knowing in the service of collective action (Ladson-Billings, 1992).

To this end, a key component of culturally relevant pedagogy is to apprentice students into a learning community that embraces and legitimizes their real life experiences and existing forms of knowledge (academic and non-academic), and frames individual success as group success. Part of this process of building community involves the teachers developing “a reciprocal relationship with students where they use their professional knowledge and skills to help students academically, socially, and culturally. In turn, the students can use their cultural and community knowledge to help their teachers more fully integrate into the students’ (and their parents’ and communities’) worlds” (Ladson-Billings, 1992, p. 388).

There is not, however, a single monolithic version of culturally relevant pedagogy, but a spectrum of practices and levels of implementation. The most sophisticated forms, most likely to have the greatest positive impact, require an equal-status dialectal relationship between the teacher, students and students’ families and communities rather than the types of contempt or pity approaches discussed in Chapter I. This involves the teacher having developed, or actively and consciously being in the process of developing, a sociocultural vision that recognizes their own racial, cultural, gendered, and class backgrounds and eschews deficit orientations (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Further, to sustain teachers and students’ collective critique and struggle against the status quo, the teachers must also be working towards and/or continually revising a political vision that begins with examinations and ownership of their own privilege, personal investments, and assumptions and modeling such a process for their students. Attempts at culturally relevant teaching without these elements, while well intentioned, may be fatally flawed in ways that reproduce or exacerbate the very inequities they desire to address.

The philosophy and practices of Marshall and of its teachers could be viewed through this lens of cultural relevancy, and the ideologies of some of its current and past teachers’ may indeed lie along the spectrum of its implementation. The Black and non-Black Marshall teachers using such an approach have strived to lessen the isolation and debunk the prevalent stereotypes surrounding African American students through cultivating high-quality relationships with these students and their families, and through having a culturally inclusive practice and curriculum that validates the students cultural identities, histories, and forms of knowledge. At the same time, as I found in analyzing the data through this lens, placing primacy on the cultural relevancy overshadows the political understanding and urgency guiding the practices of many Marshall teachers, especially Gwen Marshall, whose political upbringing and Black educational vision formulated the school’s philosophy and most significantly represents Marshall’s pedagogy. In pushing for this nuanced perspective, Beauboeuf-Lafonant (1999) notes that in culturally relevant pedagogy, “there is no intrinsic relationship between such pedagogy and black educators” (p. 704). That is, the focus on “culture” does not fully appreciate that at the heart of many Black educators’ practice, and at the core of the African American struggle for racial uplift through schools, is a deep “understanding that their oppression is a complete contradiction of the founding ideals of democracy in the United States” (p. 704).

The majority of the scholars referenced in Chapter I recognized the hegemonic, colonizing, and stratifying ideological roots of public schooling (Boykin, 1986). Their battle has been to challenge the institution to more fully embrace liberatory, democratic ideals rather than be satisfied with the ad hoc personal advancement that might occur in and through schools. The
pedagogy of Black educators reflects this orientation and requires its analysis not just as culturally relevant, but more importantly as *politically* relevant. To be sure, not all African American teachers are politically relevant teachers, or even culturally relevant teachers. However, there are educators like Gwen and other teachers at Marshall, who have been cultivated within a tradition of Black education, who have worked in different school environments, and/or who have lived through different waves of schooling reforms that have molded their pedagogical beliefs and practices as political endeavors. Recasting their teaching as politically relevant appreciates the cultural knowledge and practices that such teachers bring and emphasizes the social, political, and historical understandings that inform their practice.

This conceptual shift from the cultural to the political calls attention to these educators’ purposeful challenging of schools to move towards an ethical, democratic goal of social transformation versus their racist past of system maintenance; that is from ideals of equity and inclusion towards a fuller realization of racial justice. These teachers aren’t necessarily “culturally Black” or only benefit from a cultural synchronicity (Irvine, 1990) with their students, more importantly they are “politically Black,” i.e. they are mindful of the political realities and the aspirations of African Americans as a segment of society, and are conscious of their potential impact on the lives of their students; “our children.”
CHAPTER III

Improvisation within Structure: Making visible the polyrhythms of Black educational practice

“I’ve always taken dance classes…..and enjoyed them. Ballet, tap, and so forth. But once I heard the polyrhythmic beats of those [African] drums, I was like “Hey!” and I knew there was no going back to ballet for me (laughter).” – Gwen Marshall (fieldnotes, 10/13/10)

Part and parcel of understanding Marshall’s attempts and perceived impacts to challenging racism and engaging in racial socialization, is an understanding of the educational philosophies of Gwen Marshall, the founder and lead teacher who has shaped the school from the beginning. In later chapters, I analyze how parents and alumni evaluate the implementation and impact of this philosophy and pedagogy. Here, I use interview data from members of the Marshall community to distill the essential pedagogical themes underlying Gwen’s practice that come out of her upbringing within a family of teachers and whose threads have been woven into the multivocal pedagogy of Marshall teachers. At the same time, in order to analyze Marshall as a contemporary iteration of African Americans’ struggle to educate for racial uplift and justice, the philosophies guiding the school are considered within a legacy of Black pedagogy.

The first section describes Gwen’s upbringing and uses the microanalytic framework presented in Chapter II to highlight the beliefs/pedagogical goals and sub-themes that cultivated Gwen as an educator and influenced her educational philosophy. Here her early teaching experiences are also explored and give context to her decision to found Marshall Langston School. The second section analyzes how Gwen developed the educational philosophy that guides Marshall and its practices, and analyzes the teacher survey and interview data that unpacks other Marshall teachers’ philosophies in relation to the school’s. Within this microanalysis, the macroanalytic frames will also be used to situate the pedagogical themes at Marshall within a broader tradition of African American educators’ attempts to use education to deconstruct racial inequalities and promote African American’s collective racial advancement.

Gwen Marshall: “A force of nature”

Gwen’s story is part of a complex mosaic that gives tribute to the distinct lives and practices of individual Black educators even as it showcases the historical patterns that unify them. This is not to say that there is a monolithic or predictive quality that bounds Black pedagogical philosophies and practices; not all Black teachers fit neatly within this tradition nor are all teachers who are invested in aspects of Black educational philosophy necessarily Black. In formulating their individual pedagogies, Black educators draw upon their upbringings and their training in a variety of educational approaches—African centered, Dewey, Freire, Montessori, Piaget, Socrates, Vygotsky, etc.—to improvise upon these foundations in unique and divergent ways. The pedagogies and practices of Septima Clark, Mr. Dillard, Marva Collins, Dr.

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30 Thank you to Dan Perlstein for this phrasing. In pushing me to more critically consider the patterns of African American pedagogy, he treated me to a lovely metaphorical exercise around quilts, music, and basketball as a reminder to periodically step back and see from afar that which you are viewing up close.
31 Gwen Marshall’s first name is her preferred form of address by persons of all ages and is thus used here.
32 This is a quote from a Marshall teacher and was a sentiment commonly shared among those interviewed.
Abdulalim Shabazz are well-known examples of the countless Black teachers and administrators who simultaneously draw from and reshape African American pedagogy as a distinct and yet nuanced variety of American educational practice. Across the seemingly disparate pedagogical collages of these educators run the themes of educating for racial justice, reinforcing students’ racial and cultural pride, cultivating the communal bonds (Morris, 1999) and reciprocal development of African Americans, and providing African American youth with an Education.

Thus, a close view of Gwen and her school’s pedagogy renders visible how Gwen builds upon distinct influences, while a bird’s eye view brings into focus the larger montage of Black educational philosophies and practices she comes out of and feeds back into. Scholars have previously used such macro- or micro-lenses to examine individual or individual sets of African American educators and/or schools up close (e.g. Collins & Tamarkin, 1982; Ginwright, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Sowell, 1974; Walker, 1996) or to distill past educational patterns by viewing a larger landscape of actors and intentions (e.g. Anderson, 1988,1990; Butchart, 1988; Franklin, 1978). Others have shifted between these lenses to focus on the connections between individual actors (an educator or a school) and networks or groups to highlight broader politics and patterns within African American educational history (Fairclough, 2007; Walker, 2009).

As a cohesive endeavor, this dissertation uses this last approach by focusing on an individual school to exemplify African Americans’ current struggles to use education to instigate social change. Specific to this chapter, these attempts at racial uplift and justice in and through schools are analyzed through the practices of the school’s teachers precisely because those teachers are directly and indirectly linked into a tradition of Black pedagogical philosophies that does not parallel White educators’ histories. In essence, this chapter is an attempt to weave in another inimitable patch into the syncopated symphony of Black educational practice. It begins with exploring the influences on Gwen Marshall’s pedagogical beliefs and decisions to become a teacher, and analyzes them within the microanalytic beliefs/pedagogical goals framework.

The making of a teacher

Born in the early 1950s into a family of educators, her father was a mathematics teacher at a segregated Black high school and her mother a nursery school teacher, Gwen Marshall’s formation occurred within a context where one’s profession was deeply intertwined with their service as community and political activists. Gwen’s parents were part of an intricate web of Black school leaders and teachers across geographic areas that worked in and through Black institutions to sustain and promote familial & cultural values, educational initiatives, and politicize communities (Walker, 2009). Within their Kansas town, Gwen’s parents’ roles as educators, members of the NAACP and other political communities, were accompanied by their activities as a muralist and a businesswoman who founded several nursery schools. Gwen’s early exposure was to a pedagogical model in which an educator’s beliefs/pedagogical goals were invested in providing an Education guided by a principle of reciprocity, seeking to reinforce racial and cultural pride, and serving within their community as activists in the fight against racism and injustice. Her parents, as Black educators, were invested in being active citizens and saw their community roles and their pedagogy as intertwined.

At a young age, friends, family, and teachers quickly singled out Gwen Marshall as a budding educator. By the time she was 12, Gwen was teaching dance to younger children at the behest of

33 Exact year and date are not provided for anonymity purposes.
her dance teacher and her mother who told her, “Oh Gwen, you [italics mine] can lead children.” By 15, she was teaching swimming and beginning to teach trampoline. Her friends often selected her as the “teacher” during role-play because she “knew how to do it” and “was like her mother” (interview, 9/8/10). Their appraisal was not ill founded. Gwen and her sister, who also became a teacher, did help out their mother in her numerous nursery schools. In fact, when they were in college and their grandmother fell ill, their mother took time off and assigned each of them to help direct one of the nursery schools. They would go to the schools and work before and after their own classes (interview, 9/8/10).

Having always been exposed to her mother’s pedagogy, at her nursery school and at home, it was difficult for Gwen to articulate which practices she learned from her mother. She simply says, “I just had a role model, so I followed it…You know, I just knew how to do it. I guess I’m a quick study. I was then anyway, right? It’s like this is what you do!” (interview, 3/3/11). Easier for Gwen to identify was the influence of her mother’s demeanor and interactional style on her own teaching. Gwen watched her mother “interact with other parents… with other children, and you know how sometimes when there’s lots of noise, I can just tune it out and remain calm? My mother’s office was in the front and I remember….kids were just screaming and…the teachers were scurrying around and trying to get them to be quiet. My mother’s just doing her bookwork and is like—not getting upset, you know. And so, I just watched her” (interview, 3/3/11). Gwen, like her mother, “doesn’t get rattled” instead “she [Gwen] could get really pretty upset with the kids… she would sit down and they would talk about it and work it out and take the time to do that… and also teach the child how to deal with, how to use their own resources to solve the problem” (teacher interview, 6/18/11).

Utilizing the microanalytic framework presented in the previous chapter, Gwen’s ability to retain her composure and engage in an open discourse that fosters conflict resolution skills and teaches to the whole child corresponds to Beliefs/Pedagogical Goals #1: Schools should provide an Education, namely the sub-themes of conflict resolution, expressive discourse, and whole child and to #2: Schools should be guided by a principle of reciprocity, sub-theme teaching or learning by example. This teacher’s comment reflects Gwen having an expansive view of her role as an educator such that she is able to move beyond her personal feelings and what is going on around her in order to teach to the whole child and model for students how to step up and try to deal with a situation, rather than letting it frustrate you or pushing it under the rug.

Another philosophy that Gail inherited from her mother and modeled for students was an interactional approach that conveys high expectations and unconditional love without being a pushover. Gwen’s husband explains, “her mom, while she was extremely demanding and always on your case, always in your business, she was the first adult that really showed me what unconditional love was. And…. she, of course, passed that on to Gwen. And that's one of the gifts that she [Gwen] has, that she can provide that for a whole group of kids” (6/18/11). In the same vein, a former teacher commented that “Gwen is compassionate but has boundaries…she gets human beings” (teacher interview, 4/14/11). To clarify their meaning, the teacher went on to say that Gwen understands that people need to question things, verbalize things, and that sometimes they need time to slow down and reflect on all the things that are thrown at them.” A parent of an alumni shared how she has seen Gwen do this and how her child took it up,

“I wish I could describe it, but what's wonderful is that she manages to pass it on to kids. So I've seen my daughter do it. I have seen my daughter handle young children in the same way, who are acting out, in the same way that Gwen does and it's a very non-judgmental way of
approaching a child and saying "You are not being your best right now. And... but without accusing, without judging, with- I don't know how she does it- whether it's tone of voice or the words she chooses, but she has a way of approaching children and letting them know that her expectations are higher. I mean I have this belief that part of the reason that, um, African American kids do so poorly in public schools is because of the expectations of teachers. They expect them not to do well. She [Gwen] expects the best from every child. And without making them feel bad, she lets them know how they can get there. What specifically can they do... to give her their best, or how, “well you did this, what could you have done?” And if she's talking about behavior or academics or homework or kindness, it doesn't matter what it is, she has a very non-judgmental way of pointing out how they can be their best human being possible. And, um, and challenging them to think at the same time .... you know, she's compassionate with it. But she's also, she doesn't spare, you know she doesn't, um, I've seen some teachers before it it's very easy when kids are, for example if kids are going through a whole lot at home, it's very easy to say, 'Well, oh um ok you don't have to do your homework.' The other extreme is to say, ‘I don't care what you've got going on, you know, what's going on at home, you have to do this and you're horrible if you don't.’ Then there's Gwen's approach, which is acknowledging it, getting it, asking them what it is that is troubling them. Getting them to identify what it is that's keeping them from their best. And then helping them find it. And helping them find a way to do their best in spite of whatever else is going on and providing a safe environment to do that in, with an enormous amount of respect. And it's, it's genius on her part. I mean I've watched her do it, I cannot tell you how many times. Because, you know, kids need- they don't need your sympathy. They need to be heard and she hears them” (parent interview, 2/18/11).

This parent’s sentiments echoed those of other parents and of Gwen’s fellow teachers who repeatedly commented on the high degree of care and humanity Gwen demonstrated while at the same time demanding the utmost from students and not shying away from dealing with tough issues. In explaining how she approaches children, Gwen shared,

“You know there’s no reason to talk down to a child... you know, you don’t need to give them too much information, but I think that I like them, they like me, you know. And they want some discipline and I can give it to them swift, swiftly, in a hurry (laughs). But it’s generally fair. I mean I try to be fair. But they are, uh, children and they have to experience the world, and so they make mistakes, and we’re grownups and we make mistakes, so why judge them for that, just lead them, okay? ‘Looks to me like it wasn’t a great idea you had there, but you tried it’ and if a kid is showing me that they’re really thinking about what they’re gonna do before they do it, you can really use that as a teaching moment. ‘Okay, well, hmm, that didn’t work, let’s think about it.’ You know? And don’t embarrass them. That’s another thing, I don’t- I try not to embarrass them and put ‘em down unless I’m playing with them and they understand that and they like that, you know (laughs)” (interview, 9/8/10).

Gwen’s own expression of her interactional style match the evaluation of the Marshall community. The goals they identify fit underneath the #1 and #2 beliefs/pedagogical goals framework and explicitly spoke to the themes of critical thinking, cultivating students’ independence, expressive discourse, high expectations, humanizing, interpersonal care, lets Black children be children, link between relationships and performance, teacher self-confidence/security and whole child. Several teachers indicated how these aspects of her practice influenced their own teaching with one saying, “I watched … how she approaches those
kids that are having difficulty, I've learned a lot...No matter what it is that's going on, she hears
them and then she draws them out and draws out the best” (teacher interview, 2/18/11).

Gwen’s pedagogical philosophies didn’t only come from her mother. She notes that her
father, also a teacher “was very patient with me …and he believed that children can be taught
anything. I was 5 or 6, I didn’t need to know multiplication but there he was [teaching me]…and
I remember when my niece Nina was about 5, I taught her multiplication” (interview, 3/3/11).
Gwen’s father’s belief about the infinite capacity of children wasn’t passed on to her through
watching him in his classroom. Instead, it happened in the home. Gwen was the youngest child
in the family and her father had more time to allow her to work with him in the family garage,
which served as his art studio and handyman space. There he worked on his murals and repaired
things for the house. Periodically, he also let Gwen go with him when he went to paint the
marquee for new movies at the local theater. Rather than just having her watch, he involved her
in his work. She described that,

“he would paint scenes and letter it, and I got to be the person who would do the chalk string
so the lettering would be just right....he would say ‘Okay, the string is at the right height and
it’s level’ and I would pull the string out of the notches and he would let it go and there was
this blue chalk line and then my dad would paint, you know, the words on and I just thought
‘WHOA! This is AMAZING!’ I was just so captivated by this job that I got to do, right?”
(interview, 3/3/11).

In doing this work with her father, Gwen gained a sense that children, with some scaffolding
and a firm belief in their own capacity, could do anything and didn’t need to be restricted by
their developmental age. These “hands on” learning experiences also gave her a sense of “know
how” and a drive to “fix things.” After sharing this in the interview, she laughingly reflected, “I
guess I can fix little kids too” (interview, 3/3/11).

Her playfulness about this occurs within an upbringing where it was expected that everyone
took care of and taught one another, especially those younger than themselves. This was not
considered a burden; rather “you didn’t think about that responsibility, it’s just what you did”
(interview, 9/8/10). Gwen’s parents believed that children “learn by example” and encouraged
Gwen and her siblings to ask questions and make decisions for themselves (interview 3/3/11).
Accordingly, Gwen believes that giving responsibility to children is beneficial and challenges
them to be more thoughtful, accountable, and to demonstrate what they know. Gwen’s
upbringing relates to several beliefs/pedagogical goals, particularly the sub-themes: critical
thinking, high expectations, humanizing, interdependence, intergenerational/interr-support
support, personal responsibility/accountability, self-reliance/self-determination, self-worth/self-
possesion/self-confidence, teacher beliefs/pedagogy related to their identity/upbringing, and
teaching/learning by example. Supporting the presence of these themes within Gwen’s approach
and its impact on students, a 1990s newspaper article about the school had this quote from a
parent: “Gwen Marshall has this belief that you don't really know something until you can teach
it to someone else…Teaching the little kids has given my youngest son, Belay, such confidence.”
Similarly, a 1988 school pamphlet quotes a student as saying: “I like this school because it’s
hard and I can tell I’m learning. I’m having fun and I’m not afraid of numbers anymore.”

These associations between Gwen’s pedagogical philosophies with those of her parents are
more than conjecture. She attributes her own pedagogical beliefs to growing up in a middle-
class family of teachers where her parents presented themselves as elders who knew more and
could teach their things, but also as individuals who respected her, cared for her, and recognized
her talents. In turn, her parents knew her not only as a child, but also as a person with thoughts and feelings. In summarizing what she felt she learned from her parents, Gwen said,

“to respect children and to know that- to have high expectations from them-for children. To know they’re smart. To know that they have this social life and they have this emotional life and we should respect it and understand that they have it, you know. And that- and there’s always humor ((laughter)) you know, right? And I think also what I learned from them too, my parents, is that….no one should be the underdog. You need to be empathetic and um, you need to know what’s going on in this world. You know, because when we’re too old to vote, they have to do that, you know. So, ....the child is a complicated person. And it’s good that, if you can, to touch on all those parts, you know. And to help them blend those parts together, you know…. That’s another thing too, my parents played with me. You get a lot of information, you get a lot of love for that kid and you learn more about them and so you can gear that lesson towards them more.” (interview, 3/3/11)

This interweaving of the social and the educational at home tuned Gwen into what it meant to be a teacher, an elder, and a community member. From her own words, the sub-themes of child-centered/cultivating student independence, citizenship, critical thinking, emotional development, humanizing, interdependence/intergenerational support, interpersonal care, personal responsibility/accountability, political clarity, teacher beliefs/pedagogy related to their identity/upbringing, teaching/learning by example, and whole child. This exposure early on also clued her into seeing every moment as both a teaching and a learning opportunity for the teacher and the child. Marshall parents recognized this trait and commented that Gwen taught by example, really got to know their kids, and “never stops teaching” (Parent interview, 2/18/11).

Other early influences affecting Gwen’s worldview, and subsequently her pedagogy, were her mother’s beliefs about gender equity and Gwen’s own experiences in mostly white schools. Gwen’s mother was an “early feminist” who believed that “boys and girls could do the same thing,” which instilled in Gwen a belief that “my brother was no smarter, no stronger, no better than we [she and her sisters]. He did the same thing. And…she [my mother] was my father’s equal, you know” (interview, 3/3/11). For example, her mother stuck to those beliefs and enrolled her sons and her daughters in baseball, much to the chagrin of some others in the neighborhood. Gwen credits her mother with her philosophies around feminism/gender equity and her tolerance/open-mindedness in and out of schools.

Gwen’s mother wasn’t only a pioneer of gender equity in the area. She was also among the first Black students to integrate the local Catholic school, a school Gwen later attended. So few Black students went there that years later when Gwen was in high school the elderly librarian always called her “Laverne,” Gwen’s mother’s name—likely the only Black student she remembered. Visibly frustrated by this, Gwen’s sister pulled her aside one day and said, “Honey, she probably can’t see you, she just sees a brown shade” (interview, 3/3/10). Yet, it wasn’t until after she’d started Marshall that Gwen fully realized the impact those schooling experiences had on her “psyche” and touched “every part of a person’s being” (interview, 9/8/10). In her schooling experience, Gwen “didn’t have my culture validated. So, um, my parents would undo, at home, what was done at school” (interview, 9/8/10).

Gwen’s experiences in White schools informed her pedagogical philosophies about how to best educate students, particularly those that have been historically underserved by American schools. Such experiences led Gwen to believe that Black children benefit from Black schools,
Black students need Black role models, and that schools should advocate cultural history/validation, cultural/racial pride, social reconstruction, in order to challenge Euro-centrism and avoid parents having to culturally reprogram their children at home. For her, this clearly does not mean that schools should promote Anti-White values or African Americans should only attend Black schools, instead it reflects concerns that so far in American schools many Black students internalize and experience discrimination and racism and that children should be nurtured in tolerant environments that prepare them for bias and where they are guided by teachers who possess political clarity and develop them as culturally flexible navigators.

Surprisingly, despite the strong memories of her schooling experiences and her childhood foundations, Gwen shares that she “fell into” teaching. She considered majoring in dance, and also took education courses at a nearby liberal arts college (Interview, 9/8/11). She ultimately received her teaching credential and a master’s degree in education, as well as studied the Montessori method and volunteered at a Montessori school. She went on to teach in a public elementary school near a larger Kansas town a couple of hours away. That experience, however, was short lived. In spring 1978, Gwen filed racial discrimination charges against her school district for unlawfully transferring her to another school without her request or without explanation, and against the behest of parents and students at her current school.

As chronicled in the town newspaper, Gwen consulted with the local NAACP, filed a complaint with the Kansas Commission on Civil Rights, and requested an investigation by the American Civil Liberties Union. With the support of legal counsel and faculty from the local university’s School of Social Work, Gwen filed her charges of unlawful transfer and harassment based on inappropriate comments that were publicly made about her interracial marriage and about her sexuality because of her feminist and other political views, which the local newspaper identified as “radical.” Gwen requested that if she was not going to be allowed to remain at her current school, to be transferred to another school that had a sizeable Black student body, but for which there were no Black teachers. Her stated reason was that Black children at those schools needed “role models.” This request was in direct resistance to the existing transfer she was issued, a move that she and fellow residents charged as following a trend of “ghettoization” of Black teachers by sending the majority of them to one school, a charge the school district denied.

This political battle that marked Gwen’s early teaching experiences in Kansas demonstrated how the earlier social and political foundations of her childhood came into play in her own philosophy as a teacher, i.e. that as an educator she was responsible and accountable to the Black community and needed to speak out and exercise her political agency to ensure that her rights, and others’ rights, of citizenship were not infringed upon. The political clarity with which she spoke out against the racism, discrimination, and intolerance of the school district and others, and directed her own political action towards drawing attention to further discriminatory acts against Blacks that were occurring in the district, highlights the extent to which her upbringing was embedded in her own identity and philosophy as an educator. Her actions reveal the investment she felt to serve the Black community in and out of schools, and her willingness to use her own situation to model for others the political clarity and action necessary for change.

More than a year after Gwen filed the original complaint, the town newspaper reported that the Kansas Commission on Civil Rights’ investigation was slated to begin. This article came after nearly a year of no coverage about Gwen relative to the case or otherwise. Only a few weeks after the newspaper announced the upcoming investigation, on the front page of the
newspaper was a picture of a smiling student of color\textsuperscript{34} from Gwen’s class—she was now teaching at the school she had resisted transfer to—with a photo caption highlighting the school’s presentations. The timing of this “feel good” feature is interesting both because the newspaper’s reporting of the racial harassment case was not balanced nor favorable to Gwen, nor had their been any history of the newspaper featuring the school where Gwen was forced to transfer while her case was pending. After finishing the school year at the contested school, Gwen decided, “I was finished…I just didn’t fit in” (personal correspondence, 6/29/11) and the couple left Kansas heading towards left-leaning Northern California. The news coverage, and seemingly the political impetus for the investigation quickly diminished thereafter and the investigation ended.

That summer, Gwen was hopeful about being in a politically progressive region, and perhaps having been jaded by her public school teaching experience, she took a teaching position at a small, independent, non-traditional school whose philosophy sought to encourage “world citizenship and social responsibility” as well as foster student’s critical thinking. Teaching in a racially and ethnically diverse classroom, Gwen had “everyone” there and anticipated building upon the cultural richness of her students’ families. That first semester, she invited parents to bring in artifacts from their country or culture and to talk about them to the class with the presentations culminating in a big meal together. One day, the class was so engaged in the presentations that they forgot to go to lunch/recess and the head of the school came in to remind them to come outside. Hoping to continue the lesson, the students said, “We don’t want to go to recess, this is INTERESTING stuff!,” and Gwen suggested they eat in their classroom while they finished. The head of school rejected this proposal and indicated that what they were doing “wasn’t that important” and made them adjourn (interview, 9/8/10). This action precipitated Gwen’s speaking with other teachers and eventually speaking out against other practices at the school, including labor disputes. These conversations devolved into her being threatened with termination, withholding of pay, and being disparagingly called a communist and a feminist.

Frustrated, Gwen complained to her friends who told her, “Start a school. Your mom did. You can do that. It’s in your blood. It’s genetic.” (interview, 9/8/10). Soon afterwards Gwen told her mother of her plans. Her mother became her first donor and sent her the money for desks, books, and “whatever” Gwen needed because “it was just second nature to her” (Interview, 9/8/10). Gwen secured a small Victorian in a lower-income Black neighborhood to house the school and held meetings with her student’s families, eventually inviting 10 students—8 Black and 2 White—to start at Marshall Langston School in January 1980.\textsuperscript{35}

*Creating an Educational institution: Black Montessori, Black Hippie School, or more of that Old Time Religion*

Having grown up within a family of teachers and school founders, it’s no coincidence that Gwen became a teacher and founded her own school. As her friends said, “It’s in your blood.” In creating Marshall her idea was to cultivate students to:

\textit{“Umm, to be a good person, to stand up for their rights, and to help other people who can’t...That is pretty much what I learned as a child, in my household... that’s what I saw. And I learned by example, obviously. Umm, and to be a feminist, because that’s what my}

\textsuperscript{34} The student’s racial or ethnic background is not mentioned in the caption. The Arabic name of the student and his picture (partially obscured by the mask he’s wearing) lend credence to my identifying him as a student of color.

\textsuperscript{35} By 1989, the school had outgrown this space and moved to its current location.
mother was. So I think that my ideal was that I would develop these children academically, socially, emotionally, help with the emotional, and that we would teach, you know, we would set by example, or teach through videos, books, what have you... teach social justice. And, um, I don’t know if I consciously wrote that down, or even thought about it. I think I just came in, whoever I am, whoever I was then, I brought that all in with me you know and that’s what um, that’s how I live and so I live here too (laughing).” (interview, 9/8/10)

Also influencing her evolving teaching philosophy was the political climate of the 60s and 70s, such as the Feminist, Civil Rights, Black Power, and Free Speech movements. A self-described “hippie” (interview, 3/3/11), Gwen developed her school an alternative to the institutionalized educational system and social hierarchy that set kids up to fail. She also wanted to create a learning environment that would challenge society’s restrictions about gender, race, religion, sexuality, and other -isms. To do this, her vision was to build a community school that cultivated respect, individuality, interdependence, tolerance, and peace. Key to this vision was to develop children “academically, socially, emotionally,” to “validate a child’s culture” (interview, 3/3/11) and to “inform these kids, and their parents, ‘cus the parents learn from the school also about politics, to politicize these people” (interview, 9/8/11). In an early Marshall pamphlet, the school describes its philosophy and its social critique of existing schools in the following way:

“Marshall Langston School is a unique community school. It offers an elementary education to gifted children of color designed to encourage academic excellence as well as racial and cultural affirmation. By encouraging respect, pride and social responsibility among students—regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation or ability—the school aims to empower our children and nurture the coming generation of leaders for social change."

“Today’s headlines offer sensationalized accounts of eight-year olds dealing drugs and skyrocketing numbers of drop outs among inner city kids. These children are casualties of a society—particularly its school system—that systematically discourages African-American and Latino youth. Bright children of color who are bored in overcrowded classrooms and angered by teachers who do not treat them with respect, become behavior problems and are tracked into dead-end programs.

Marshall Langston School offers a clear alternative to warehousing children discouraged by the public school system. For example, seven-year old Aida came to MLS after the public school counselor diagnosed her as ‘developmentally disabled.’ By the end of her first year at MLS, she was reading at a 4th grade level and won the school’s read-a-thon.”

In teaching to the whole child and viewing all children as “gifted,” Gwen’s vision for Marshall was to prepare students as citizens and advocates for change, as well as politically inform their families and communities. Building on her upbringing and her own political awareness, Gwen wanted the school to remain a community, a place where people “live” and aren’t disrespected or disregarded because of their affiliations with certain social groups or their non-mainstream beliefs. She decided to keep the school small and family-like where the members of the school could really get to know each other, there would be a continuity of care, and students would become responsible and accountable for one another.

“They go to school for so long here, see so they, they spend the time...And that’s nice, you know, because you get to know them and you know their parents, you know their
grandparents. Um and you know they’re from a family, simple as that. You also create a family here. So and I guess I’m the leader of the family. I’m the leader of the pack (laughs).” (interview, 9/8/11)

Other clear influences shaping her pedagogical beliefs and that of Marshall’s philosophy were her formation in a Catholic schooling environment, her liberal arts education, her training in a Montessori setting, and her more recent teaching experiences in public and private schools. Understandably, Gwen didn’t always consider which of her philosophies stemmed from which experience. However, in interviewing parents three interesting metaphors about Marshall’s philosophy and pedagogy emerged and were later expounded upon by other parents and alumni. They were that Gwen’s school is “like a Black Montessori,” was a “Black Hippie School” and that Gwen’s school “is very basic 3’Rs.” Other parents thought that Marshall was a mixture of all of these approaches, “[Marshall is] Unique.. because of the combination. Unique among all schools because, um, there’s old fashion, new fashion, and [its] for African American children. And then it’s small, it’s just a little jewel” (parent interview, 2/17/11). These metaphors, while they invoke distinct pedagogical approaches, are nonetheless qualified as the “Black” versions. These caveats suggest that parents, to some degree, were also aware of the cultural and political clarity of Marshall’s approach—however they identified it—that distinguished it from the White, middle class orientation that often dominates the Montessori approach or a Hippie aesthetic.

The metaphor of Marshall as a Black Montessori referred to the perception that Marshall’s philosophy was analogous to U.S. Montessori approach that was “less structured” (2/21/11) than the typical school management style and organization of student activity. They viewed Marshall, like the Montessori schools they knew of, as fostering student independence, allowing for classes of mixed aged groups of students, and not always relying upon direct instruction. While Marshall students attend a roster of classes, parents still saw the school’s philosophy as respectful of individual students’ natural process of development and allowing for independent work time where students are able to choose from a variety of activities or materials. Likewise, the philosophy of the school allowed for more fluid groups of students of roughly the same age and skills rather than separating students into individual grade levels based solely on age. Clearly drawing upon her Montessori training, Gwen philosophy at Marshall was to allow for greater degrees of student “discovery,” independence, and a less didactic teacher approach than traditional schooling environments.

The second metaphor of Marshall as a “Black Hippie School” referenced the self-directed nature of some aspects of the curriculum that built upon students’ interests and ideas, as well as the elements of social freedom and alternative educational style (critical thinking, community or family-like environment, conflict resolution, fairness, feminism/gender equity, lack of standardized testing, modeling activism, one-room schoolhouse, small school/small classes, and tolerance/openmindedness) at Marshall. Also referenced within this was the focus on the performing and creative arts that wasn’t restricted to mainstream philosophies about the arts, but included drumming, African and other cultural dance and arts forms, hula-hooping, trampoline, yoga, and other cultural and artistic forms that are often oriented to part of a Hippie ethos.

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36 These metaphors were not originally part of the interview protocol, but were added to it after repeated references to these models emerged in the data.
37 The first group of students were 2nd and 3rd graders. Through the year additional students came in. This led to the development of the “little kids” and “big kids” peer groups. More recently, a “middle kids” group was added.
The third metaphor, “3 Rs” or “very old fashioned” (parent interview, 2/18/11), would seem to contradict the freedom and unconventional tenor of the first two. However, community members indicated that Marshall’s philosophy and pedagogy was “some of all of that” (parent interview, 3/5/11) and shared that although the philosophy of Marshall pushed the traditional boundaries of schooling, at the crux of it was still a belief that students needed to learn the basics or the “fundamentals.” When I asked Gwen (interview, 3/3/11) what she thought of these metaphors about Marshall’s philosophy and her own orientation she agreed that each one represented part of what drives her school and reflect her own beliefs and sense of identity:

“Well I am a hippie ((laughter)). And I think that comes from- I want peace and love in this building, you know? I want them to go out and spread it; that’s where that comes from, right. And maybe because the colors [around the school] are all kooky and colorful and it is! But its- the 3 hours, they learn the basics. ‘Cuz if you learn the basics, no one can take anything else from you.”

“Montessori believes that they help you. I mean we are ultimately responsible but we set the scene and they move about it and they feel empowered and that’s what’s what I’m trying to do is empower these little rugrats (laughter).”

“My catholic school... it was just a better school. I mean because the nuns would give up their whole life for you... I mean they were just focused on what you needed, the nuns....At my catholic school... we were in plays and I have a minor in drama, so... in my quest to make them poised and be able to remember things and um, you know, if you go to a party and someone’s playing the piano, and you have the skill of reciting, well ‘Ha!’ (laughter). Um, so I was always amazed....when you could do something, you’re contributing..., while there are people who are just standing back and they feel embarrassed.”

“My philosophy. Um, to teach to the child- to teach to the child’s intelligence. To be aware of what is going on with that child, for instance if they’ve had, if they have a hard home life and we know that they’ve had a fight with their mother or father that day, let them relax, you know but make sure you let them know that you know- be empathetic to them. Um, and just tread easy that day. That there’s always a tomorrow and that’s really a Hallmark saying but there’s really is tomorrow that they can learn it, it’s a child, they can learn it tomorrow. They’ll be in a better condition tomorrow and if they know that they can count on you to be there and um that you pretty much, I mean I pretty much like them unconditionally, yeah. Um, then they can learn anything from you. So I think you meet the person where they are. You meet the child where they are, where they come from, what they know, and not try to force it on them, you know? And to be their friend but to also be their adult- and it’s not so much that I’m their disciplinarian because I want them to discipline themselves ‘cuz it’s a hard job if you have to discipline someone...So, um, I think what I want my philosophy is every child is different. This is not a factory and we’ll gain their trust and then I can teach them. You know, they trust what I’m saying and I don’t want them to think I’m a know-it-all. I don’t want them to swallow everything we tell them; I don’t want to brainwash them. And sometimes it’s hard not to because, you know, you want to give them these facts and they’re generally hard and fast facts but I want them to question that. Right. That’s my philosophy (laughter).”
The above excerpts underscore how Gwen’s beliefs draw from and are improvisations upon her personal and professional history with all of its juxtapositions and nuances. This diverse pedagogical landscape that informs Gwen’s teaching philosophy has, in turn, shaped the philosophy, curriculum, and environment at Marshall. There are moments of direct instruction, unstructured student-led activity, old-school recitation and multiplication tables, and discussions with students about how to think about their personal comportment and individual agency or activism. The philosophy aims to be non-judgmental as students engage in this learning curve and make decisions within these realms, while at the same time providing models—in the form of other students, teachers, and parents—a variety of ways of being. Binding this multifaceted philosophy together is a commitment to Educate children, as children, and as members of a society that still needs to be improved. Being at the elementary level, Marshall sees its role as with providing children with the “building blocks” not only for academic success, but also for success in developing themselves as individuals, Black people, and as citizens. This political clarity unifies the diversity of Black educators’ and schools’ philosophies or practices and guides their personal and professional commitments to break the cycle of oppression or “miseducation” (Woodson, 1933) of African Americans through schools. The following section draws in the perspectives of the other Marshall teachers to demonstrate how they expand upon Marshall’s philosophies, and how they are connected to the larger landscape of Black educational practice.

A quilt for Coltrane: The patchwork of African American pedagogy

Many African American teachers have chosen to be educators to aid in the personal and social emancipation of their students and families (King, 1991). In the segregated past, Black educators fought for control of their schools, their rights, and simultaneously prepared their students for a world in which such separation wouldn’t exist (Walker, 2009). They served as teachers, counselors, community liaisons, activists, advocates and “gate openers” (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 1999, p. 708) who shared their cultural wealth (Yosso, 2006) with their students and communities despite financial and other constraints (Walker, 1996). Today, educators like those at Marshall juggle similar roles and are faced with new and lingering social issues, e.g. the fractured residential and educational arrangement of African American students and their families. These educators remain unified in their commitment to the collective racial advancement of African Americans in and through schools, yet their enactments of it may vary.

This next section explores the unifying and distinct threads of Marshall teachers. It begins with a demographic overview of Marshall teachers collected from the survey. Next, the microanalytic framework for politically relevant teaching is used to create subsections that reflect the coding from the teacher interviews. Within these analytical subsections, the macroanalytic frames of racial inequality and racial uplift will also be brought in to contextualize the interview responses within a larger framework of African American educational thought.

Marshall teachers

Consistent with how teachers identified themselves in the survey the term “Black” is used in presenting the survey results and the term “non-Black” is used to represent teachers who listed either Caucasian, Jewish, White or Caucasian/Jewish. Of the teachers that completed the survey, there were slightly fewer Black teachers (6) than non-Black teachers (7), however the Black teachers taught a greater portion of the content (nearly 70%). There were more female (9)
than male teachers (4), with both male and female teachers having taught mainstream and non-
mainstream courses. All of the current mainstream academic area teachers have elementary
Teaching credentials and some have single subject teaching credentials or master’s degrees in
education and/or their content specialization. The current teachers of African Civilizations,
African Dance, African Percussion, Recitation, Singing, Swimming, Tennis, and Yoga represent
teachers with credentials, credential training, or experienced practitioners/artists in their fields.

TABLE 6: Teacher demographic survey results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Sub-group</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
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<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-Black</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of Education</td>
<td>College</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teaching Credential</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Some graduate or professional school</td>
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<td>8%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Graduate or professional school degree</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual Income</td>
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<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$20,001 - $30,000</td>
<td>2</td>
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</tr>
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<td>$30,001 - $40,000</td>
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<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$40,001 - $50,000</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$50,001 - $60,000</td>
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<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>$60,001 - $70,000</td>
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<td>15%</td>
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<td>$90,001 - $100,000</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$100,000 or more</td>
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</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>No response</td>
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<tr>
<td>Number of Years at Marshall (current teachers)</td>
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<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2-5 years</td>
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<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6-10 years</td>
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<td>11-15 years</td>
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<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16-20 years</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>more than 20 years</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The retention rate of teachers is high. Among the current teachers, the newest to Marshall has
been there 2 years, the second newest 5 years versus the “father” of the school who has been at
Marshall for 20 years. Marshall teachers’ average household incomes were consistent with that

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38 As the co-namesake, Gwen’s husband is technically the “father” of the school but he does not teach at the school
and only has had a consistent presence within the school for the last few years. However, several parents and
of an average teacher’s salary- $60,641- in the school district and above that of the families attending the school. The household incomes of teachers above this average was due to their more lucrative professional pursuits outside of teaching and/or the additional income of their partners and cannot be attributed to their teaching incomes from Marshall or other schools. The survey data provide some insight into the composition of the teaching faculty at Marshall. Below the interview data from these teachers is analyzed, with the microanalytic frames used to cluster and analyze their responses and the macroanalytic frames brought in to explore Marshall teacher’s philosophies and what they mean for the school’s attempts at challenging racial inequality and advancing African Americans as a group.

_Schools should provide an Education_

Consistent across the teachers at Marshall was an agreement that their “jobs” as teachers were to prepare students academically and to teach to the whole child as a person in the larger world. Central to this goal was to take the time and space to engage students in critical thinking and to get to really know students as people. Teachers felt that this was hard to do in more rigid, larger schools in part because of testing and because this wasn’t part of the philosophy of those schools. By contrast, Marshall teachers felt encouraged to develop close relationships with their students, to empower students, and to develop life skills students could use outside the classroom. Citing this link between teacher’s relationships with students and its affordances for the teacher and the learner, one teacher said:

“you know them so well and know their needs and are able to bend and know them and really honestly know them, um, I just- I feel like that’s so beneficial to the kid…..I just think – having someone know you is just, I think it just makes you a better learner. Knows you well, likes you. I think sometimes it takes a teacher a whole year to figure out how they’re going to like a kid and then it’s over. And Gwen can’t afford to do that. She has to—to like everybody. She has to find a way to like everybody and she can and figure out what their strengths are. In a huge setting a lot of teachers miss that stuff. What are the strengths? What’s going on with this kid? So I just feel like… it works (laughter).

(teacher interview, 2/10/11)

Referencing the different philosophy and style between Marshall and other schools relative to taking the time to know students and build upon what they know, another teacher gave the following response:

“I think that sometimes teachers [at other schools] get kind of- they’re just kind of moving from one thing to the next, in terms of curriculum. You know, they have to reach these goals and sort of move from one thing to the next … we’re going to move from this to this, we’re gonna move from this topic to this topic um, without looking at the broader picture, without making associations, without looking back at what we’ve looked at before. Looking back at ‘Who thought about that before?’ and ‘What we thought about it before’ so I think that’s what Gwen does is kind of um, she can make it personal, a big part of their family history that they’re drawing from family customs. That they’re drawing from, you know, what if

alumni referred to the Black male teacher with 20 years of experience at Marshall as the “father” of the school, with Gwen being the “mother.”
they’re reading about- they’re just always referencing and drawing from what they’ve learned before and it’s from their school learning and from their home learning and so on. Uh, so I think that that helping kids make those associations between things. Like things are connected- I think is huge. I don’t think I learned that until college like “Oh, critical thinking, wow! Really?” (laughter) (teacher interview, 2/10/11)

Focusing on the importance of critical thinking and being able to draw upon their relationships with students was important to this teacher’s philosophy as was being able to draw upon students’ previous learning experiences and connecting them with their home lives and their own cultural history. Another teacher pushed on this philosophy relative to relationships even further by arguing that teaching to the whole child and developing students’ critical thinking, also meant preparing them for life. The teacher saw their responsibility as a teacher extending beyond academics and beyond the classroom in ways similar to that of a parent:

“It [raising a child] is the job of the family in its entirety. And what I mean by that is, the teacher is the family. You’re a part of the family. Because you’re with the child pretty much more than parent is. So, it’s the job of the family, but the only thing is that most teachers don’t realize that they’re included….the parents, the teachers, and the students. That is a family. And I think that if more teachers felt like that, that would really help out [African American] students a lot. I don’t feel like I am just their teacher, you know what I mean…..I feel like I’m the social worker, I’m the nurse, I’m the police, I’m the parent, when the parent is not there, because I am responsible for them….so I think that the teacher definitely has a responsibility to help the student along the way. Otherwise, what use would the teacher be? The teacher’s job is to teach the child so that they can be independent. Same as the parent. The parent’s job is teach the child, so that they can be independent. The only difference is that the teacher does the academic part and the parent does the social part, but in actuality, those two roles are interactive. Because not only am I teaching social responsibility, I’m teaching economic responsibility….I teach spiritual responsibility, so I teach a whole lot. And even with the parent, parents don’t only teach their children how to be socially responsible, they teach them, how to learn, because the parent is the first teacher” (teacher interview, 6/1/11).

In the above quote, the teacher equates educating a child with helping to raise a child and to empower them as an independent person and as a student. This teacher describes the interweaving and overlapping and multifaceted roles of teachers and parents, and constructs the notion of family as including the teacher. The latter point also resonates with belief/pedagogical goal #2, the principle of reciprocity wherein it is believed that schools benefit from fostering tight community or family-like associations that take advantage and require the interdependence of its members. In its entirety, the teacher’s comment reflects a humanizing philosophy to education in that she argues that teachers need to recognize students as people with a variety of needs, and as children who need a family of individuals to help raise and educate them.

In pushing on the teacher and parents role to foster the child’s independence, this teacher’s reflections are also consonant with Gwen’s philosophy of teaching each child to be self-reliant and learn how to solve their own problems, manage their work, and themselves as well as be able to help others. The parameters and impact of this approach were captured by an alumni who said, “Honestly, I learned more life skills from Marshall than I did from my mom” (interview, 6/20/11) because he felt that in taking care of other, younger students and having wider degrees of independence that he began to understand the responsibilities of community and of manhood.
Teachers also argued that part of this process of raising children and developing students involved a commitment to developing students’ positive self-concept and identities, by encouraging them to take pride in their schoolwork, by having high expectations, and giving them a high degree of academic skills that could not be questioned or “taken away” in other schooling contexts or later in life (teacher interviews, 9/8/10, 5/16/11, 6/1/11). For Gwen and other teachers, this involved providing students with the “foundations” off of which to launch their academic careers and to cultivate their identities. It also involved embedding with their students a belief that at Marshall, “I’m going to have to work hard, they’re not going to let me get away with things” (teacher interview, 6/1/11). The teachers that focused on teaching athletics and the performing/creative arts noted that the development of “poise” (interview, 3/3/11) and “stage presence” (interview, 2/18/11) was key and empowered children to “do things that other kids would be way too self-conscious or scared to do” (interview, 5/31/11) and allowed students to take advantage of educational and social opportunities to learn and grow rather than stay within a narrow comfort zone where they wouldn’t be challenged.

The teachers, in demonstrating their investment in the philosophy of Marshall and reflecting on the ways it resonates or has shaped their own teaching philosophy, draw upon the different frames of racial inequality and racial advancement. Their goal to cultivate the “critical thinking” of African American children draws upon the psychological frame in trying to develop students as self-evaluators (Baldwin, 1963) rather than passive internalizers of external input. Marshall teachers approach also recognizes the tensions of identity that occur within schools and the need to recognize students’ humanity and educability as a pre-requisite to teaching. This occurs in part through their role as a teacher educating the various aspects of the child (academic, emotional, physical, social) and teaching them with a “sympathetic touch” (DuBois, 1934) that respects the crucial stage of development they are at and the teacher’s role as an authority figure and socializer of the child.

Marshall teachers’ perspectives about critical thinking also reflect aspects of the social-structural frameworks in that they as Black and non-Black teachers take responsibility for teaching African American children and see a “pedagogy of questioning” (Mississippi Freedom School Curriculum, 1964/1991) as part of the process of liberating students through schools and making African American students aware of socially oppressive forces they may encounter. The teachers’ focus on “life skills” reveals an investment in preparing students as active and informed citizens able to navigate and challenge the social world around them. Relative to the cultural frame, Marshall teachers believe that they need to draw upon students’ histories and the histories of their communities as a way to develop students’ associations between themselves as individuals and as part of a larger legacy of success and accomplishment. Finally, the teachers’ belief in the importance of developing students’ social, economic, and spiritual responsibility through encouraging their hard work and self-efficacy, aligns with the moral frame’s focus on cultivating an individual’s sense of dignity as a stepping-stone towards racial uplift.

*Schools should be guided by a principle of reciprocity*

Marshall was often referred to as “Gwen’s school” because of her unique and overarching vision. In spite of Gwen’s looming presence physically and philosophically at Marshall, teachers uniformly talked about the caring, non-judgmental and respectful philosophy that distinguished Marshall as a nurturing and rewarding place for students, and for teachers. In line with the principle of reciprocity, Marshall teachers viewed the school as a communal space for the ongoing development of their students and themselves. Teachers conveyed that they remained at
Marshall for so long, mainly because they loved working with Gwen and the Marshall kids. Further probing indicated that their positive evaluation of working at Marshall related to the high level of support and trust as educators that they experienced, including the flexibility and support to teach what they wanted and how they wanted, as well as the ability to learn from Gwen and other teachers without there being a stigma attached to their learning curve.

“And I could see the same issues [I had] for lots of those [White] women, especially those who chose to teach in schools where they were the racial minority, that they were feeling disrespected, you know, and I would have been in the same place if I didn’t have Gwen pointing those things out to me and processing them with me in a way that was like she wanted me to be a better teacher. I think I was writing out a progress report for someone and she said, ‘I think this is a racist way of saying this.’ She wasn’t telling me I was wrong, she was telling me the way you did it is wrong. You really need someone to tell you that because otherwise, how do you know? I feel safe to ask her questions that I would feel sort of risky asking other people, you know? Other people might question my agenda but she knows that I’m just trying to help a population of kids that are traditionally underserved. (teacher interview, 2/17/11)

In this case, the mentorship involved helping this teacher to deal with issues of race and racism in his/her own philosophy and teaching practice. Providing this space for inquiry and growth is a major concern for teacher development programs and for White teachers in particular who are working with racially diverse student populations (King, 1991; Sleeter, 1993; Tatum, 1992). This non-Black teacher’s statement speaks to the psychological, social structural, and cultural frames’ concerns with White teachers’ ability to teach African Americans and the types of personal questioning and training they need to undergo in order to effectively avoid reifying or triggering racial stereotypes that affect students identity, to avoid racist practices, and to begin the process of questioning the status quo even within their own worldview or experience. Other teachers also appreciated the philosophy that Gwen modeled and tried to learn from her reciprocal, tolerant, and respectful approach to teaching:

“You know, the thing that I admire the most about her is how she- she treats the kids with such respect and that is something that I strive to emulate, you know (laughter) is to be respectful, seriously! I mean I think that as educators you fall into this trap that you are in charge and...But its like I have just as much to learn from them and keep reminding myself of that. (teacher interview, 2/4/11)

In interviews, Marshall teachers spontaneously brought up this aspect of Marshall’s philosophy and frequently mentioned their investment in the relationships they developed with the children and their families, which made working at Marshall “more than just a job” (teacher interview, 6/1/11). Instead, it involved becoming part of a community in and out of school, and beyond their tenure at Marshall. For many teachers, namely all the Black teachers, working at Marshall was tied to their desire to contribute to the educational advancement of Black youth and the Black community—aspirations they indicated were harder to meet at other schools without a strong presence of Black teachers or administrators. Connecting back to the cultural frame, these

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39 The use of the terms “kids” and “children” rather than students throughout this chapter is intended to mirror the ways in which teachers themselves referred, and viewed, Marshall students as children (“their” children) rather than as unassociated students.
“communal bonds” (Morris, 1999) or family-like connections that teachers formed with their students and their families reflects the teachers’ own cultural/racial pride and beliefs that Black students need Black role models in order to better understand the Black experience in America. This perspective resonates with the psychological frame both in its allusion to there being a psychological understanding of life particular to Blacks, but also in trying to build from this assumption to develop students’ sense of belonging within a larger group. Noting the deep connections and investments, one teacher who also works in other schools differentiated the Marshall commitment from what happens at other schools,

“There is not that kind of ownership in other schools. Of the pride of having the kids be successful…. She’s [Gwen’s] got much more of a higher commitment to seeing those kids be that successful in the end because she’s with them for so long with their parents and then their grandparents and then their sisters and their cousin comes. (teacher interview, 2/4/11)

As one teacher describes, this interdependence and intergenerational/inter-student support was viewed as a necessary part of Marshall’s sustainability:

I remember when I came and visited…. we went to the park and we were walking back from the park and Gwen and I were talking and there was kids in front of me and there were, the big kids were yakking away…. and as we got to the driveway, you know right where the cars are—without even stopping their conversation, they each reached down and grabbed the hand of a little one. So the preteens were still like talking and talking and talking, they each like grabbed and made sure that somebody had the hand of every little one as we went to the gate and I said ‘Gwen! Oh my God! I’ve never seen that before. How do you get them to do that?’ And her answer was ‘We couldn't function any other way. There's no way that I could be the only elder here. It just, it wouldn’t work. It just wouldn't work; it works because they do that. It's not how do you get them to do that, that's the only way it can function.’” (teacher interview, 2/18/11)

Fundamental to this was a philosophy of institutional and interpersonal care (Walker, 1996) that previous excerpts have alluded to in talking about the nurturing environment at Marshall. One teacher noted this in saying that at Marshall you have the “ability to call kids out because you know them and have relationships with them and their families. You have a sense of history about them and their families” (teacher interview, 5/31/11). Drawing upon the cultural frame, this teacher argued that through having a sense of their child’s past, teachers can understand their students’ experiences and can develop the students’ consciousness. Another teacher noted that beyond helping the school to coalesce as a community, the institutional and interpersonal care also makes students’ more conscious of their impact on one another:

“it makes them much more of a community and that is the big thing in that school because the kids run the gamut of age and they’re really their own community. They’re not- you know they’re not separated out in the morning and, ‘You go with this’” and, ‘You with that person,’ but they’re a community and it creates more of a sense of… caring and responsibility for each other and just how you are in the world because- ‘Oh,well I said this thing’ and I didn’t even know that I hurt this person and they bring it up in meeting that it hurt their feelings and I need to be more aware. I mean it’s just way more consciousness probably than most of the kids have, but I think in some way, by the time they leave the school there is some degree of that being in their consciousness.” (teacher interview, 2/4/11)
Care, in the context of Marshall wasn’t just about the nurturing, humane endeavor of teaching (Noddings, 1984) that appreciated the multiple developmental needs of students. Teachers indicated that the level of care was related to their racial and political affinity and commitments (Noblitt, 1993) to their students, “I see my role as so important because if you come from the community where you teach, it’s like you have, personal responsibility, but it’s to the 10th power” (teacher interview, 6/1/11). This spirit of responsibility and reciprocity wasn’t restricted to students, but included parents as well. As one teacher communicated:

“I make it a point, that they [parents] feel comfortable with me.....I am always there to support, never there to bash, if I have an issue with a parent, that’s personal. I’m always there to support. I see it so often that the parents don’t want to talk to the teacher..because it’s always something negative that they [the teacher] have to say about the child and I think that the gap is so huge that the parent and the teacher... don’t make the time to connect.”

(teacher interview, 6/1/11)

The levels of respect, the willingness to get to know and invest in students, and the communal bonds formed between teachers, students, and families was demonstrated in statements like the one above and in how teachers used their aspirational, social, navigational, familial, and other forms of cultural wealth to access resources around the city in the service of the school and the students. It was common to hear teachers give parents advice about middle schools for their children, financial aid opportunities, or to bring pamphlets to school about summer camps or other out-of-school resources and encourage parents to enroll their child. These resources were often being offered to Marshall students because of a teacher’s affiliation and were related to sought after programs and activities for which there was limited space. One alumnus noted this cultural wealth that was shared with him and indicated that he “couldn’t have gotten through without Marshall” and knew for certain that he wouldn’t have gone to college if it weren’t for Gwen and the other teachers belaboring its importance.

Teach and reinforce students’ racial and cultural pride

Blending the moral, psychological, and cultural frames, Marshall teachers’ often made statements arguing that if their students “know who they are” as Black people, as academics, and as individuals and, “if they know who they are when they go somewhere, they’re not going to change who they are” (teacher interview, 6/1/11) because “that can’t be taken away” (teacher interview, 9/8/10). They thus viewed the early foundation of cultural history/validation and cultural/racial pride as critical to individual students’ psychological well-being and ability to resist internalizing the racism they may encounter in other settings. For example:

“Well I think a lot of kids that come to Marshall are coming from situations that- where they have felt completely alienated, like culturally alienated or racially alienated or alienated based on socio-economic status [or] something about that experience has made them feel less than, and angry.......at Marshall, Gwen is so careful to make sure that kids feel good about themselves.... And then they start to come out of that mean little shell that they were protecting themselves with and then you can see them relax and they’re able to learn which they weren’t able to- in places where they felt scared or wrong or [their person] was wrong.” (teacher interview, 2/17/11)
In referencing the psychological protection of the “mean little shell,” the teacher conveys that one aspect of Marshall’s philosophy was to foster students’ sense of self-worth or self-possession, characteristics of the moral frame; and to promote students’ positive self-concept and sense of belonging, characteristics of the psychological frame.

Teacher’s comments also corresponded with the psychological and cultural frames in the ways in which they viewed Marshall’s philosophy of validating students’ cultural history and racial pride through its Afrocentric curriculum and through a pedagogy that didn’t culturally or racially isolate them. Sharing this, one teacher explained:

“All day long every day they feel like they’re the standard, you know, they’re never the deviant, they just are! And in some ways, I mean.. it’s empowering for them because they feel like they’re a part of something special and another reason is its normalizing which is nice because I think a lot of them in the public school system would feel deviant or less than. So like in some ways it lifts that off and lets them just be students in a way.” (teacher interview, 2/17/11)

This teacher points to the psychological burden that’s relieved when students aren’t having to deal with racism in the curriculum and can see people like themselves fully included within the curriculum versus only written into history in tragic or deviant ways. The teacher also brings in belief/pedagogical goal #1, sub-theme “let’s Black children be children,” by arguing that by removing the psychological burden of perceived deviancy, Marshall students are able to “just be students.” Marshall teachers argued that they often feel that in schools African American children are not allowed just to be children, but are seen as smaller versions of their older counterparts that have all been stereotyped and maligned in society. The excerpt from the Marshall pamphlet quoted earlier in this chapter makes a similar point about the stereotyping and discrimination that occurs within schools and in society more generally. Marshall teachers also allude to the sense of belonging and racial pride characteristic of the psychological frame and cultural frame, respectively, in commenting that by allowing African American students to “be the standard” they can feel like “they’re part of something special.”

Again resonating with these frames, another teacher notes that undergirding their philosophy of teaching in and through Afrocentric curriculum is because:

“There’s an African history of at least 6,000 or 7,000 years. Black history didn’t begin in the U.S. and didn’t begin with slavery. That’s the main point....... People talk about, you know, people kidnapped slaves from Africa. But the people weren’t slaves in Africa. There weren’t slaves. They were Africans who became enslaved, right? So, it’s just a matter of a state of mind. They were put into a cage. That doesn’t make them animals. It just makes them people who were put into cages. Just using the term slaves doesn’t tell you anything about the people’s state of mind, or how they saw themselves. And to this day, some people still think that way, that they are slaves and that there’s nothing that they can do about it and that it’s always been this way and it’s never going to change, you know, so, that’s what I’m trying to get their minds away from. That there’s many more things you could be, that there’s many more things that you are. So don’t get stuck in somebody’s definition of you. Even the whole thing about the N-word. That’s, that’s what I try to explain to them. That in my opinion, someone who call themselves that is somebody who—seems to me—wants to be a slave, even if they don’t know that they are not a slave, even if they don’t know that that’s not all they could be. They internalize it.” (teacher interview, 5/16/11)
The Harriet Tubman sign that introduces the visitor to the school also reflects this philosophy and harkens the cultural frame recognition of the history of African people in the U.S. as not just being about slavery because Harriet Tubman is a symbol of the African American struggle and achievement in that she was able to secure her freedom and that of others. It also draws upon the social structural frame in highlighting her agency and the system of oppression that tried to bind her. Although she is clad in threadbare clothes and has shackles around her feet, those shackles are broken and Harriet Tubman is fiercely holding the shotgun as if she’s prepared to use it.

*Teach students about racism, injustice, and activism*

Recalling the social structural frame, in interviews many Marshall teachers shared their beliefs about the necessity to politicize their students and articulated their own political affinity with African American and other oppressed peoples. In talking about their teaching philosophies, Marshall teachers expressed feelings of personal responsibility towards developing a political consciousness in African American youth. Marshall teachers discussed the on-going need to “politicize” (teacher interview, 9/8/10) their students and families through having the school participate in demonstrations (teacher interview, 9/8/10, 5/16/11), engaging in letter writing campaigns to persons and institutions whose practices they viewed as racist or otherwise problematic (various fieldnotes, teacher interview 3/3/11), and through fostering discussions about current events, community petitions, and other incidents of political action, and through encouraging students to speak out in morning meeting about injustices they saw or experienced (various fieldnotes). The belief was that in making students aware of injustice, by modeling activism, and practicing using the tools of political action, students would be able to later think for themselves and make more informed political decisions. One teacher explained this philosophy by saying:

“*And actually, the more you know about other people’s cultures and their countries, if more people knew about Afghanistan, if they understood that there’s moms and dads and schools and hospitals there, .. if they understood there’s a bigger world, there’s another world outside of the U.S. If you understand that as a child, I think, I know that you’re in a better position to not judge and if you have to go to war, to say ‘I’m not going. Um I know that I don’t want to kill somebody.’ And, plus what about Black soldiers, or Latino soldiers going, there shooting brown people, and they’re thinking, ‘They didn’t do anything to me, you know, why should I, you know kill these people for some old white guys’. You know, that’s what the story is. “* (teacher interview, 9/8/10)

Teachers at Marshall had a fore sightedness about preparing their students both in terms of their political awareness outside of the classroom, but also inside of classrooms and schools. For example in building both from the social structural and cultural frames, teachers believed that it was necessary to explain to students the “codes of power” (Delpit, 1988) (fieldnotes, 3/17/10) as well as discuss with students “behavior-code switching” (teacher interview, 6/1/11) that focuses on developing students’ ability recognize how society views which actions are deemed appropriate for certain settings. These perceptions of what was valued or was “appropriate” were not validated, but were unpacked to give students a conscious understanding about when and if they choose to participate or resist those norms. In trying to cultivate students as culturally flexible navigators (i.e. individuals that move fluidly across distinct cultural, racial spaces and activities—see Carter 2005), Marshall teachers used African American poems and other literary
tools to identify within them the moments and utility of code switching (fieldnotes, 3/17/10).

Marshall teachers believed that these strategies and conversations were necessary to prepare students to deal with bias and discrimination and to have a sense of where these injustices came from. They believed that by making students aware of ignorance, teaching them tolerance, and giving them the tools to speak out or exercise their rights, that students would have more options about how they chose to deal with bias they encountered. Explaining this a teacher said:

“They have a choice now [about how to deal with racism]. So, I’m not saying they are going to go either way, to take the ignorance a little further, or to handle it in a professional way, take the emotion out of it, and deal with that person one to one...but, I think that they’re given the tools to do that. The longer they are in these schools [Black schools]...the more prepared they are to attack racism at its core.” (teacher interview, 6/1/11)

For this teacher the core of racism was ignorance and misinformation. They viewed their philosophy and the strategies at Marshall as trying to prepare students to understand this and deal with it as such rather than taking it personally, internalizing it, or further legitimizing it.

“Good” teaching

Looking across the beliefs/pedagogical goals of politically relevant teachers is a commitment by the teachers at Marshall to foster cooperation across their students, families, and among themselves in order to contest the “racist premise” (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 1999, p. 708) of African Americans’ ineducability and misrepresentation in society by preparing their students for what they might encounter in and beyond school walls. The commitments of many of these teachers to African Americans’ racial uplift was intentional, and was evident in their aims was to socialize their students into positive ways of viewing themselves and critiquing society, as well as developing their political tools to resist oppression. While some philosophies that teachers shared ultimately frame the issue of racial inequality and its resolution along different lines—moral, psychological, cultural, and/or structural—their ultimate political intent of collective racial advancement was shared.

At the same time, the physical delivery and presentation of each teacher’s teaching philosophy—no matter how much they overlapped was distinct and encompasses a range of pedagogical styles and practices. Among the current teachers interviewed, all were observed in their classrooms and their pedagogical style ranged from loosely structured and relaxed to very structured and disciplinarian. These differences were identified and embraced by the teachers themselves, and were reaffirmed in the views of the parents and alumni, and observations of the researcher. Notwithstanding the variation, the school community viewed each teacher’s style as “good” teaching. As will be shared in the coming chapters, parents and alumni perceived this goodness to be rooted in Marshall teacher’s commitment to the school’s philosophy of “empowering” African American children through teaching to the whole child (school website, 7/27/10), to their high expectations and beliefs in the educability and ability of their students, and towards their political aim of combating a common “enemy”—racism—which parents and alumni had encountered in other schools and in society. Gwen, as the most senior teacher and founder, was integral to developing this vision, mentoring other teachers into this vision, and providing a continuity of care to students across the history of the school.

Gwen and the other Marshall teachers’ are attempting to reverse the “relational breakdown” that has contributed to the failure of schools (Noddings, 1994; Valenzuela, 1999; Ward, 1995)
and instead focus on being a part of building and sustaining communities. Marshall is an empirical example that such teaching marks a legacy of Black educational practice and that such reformulations can still occur in current schools. Marshall is also an example that the enactments of these reformulations can occur by different teachers in different ways. As the title of this chapter suggests, Marshall teachers may be unified in their pedagogical beliefs/goals and at the same time may adhere to and improvise upon different pedagogical traditions given their own training and upbringing. Much like the unique patches on a patterned quilt, or the syncopated beats that constitute a song, Marshall teachers’ attempts to challenge racism as educators and to socialize and humanize the schooling experiences of their students may be diverse in their enactments but are unified in their battle against oppression.
CHAPTER IV

“It looks like freedom40:”
Parents’ perceptions about Marshall Langston School

And what Black parents are looking for is what white parents take for granted: We want it all. We want high expectations, facilities, we want curriculum and we want you [teachers and principals] to believe in our child’s capacity to succeed. And Black parents keep on going around looking for this and we really can’t quite seem to find it.” -Vanessa Siddle Walker

The above quote reflects the views and issues facing the parents42 of Black youth today and in the past. Earlier chapters similarly implicate the lack of inclusion, lack of access to high-quality educational resources, and the issues relative to teachers’ expectations and interactions with African American students and their families. Educational research, however, more frequently talks about parents of African American students43 orientations to and involvement in education, than analyzes these parents’ views and perceptions of their and their children’s’ experiences in schools particularly with regard to race and racism. Indeed, several scholars have called for additional empirical research that exclusively focuses on African American parents’ perceptions and experiences with schools (Diamond & Gomez, 2004; Edwards, 1993, 1996; Morris, 1999).

In response to this call, this chapter discusses Marshall parents’ perceptions and evaluations of Marshall’s attempts to challenge racism and provide an alternative approach to educating African American youth. The data analyzed in this chapter comes from interviews with parents of Marshall alumni and parents of current students and from the brief survey they completed at the beginning of the interview.

First, the results of the survey are presented to give context as to who these parents are demographically. Second, interview responses about how parents found out about Marshall and how they selected it as a school for their children provide a backdrop for the in-depth analyses about their perceptions. Third, parents’ perceptions of Marshall’s pedagogical philosophies and practices and their impact are analyzed. Finally, in the concluding comments of this chapter these findings are put into conversation within the African American struggle to Educate Black children.

Demographics of the Marshall Parent population: Shifting and resilient trends

Of the 18 parents that were interviewed (Cohort I: N=4; Cohort II: N=5; Cohort III: N=5; Current students: N=4), 67% were female and 33% were male. This population included female (22%) and male (17%) parents who were sole caretakers (total: 39%), female (17%) or male (6%) parents who shared custody with the other biological parent or other caretakers (total:

40 Quote from parent interview (1/27/11).
42 “Parent” is used throughout to refer to biological parents as well as other adults such as grandparents, legal guardians, and extended family members with whom the students live and who act as parents.
43 The phrase “parents of African American children” is used to identify that not all the parents of Marshall’s African American population are themselves African American. There were White parents of multiracial children, as well as White adoptive parents of African American children. The analyses generally do not differentiate among these groups, but rather focus on their overlapping concerns about selecting schools and about racism in schools.
23%), and female (28%) and male (11%) parents of two-parent households (total: 39%). The majority were mothers, with some fathers and grandparents (male and female). Of these parents, almost three-quarters identified as Black and nearly a quarter as White. This included Black parents of Black or multiracial children (67%), White biological parents of multiracial children (22%), and White adoptive parents of Black children (11%).

Survey results (Table 7) demonstrate that for those parents that provided their household income, Black or non-Black, 88% fall below the median income\textsuperscript{44} and 63% fall at or below the median income range for African American households in the city in which they reside.\textsuperscript{45}

TABLE 7: Parent survey results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Sub-group</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
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<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship to Student</td>
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<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Father</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grandparent</td>
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<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
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<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Some college</td>
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<td>College</td>
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<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Graduate or professional school</td>
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<td>22%</td>
</tr>
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<td>Income*</td>
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<td>22%</td>
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<td>6%</td>
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<td>$30,001 - $40,000</td>
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<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>$50,001 - $60,000</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>17%</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>11%</td>
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<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$100,000 or more</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No response</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Past incomes reported for the years in which children attended Marshall were adjusted to current dollars.

\textsuperscript{44}Economic characteristics, 2005-2009 American Community Survey 5-year Estimates from the U. S. Census bureau (www.factfinder.census.gov/)

On average, Marshall parents’ educational levels outpace their income levels, with Black and non-Black parent populations at Marshall being slightly more educated than their racial counterparts within the city they reside\textsuperscript{46}. Informal discussions during observations with parents who were not interviewed indicate that their economic and educational trends were relatively consistent with those of the parents that were interviewed. Of the parents that were interviewed, some did not have their current level of education (N=2) when their child(ren) attended Marshall and others are still enrolled in higher education programs (N=3).

GRAPH 1: Level of education across cohorts

![Graph 1: Level of Education Across Cohorts](image)

**Level of Education Across Cohorts**

- Highest Level of Education Attained
- Percentage of Parents
- Highest Level of Education Attained

**Graph 1 Details:**
- Cohort I
- Cohort II
- Cohort III
- Current parents

GRAPH 2: Level of income across cohorts

![Graph 2: Level of Income Across Cohorts](image)

**Level of Income Across Cohorts**

- Percentage of Parents
- Household Income

**Graph 2 Details:**
- Cohort I
- Cohort II
- Cohort III
- Current parents

\textsuperscript{46} Race & Educational Attainment in California (Report No. 11, 2001), Demographic Report Series, Center for Comparative Studies in Race and Ethnicity, Stanford University (www.stanford.edu/dept/csre/reports).
Comparing the educational levels from parents across the cohorts, Cohort I consisted of families with parents who uniformly attained higher levels of education than later cohorts. The distribution across cohorts II, and III, however, is more varied but still consists of families for whom the majority has a parent with at least some degree of college exposure. Relative to income, there is an overall trend of lower to middle income families, with the parents of current students being less well off than their predecessors.

Given the “flight” of mainly middle-class African American families from the city to the more affordable suburbs, resulting in a decline in the overall African American population in the city from more than 13% in 1980 to slightly more than 6% in 2009, these economic and educational trends at Marshall are not surprising. In fact, while parents from earlier cohorts almost exclusively came from within the city’s boundaries, there are a number of families of current students that travel between 14 and 55 miles to attend Marshall. Most of these parents are from the city and either continue to work or go to school in the city, but a couple make the trip just to bring their children to school. Those families that live within the bounds of the city are also choosing some form of commute as many of them forego enrolling their child(ren) in a neighborhood school or a school closer to their home. These families, like those of the past, are making a conscious decision to opt out of a free, public education and to incur varying degrees of economic hardships to pay for a private education. The economic and educational diversity of families attending Marshall suggests that something is occurring there that parents of African American students orient to as worth paying for and do not view as occurring in public schools.

“To school or to Educate?:” Parents perceptions about Marshall and about schools

Parents’ evaluations of Marshall were connected to their reasons for choosing Marshall and their and their children’s experiences at other schools. Marshall parents indicated that beyond choosing neighborhood public schools versus magnet, private, or charter schools, focusing on academic or curricular approaches or programs, were added layers of decision making relative to the racial composition of schools, the physical quality of the facilities or educational resources, and the racial tenor of the school and its affiliated networks. Thus, for parents of African American children the process of selecting schools is also a racialized process that may have real implications for their child(ren)’s longer term well-being and success academically and non-academically (Apple, 2006; Bush, 2004; Fields-Smith & Williams, 2009).

Undoubtedly, these choices have concerned parents of African American children for a long time. Movies like Waiting for Superman document how recently this school selection has taken on a feverish pitch and is informed by families’ previously unsatisfactory experiences in schools. Marshall positions itself within this dialogue as an alternative to the systematic “warehousing” of African American children and as helping to “solve Black parents’ dilemma: finding an academically challenging school that also cultivates their children’s self-respect. We build students’ strength through a holistic approach, teaching the whole child.”

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48 These commutes range from 20 minutes to nearly 2 hours (each way) depending upon the traffic.
49 Within this city, nearly 30% of parents send their children to private school, a rate that is nearly twice the national average. Most of these are middle to upper class White families. The majority of African American and Latino students in this city attend public schools.
indicate in this section, they were acutely aware of their dilemma and found out about Marshall through different avenues, ultimately deciding to send their child(ren) there for overlapping and divergent reasons.

FIGURE 5: Interlocking Networks feeding into Marshall

Parents found out about Marshall through a variety of means, including community centers, local artistic and athletic groups, news articles about Marshall, and connections through social networks that knew about the school. A frequent comment from parents was similar to this parent’s, “people just kept telling us every time we complained [about finding a school] that we should send her to Gwen’s school” (interview, 2/17/11). Another parent found out about Marshall through an article that ran in a local Black newspaper and then shared it with other parents of African American children who were her neighbors (parent interview, 3/4/11). These families played soccer with (parent interview, 3/5/11) and/or were in a theater group with other families (parent interview, 3/4/11) and continued to pass on their information about Marshall to
those networks. Numerous parents also found out about Marshall through Major’s Community Center, a gathering place in a historic Black neighborhood that hosts cultural, political, and literary events and that parents “really respect as a community kind of information center” (parent interview, 2/03/11). In complaining to Major’s staff about their children’s problems in school, about finding a school, or and/or their need to supplement their children’s cultural or political education at home, several parents found out about Marshall. Others saw Marshall’s pamphlets on display at Major’s. Parents themselves were aware of this connection and when asked how they found out about Marshall, one parent matter-of-factly stated, “I’m sure you’ve heard the same answer. Major’s Community Center” (interview, 2/21/11). A ringing endorsement in the eyes of these parents was that the majority of Major’s staff at the community center had also sent their children to Marshall.

Figure 5 represents this web of families and the local nexus’ that have fed into Marshall. Because of the small size of the African American community in the city, particularly in recent years, the actors in this web interlock with each other in multiple ways, in and outside of Marshall. The dashed one-way arrows reflect a relationship to Marshall and the dashed two-way arrows represent relationships between actors who are also connected to Marshall. The solid two-way arrows represent a reciprocal relationship where an organization or network feeds into Marshall and it feeds back into it. The gray “hubs” and their relationships to Marshall represent actual entities or persons. To maintain the anonymity of particular families and their relationships to those hubs or to Marshall, the configuration and quantity of “student families” in the figure and the relationships between them is a hypothetical representation and does not directly correspond to actual families. These types of interconnected relationships between families do exist, however not in the exact configuration presented here.

Interviews also revealed that across Marshall parents and cohorts, these parents did not necessarily have shared inclinations towards selecting small schools, all African American or Afrocentric/African centered schools, or towards selecting schools with a particular curricular or philosophical foci (e.g. college preparatory, technology focused, social justice, peace-based, etc.). An overarching factor for the majority of parents, however, was that they wanted to find a fair, nurturing school climate that welcomed racial and cultural diversity and was willing to be an inclusive environment for non-White students and families from different class backgrounds. This orientation was grounded in Marshall parents’ own schooling experiences, schooling issues they had heard about, and/or from their children’s recent experiences in schools. Parents across cohorts expressed frustration about having to “reprogram” their children at home to override the cultural, historical, and political messages received in schools that didn’t incorporate or line up with the Black experience in America. Explaining this burden, one parent commented:

“it wasn't like now [at the child’s other school] you know when they come home you're gonna have to reprogram - or you're gonna have to make sure that all that other stuff is inserted in their education. It was just already done at Marshall. So it just kinda took some of the burden off. It was just like dropping your kid off at their aunt's or your grandma's or something like that, where you knew they were getting the same discipline, um, and there's just a different understanding of how I think, um, Black folks are; I don't know. Um - what we say out loud, what we don't say out loud, what's comfortable to say in front of each other, just the kind of things how we represent ourselves in front of each other and in front of other cultures, um, it's just when I drop my kids off now, I don't have that same feeling. I'm not as
comfortable, um, because the people who are teaching my kids don’t necessarily live like my kids or live around people that look like my kids." (parent interview, 5/3/11)

This parent describes the added “burden” they had to culturally, racially, and politically educate and socialize their children differently at home from what happens at schools other than Marshall. Picking up on these comparisons between Marshall and their child’s previous school, another parent pushed on these same concerns and also connected them to class differences, to ways of parenting, and to expectations about children that were different for them as a parent of an African American child:

“the staff [at the former school]…. wanted to assist parents in parenting. They wanted parents to attend parenting seminars of ‘this is the way you go about parenting’ and so on and that was one component, a style, that I felt, that, well, my style is going to be different than the style that you are promoting. I can understand logical consequences in terms of behavior but I have a different expectation of, you know, if you say you’re going to do something, you’re following through rather than you know, turning a piece of paper with peanut butter all over it and that’s okay because you’re a cute kid. That doesn’t work for me, you know? And in some ways I think that that’s just a different style of, you know, just, it’s not only a racial difference, it’s different class, different way, you know, of how you go about it, what’s the different expectations of children and so on......I think parents put in a lot of effort over the 2, 3 years that we were there, into creating a multicultural education .... and when..the idea of going to a school that we didn’t have to do that ...many of us went to look at it. We said ‘Oh, this person is already doing these things that incorporate African sensibilities and history and, and people of color live throughout the world and what are they doing’ and so on.” (parent interview, 3/5/11)

This parent highlighted active attempts of family socialization by schools and differences in racial, cultural, and class values and expectations. They viewed this dissonance also being about political values that distinguish a liberal, progressive White paradigm from that of People of Color. This same parent tried to work with the child’s first school but it became too much work:

“after a year or two years of- of struggling with them to- for them to understand that- first of all, values of people of color or how you go about raising children might be different than, liberal progressive white folks. ...but more so of just the inclusion of- of people of color within the curriculum. If it’s left to the parents and a weekly thing of the parents having [to do it all]- it’s like “this is a lot of work!”

These comments align with the concerns of other Marshall parents and point to the presence of a monolithic Euro-centric, middle class paradigm operating within schools that collides with parents of African American children’s values, styles, and beliefs about what should be incorporated into the ‘hidden’ and visible curriculum of schools. Their withdrawal from public and private school settings to attend Marshall was characterized by a sense of relief at finding a school that aligned with their racial, cultural, and political beliefs and practices such that they wouldn’t have to “reprogram” or do all that “work” only at home. Later waves of Cohort II parents, as well as Cohort III and current parents, frequently indicated that they also selected Marshall out of desperation or a frantic need to “escape” the public or private schools they were already in. They cited low teacher expectations, teacher disinterest or lack of commitment to educating or believing in the educability of African American children, and overt racism in
schools. For example, one parent had found out about Marshall when their child was in kindergarten but was not inclined to make the commute it required nor pay tuition for a private school. It wasn’t until years later after they were “stressed out” because of how their child was being treated in public schools that, “I dug in my wallet and I found the number for Marshall Langston” (parent interview, 2/24/11).

Marshall parents felt that public schools, charter schools like KIPP, and private schools were rife with microaggressions and a general lack of concern or care for the long-term academic and non-academic well-being of African American children. Many shared experiences about their children being “labeled” with ADD, developmental (parent interviews, 2/03/11, 2/18/11) or behavioral (parent interview, 2/24/11) issues, and/or being physically, verbally or emotionally harassed (parent interviews, 2/21/11, 5/3/11; various fieldnotes 2009-2010, 2010-2011). One parent’s experience captures the tenor of their experiences,

“public schools don’t hesitate to want to classify young black males as having Attention Deficit Disorder or behavioral problems and they want our young black children in special ed... when he [her son] was in school in [city name], they said he has ADHD that he’s bipolar, he’s all these different things and they wanted to test him. I was comfortable with that because I know my son is not a special education student. So I let them test him and although they wanted really hard to put him in special ed., they couldn’t because the findings from the school’s psychologist came back and said ‘I cannot recommend this child for special education, he does not fit the criteria.’ And he said in every area that he tested my son he ranked in the superior to gifted category so they could not do it. But public schools will try, they will try. And a lot of them succeed if you don’t have someone to advocate for you and I have to admit that they had just about worn me out. I’m a single parent, and I was just about worn out. I was ready to throw in the towel and say forget it, medicate him, you know, do what you need to do. I was just stressed out. But I continued to advocate for him and I ultimately got him out of there” (parent interview, 2/24/11).

Marshall parents felt that they were “fighting on the daily with the school system” (parent interview, 2/3/11) and were being prodded towards accepting diagnoses or actions that they didn’t feel were appropriate for their children and that were not substantiated by sound evidence. Other parents shared similarly difficult experiences, including those that were the catalysts for them to find an alternative schooling environment. One mother’s story about why they chose Marshall was particularly telling:

“He was bullied a lot, physically and verbally. He was really sensitive. And so Kathryn [staff member at Major’s] told me about this school and I called my mother and I said ‘Mom, I want you to come look at this school with me because I think I might be moving. Tariq had been pushed down the stairs, he had gotten a black eye, um, he was just like the target of bullying. And that was during the same time that they had the Columbine shooting. I kept saying ‘I don’t wanna be one of those mothers saying ‘I didn’t know my kid had an arsenal in they bedroom.’ So we went to look, me and my mother....we went and looked at the school.... Tariq came and visited for two or three days and it was in May- April, about April or May cuz it happened- when the Columbine shootings happened. Tariq had a really bad episode at school where someone had picked on him and he had gotten sick, violently sick, but when he had got home, he wasn’t sick that evening. And so...that evening I said ‘Okay you seem to be feeling better so you can go to school tomorrow.’ And, um, that night he came downstairs to
my room and he was like “Mom, my nose started bleeding,” and I said “Well, you know, just put a towel over it and I’ll take the sheets off in the morning.” He said “No, I think you need to come look, it’s a lot.” And there was a pool of blood where his nose had been bleeding and I said, ‘Well you are not going to school tomorrow. I’ma have to take off tomorrow and take you to the doctor.’ I took him to the doctor and they couldn’t find anything and they said they really thought it was stress related. So he came- Tariq came to Gwen’s school one month before school was out for the summer because I had just had enough. I was like, ‘You know, the principal [at the old school] is telling me, ’Tariq’s very sensitive.’ He is very sensitive, I agree with that. But I don’t give a damn how sensitive you are, nobody should be throwing you downstairs. My child is dark complected and I could see clearly he had a black eye. Picking him up from school I thought it was a smudge of dirt and after trying to rub it off he was like ‘I got hit in the eye by some boy.’ And the principal told me ‘Oh well, he’s really sensitive and he needs to get a little tougher skin.’ And I’m like “You’re right, he is sensitive. But no black eyes. No throwing my child down on the stairs. I done had enough.” I said the next kid that lay they hand on my son, it’s gone be me, them, and they parents. I done had enough. So I moved him. I took him totally out of school, brought him over here and it was like he had found some peace.” (parent interview, 2/21/11).

This parent’s story was one among many of the disturbing accounts of Black students’ experiences in schools and parents’ desperation to find alternatives. Several parents gave detailed accounts of school officials and teachers not taking measures to counteract bullying or harassment from other students or teachers not being responsive to parent or student concerns. In trying to address these concerns, parents experienced a downplaying or resistance towards resolving issues or incidents they considered problematic. Some incidents were clearly racially motivated, like the parent who shared that the White students at her son’s previous school used to tell him that his dreadlocked hair looked like “dead worms” and would push him and laugh at his darker skin tone (fieldnotes, 6/9/10) or rubbed their skin “to see if her skin color would come off” (parent interview, 2/24/11). Or the parent who challenged a “C” on a report card because all “his papers and tests..were all A’s.” This parent couldn’t get a reason out of the teacher other than he got the student confused with another student. She later found out that all the Black male children in the class had gotten “Cs” leading her to wonder which were deserved and which were not (parent interview 5/3/11). Other accounts, like Tariq’s story, are less clear in the incident’s racial motivation but still reflect the school’s lack of willingness to recognize and resolve a problem, a trend that may itself be racialized. Parents remarked about this lack of responsiveness and their increasing disillusion with schools’ interest and ability to act on behalf of their children, “I mean they acted like they were doing the best they could, but I really don’t feel like they were. So of course they said, ‘Oh, we’re doing everything we can,’ you know, but I don’t really think so” (parent interview, 2/24/11).

The frequency and severity of these experiences of African American children in schools may explain why recent and current Marshall parents represent a wider array of class backgrounds than in the past and why Black and non-Black Marshall parents were united in their explicit concerns about racism in schools. Studies indicate that parents of African American children concerns about racism in schools and its effects on their children’s psyche and social mobility is a main motivator for their choosing African American independent and private schools, or parochial schools catering to African American families, over public schools (Bush, 2004). The costs of such schools are generally far less expensive than White private schools (Davidson, 1987, pg. 37), for example Marshall’s annual tuition is nearly 60% below the average costs of its
White private school counterparts; yet the financial and travel costs to parents far exceed those of public schools. Marshall parents indicate it has become necessary to make such sacrifices given the implicit and explicit forms of racism in schools. In the next section, the interview data is analyzed to explore how parents viewed Marshall as challenging such racism within its philosophies, practices, and schooling environment, and how they evaluate its impact.

**Educating Black children**

Having presented the demographics of the Marshall families, the networks that feed into Marshall, and Marshall parents’ reasons for enrolling their children there, this section talks about parents’ perceptions of Marshall and its impact upon their children. This analysis touches upon parents’ experiences and evaluations of other schools given that they use these as points of comparison through which to evaluate their and their child(ren)’s experiences at Marshall. Parents’ perceptions are analyzed through the microanalytic beliefs/pedagogical goals framework and their responses are parsed into thematic areas that represent each of the four beliefs/pedagogical goals (schools should provide an Education; schools should be guided by a principle of reciprocity; teach and reinforce students cultural pride; and teach students about racism, injustice and activism).

_Schools should provide an Education_

In choosing Marshall, parents expressed that they were both opting out of more traditional schooling environments, public or private, and were opting out of traditional philosophies about what is meant by “education.” In making this distinction, one parent explained what they thought traditional schools tried to do versus what they wanted schools to do,

“Well what I think it [the goal of traditional schools] might be is just to educate the children. What I want it to be is to ensure, or to the best of their ability ensure, the success of each and every child that comes through their doors. Well, there’s one thing to educate a child and that’s books and reading, curriculum, and lessons, but as far as a child being successful they need more tools than just what they’re taught in the classroom. They need life skills, they need social skills, they need to know how to interact with people, they need people skills, they need to learn how to identify with other groups of people, they need to know how to adjust to various situations and environments and adapt. So that’s what I mean when I say success, that to me is a successful child” (parent interview, 2/24/11).

Here, the parent argues that the goal of schools has been to prepare students academically, whereas they feel that it should also be to make the child “successful” which includes also teaching them life, social and social navigational skills. This parent went on to comment that at Marshall children were treated as children with a multitude of developmental needs, rather than as merely students who only need academic support. Other parents made similar arguments that distinguished between the narrow focus of schools on success in academics and not other areas of development. They also expressed that a strongpoint of Marshall’s was its humanizing,
empowering approach to developing the whole child in “all aspects of human development mental/intellectual, physical, emotional, and spiritual” (parent interview, 2/20/11). Like the parent above, this parent thought that this should be the function of all schools, not just Marshall. Another saw this approach at Marshall being able to occur because at Marshall Black children,

“don’t have to be perfect from head to toe. You can go in there with rags and be accepted... Don’t have to worry about nothing but being a child. This little kid over there is a child but their priorities is like, ‘I gotta look a certain way.’ Or they might have to deal with adult issues ....I don’t see how that baby is really being a child all the way. [Child’s name] doesn’t have to pretend. She could be who she is all the time. I really find it’s important for children to be children.” (parent interview, 1/27/11)

Highlighting the child-centered philosophies of Marshall, the parent viewed this approach as humanizing and as “freedom” because her child doesn’t have to fit into a particular stereotype and isn’t expected to “be like everybody else.” By contrast, at their child’s previous school many children had to deal with “adult issues” of having the right clothes, acting a certain way, and were not taught how to talk about or process things in a productive way.

Parents saw this Education, in part, as occurring through Marshall’s focus on developing students’ critical thinking. Describing the changes they saw in their child, one parent said:

“Um, her method of processing her thoughts is coming out clearly as a result of Marshall, um, to where she's challenging her own father and it doesn't bother me to a degree. But she's actually listening to the statements that not only she makes, but others make... and goes back and now recalls them. By example: but ‘Dad didn't you say that, but did you mean this, 'cuz you told me this.” (parent interview, 2/18/11)

From this parent’s statement, it’s clear that they attribute a shift in their child’s way of thinking, their ability to pay attention, and to ask critical question to having been at Marshall. Parents also were impressed that through attending Marshall their kids began to think “completely outside the box” (parent interview, 1/27/11). One parent saw this occurring because at Marshall kids were taught “to put together the pieces of a puzzle and figure things out” (parent interview, 2/24/11) for themselves. This parent believed that Marshall’s focus on critical thinking and its humanizing approach made their child start “wanting to go to school” (parent interview, 2/3/11) and cultivated their love of and for learning.

Parents also saw Marshall’s teaching style and philosophy as having an impact on students’ positive self-concept/identity. Parents indicated that at Marshall their child “came back to being the [child’s name] that I knew” (fieldnotes, 6/9/10) and some blamed public schools for having caused their child to lose their positive sense of self. Remarking on this, one parent said that they chose Marshall because, “he [the child] deserved an opportunity to… be more comfortable and develop a sense of identity because I think he lost it. He may have had it at one point, but I think he lost it and he found it at Marshall” (parent interview, 2/24/11). According to this parent, after their child was at Marshall:

“he developed a strong sense of self, his self esteem sky rocketed, and he felt good about himself, and he felt proud of who he was. So and with that he was very proud and he just accepted that responsibility and it came naturally to him as he developed a strong sense of identity, I know who I am, I know who my ancestors are, I know what I’m capable of, I know what I can do, and it just pushed his self esteem up there”
They saw this positive identity development having occurred because of his sense of cultural history, but also because of his own beliefs in his capacity, positive self-evaluations of his own work, and the pride and esteem that came with those affective and tangible experiences. Parents attribute some of this positive self-concept as being based upon the high expectations that Marshall had for its students. One parent talked about the high expectations and beliefs in student ability at Marshall and what they, as a parent, had also learned from it:

“don’t say this is a 2nd grade reading level book so I’m gonna give it to my 2nd graders, just say here's some books. Now there could be a 2nd grade a 4th grade a 8th grade book in there and, ‘Go ahead do your thing,’ you know. And the fact that she [Gwen] gave them those options and just you know let 'em go as much as they could go um without putting like restrictions on what um helps them a lot I mean and they like my son is competitive like very always wants to be head of the class but I think um I think yeah I even learned that to have higher expectations and not limit my kids. (parent interview, 5/3/11)

This parent saw the high expectations not just in the teaching style, but also in the teacher’s beliefs in the capacity of children irrespective of their developmental age. They saw this high level of expectations taken up by their own child and by themselves relative to how they orient to their children’s learning.

Aside from the philosophy at Marshall, parents also often talked about the morning meeting, or the Compliment and Complaint circle, that occurs at the beginning of school everyday. Parents saw this practice as particularly distinct to Marshall and indicative of its commitment to Education. Marshall parents explained that the morning meeting was a time for students to share out about things going on with them, resolve conflicts, and have whole school conversations around a variety of topics including other student’s behaviors. Key to this public airing was an expressive, honest discourse between and among students and teachers that allowed for the development of the whole child in a humanizing, child centered way that was free of judgment and shame. For example, a parent shared that Gwen talked about their child’s personal issues with the other children but did not make a big deal of it and diffused the stigma that was attached to the incident, “Gwen found a way to present it to other children, ‘Oh, well [child’s name] is working on this, you know, and she got in trouble, it’s okay’” (parent interview, 2/17/11).

Another parent credited the interactions during the morning meeting with helping their child transition into Marshall and helping him to deal with his own emotional issues:

“Transitioning into Marshall was hard for him in the beginning because he had come from an environment where children were so mean to him, so he was really mean when he first got to Marshall…Um, so he had to learn that the students there were very supportive of one another and that overall they were really nice kids and it took one of the students to say “hey you don’t have to be mean, we’re not like that at this school” and he slowly but surely came around” (parent interview, 2/24/11).

Relative to the academic environment at Marshall, some parents were critical of Marshall’s academics or resources and noted that their children “hadn’t had the same material” (parent interview, 3/4/11) as the other schools, or that the materials at Marshall were “dated” (parent interview, 5/3/11) and not reflective of private schools. This included references to the lack of new computers or other technology, curriculum, and physical materials such as books, white boards, or manipulatives for mathematics or other subjects. These concerns about academic rigor were expressed by 2 Cohort III parents and 1 other parent from the previous cohorts. One
of these parents felt that academic rigor was an issue but a trivial one because it was simply a matter of the child “learning that other content” (parent interview, 3/5/11) while the other two saw it as a lack of academic preparedness or skill development at Marshall.

The remaining 11 alumni parents indicated that their children were well-prepared or “far better prepared” (parent interview, 3/5/11) than their peers when they went on to middle schools and the current parents did not indicate that felt that their children would be underprepared. This generational clustering suggests that either the academic development of students is declining, the skill levels of entering students themselves are lower than prior years, or that the present academic expectations or format in schools has shifted in ways inconsistent with Marshall’s approach to giving students a solid foundation in the “fundamentals.”

Gwen, the founder and lead teacher, when asked about newer resources responded that she did have some, but that she didn’t always see the benefit in some of the newer resources if the older ones still worked and students enjoyed them because they “were learning the same thing:”

"it’s okay but you can’t depend on them [manipulatives] totally, you know. I like manipulatives because you can hold it, it's concrete but I like them to write on the board too. And we use some of it [the newer resources] and some we don’t. And I’m not against it, it’s just how much do you need. Basically.... But it’s not solely what we use and I don’t particularly think it gives any person a leg up.. I mean I’m sold on it, I just- I don’t need a lot of it....You don’t need a lot of anything (laughter). It’s too much! ......The newer stuff is just a little bit more improved than the old stuff and it might not even be improved. And I don’t think we have to have that. I mean if we have some old manipulatives that they still use and it’s teaching the same subject and the children are very excited about that- for instance with states and capitals its location, direction, cities in that state. We can look on the computer or we can look at something that a kid can hold in their hand and they’ll enjoy it too. They’re learning the same thing." (interview, 3/3/11)

A separate, but related concern, mentioned by Cohort III parents and current parents was about the lack of standardized testing at Marshall. One parent shared their conversation with Gwen about this issue and outlines Gwen’s responses:

“Um, and I spoke with Gwen about it and she explained to me her opinion of public schools teaching to the test so that children are only taught to score high on these tests that they take, these standardized tests and that they don’t really grasp the fundamentals, they don’t have the fundamentals down they just are taught to take this test and score high on this test.” (parent interview, 2/24/11)

In this excerpt, Gwen, like many teachers, expressed concerns about “teaching to the test” and reaffirmed her belief that students need to have a “grasp on the fundamentals.” The parent expressed that they agreed with her but was concerned about having indicators for what her child was learning. She shared that these concerns were later allayed when she saw his homework assignments and the level of engagement he had in completing and attending to his schoolwork. Other parents were interested in having students practice standardized test taking so that they would have some exposure and strategies for when it later became a high stakes issue:

“you take the SSAT to get into the middle schools or to the high schools? High schools. That was the first time she’d [the child] ever filled in a bubble. So I mentioned to Gwen before that

52 Current parents did not express concerns, yet none had transitioned their child into a school after Marshall.
It might be a good idea for them to, for her to do some practice on those. It would be like she gives them math sheets to do. Well, make some of the math sheets bubbles. Just so they can get some practice in it. No, don’t call it a test but just... or the other thing she can do, and she has done I think, is just have somebody come in and teach them how to take tests.... But I mean she, Gwen, could even be political about it and say that it’s a you know, let them know that it’s very important for them not to let this piece of paper or this score define them in any way. And let them know how offensive it is that... all these companies are making so much money off of, um, defining, purporting to define aptitude. (parent interview, 2/18/11)

This parent expressed how it might be beneficial to practice standardized test taking in preparation for the tests that students will have to eventually take. They also mentioned that Gwen may have actually already done or might be willing to do it. They also indicate their own distaste for the positioning of these tests and advocated that Gwen be “political” in her approach to teaching these tests. During several school observations this topic was discussed, with Gwen and other teachers considering whether or not they should practice standardized testing taking or take an oppositional stance towards the frenzy of test taking and not legitimize their power by refusing to practice them at all.

Interestingly, despite the aforementioned concerns, all Marshall parents affirmed that they would still send their child to Marshall even if they had known about these issues prior to enrolling their child. On the one hand, parents did not see public schools as a viable option anymore and were very critical of the type of education their children had or were getting there. Relative to public and private schools, parents were frustrated with the lack of Education African American children were receiving and were concerned about negative racial dynamics within those schools. Hence, their selection of Marshall was an indictment of other schools. On the other hand, parents viewed the importance of practices like the morning meeting, and of Marshall’s philosophical and pedagogical focus on Education more generally, as nearly as important, if not more important than the academics. As one parent explained, “I feel like they [the student] can pick up the academic stuff later, but the fundamental positive feelings about their identity, you know, are much more fundamental in a way…… it’s much harder to make them whole again” (parent interview, 3/4/11). Thus, parents selection of Marshall was not only a rejection of other schools but an embracing of an alternative philosophy of schooling and of Education.

Schools should be guided by a principle of reciprocity

Parents’ evaluations of Marshall’s attempts to provide an Education referenced the high degree of institutional and interpersonal care (Walker, 1996) at Marshall. In spite of the critiques of some parents, parents unanimously pointed out the care and nurturing shown by teachers as embedded within the humanizing, whole-child, and child-centered philosophy that cultivated children within a context of high expectations. Previous interview excerpts, namely those about the morning meeting, display parents’ expressions about the care embedded within Marshall’s schooling structures and practices. Again talking about the morning meeting, one parent said:

“Oh, another really great thing I like about Marshall is the meetings that they have every morning. And to me it’s like a mini therapy session and they can come and air out whatever’s on their mind, and I like that fact that Gwen takes the time out with the students no matter what’s going on or what they have planned for that school day, if there is
something seriously going on with that child they will just talk it out. They will talk it out, they’ll cry, they’ll hug, you know and they will just take the time that they need to help this child to process whatever goes on. And its confidential even though all the kids are there and all the children is talking about it. My son has never come home and given me names, he’s only said we had a really rough day at school or it was really emotional at school today and something happened to one of the kids, and he wouldn’t elaborate but they were there to support one another and I just think that that is fantastic....And, um, I believe they’re so mature because they get to talk and communicate what’s on their minds” (parent interview, 2/24/11).

In identifying the meeting as a “mini therapy session” the parent points out the degree of care and respect ascribed to attending to the holistic well being of individual students at Marshall. The parent also points out the time spent on providing such care and the importance given to taking that time and valuing the confidentiality of that space. Parents saw this care as not just coming from the teacher, but also being modeled for and taken up by students. As one parent said, “Gwen is teaching them is to really care for people, which you don’t get taught in other schools” (parent interview, 2/3/11).

Parents perceived this care to be embedded within the morning meeting, and also exhibited within the elder system where older kids were taught to take care of and mentor the younger kids. Outlining what it meant to be an elder, one parent said:

“It has to do with your ability to help other people be their best ..And your maturity. So it's your ability to be able to control yourself and to do your best, whether it's behavior wise or academic or whatever, your ability to do that, get your homework done and all that. And your ability to point out to a little one who needs it that they need to do something else—they need to sit in their chair; they need to move their desk; they need to get their homework, whatever it is, to do it in a way that's. .. like she [Gwen] does it, that's not judgmental and that's helpful and when they can do that, when they have that kind of maturity, they're an elder. And if they're doing it sometimes but not all the time then they're middle elders. So it's like a step.” (parent interview, 2/18/11)

This description of the elder model illustrates the personal and collective responsibility and accountability that comes with being an elder, and the high expectations and degree of care associated with it. Students have to first demonstrate their ability to handle themselves and complete their work, before they can take on the responsibility of caring for a younger student. Acknowledging the developmental growth of students, there is also opportunity for those students who do not yet exhibit the consistency necessary to be an elder, to be brought in and cultivated as a middle elder. The parent emphasized that becoming an elder was not just based on age, but more importantly on students’ demonstrations of maturity and compassion. For parents, the elder model was an example of the institutional care integrated into Marshall’s structures and practices, and also the interpersonal care within the relationships between students. By the parent saying that elders need to communicate with younger students “in a way that's.. like she [Gwen] does it, that's not judgmental and that's helpful,” they point out that this interpersonal care, including the personal responsibility/accountability, interdependence, and intergenerational support that go with it, were first modeled by teachers’ interactions with
students. In asking parents if any one could be a teacher at Marshall, a firm response was “No.” The first reason was because of the level of care that they describe below:

“Um, when she [Gwen] said something to my kids, when she taught them or even when she disciplined them it was out of love or out of- that she cared how they were going to mature. And she loved them you know what I mean. just exactly for who they were, they didn't have to impress her she was already impressed you know it was – Gwen, um I mean it literally is just like dropping your kid off at somebody's home that they're used to. You just didn't worry about it and they felt close to her; they trusted her to take care of them. It was never any um question of why she said something or somebody was being unfair. It was always open, you know, where they could discuss kinda what was happening and it was just balanced that way where even as a whole class they could discuss or a whole school they could discuss ‘This is what happened’ and ‘Why do you think this was wrong?’ or ‘Why do you think this is ok?’ and ‘What do you think we should do about it?... and it allowed them to think, you know, as opposed to somebody dictating to them what’s gonna take place and do it ‘because I said so’ - that kinda environment.” (parent interview, 5/3/11)

“Everybody’s [referring to the teachers] different. What it takes to be a teacher at Marshall Langston is an interest in doing something experimental and interested in working among other really fine educators. Um, the teacher loves the students and knows them all very well and takes care of them and you know calls them if they’re not doing things, you know. It takes somebody that respects children.” (parent interview, 2/17/11)

“It takes a special kind of person. Um, you really have to love what you do in order to be a teacher at Marshall. You have to love children at Marshall. You have to love, genuinely love them from the bottom of your heart love. You cannot just be a teacher earning a pay check and work at Marshall, you have to be passionate about teaching in order to be a teacher at Marshall.” (parent interview, 2/24/11)

Each of these parents highlight the love and care associated with the teachers at Marshall relative to knowing the students and being concerned about their holistic development as individuals and as a community. In bringing up discipline, one parent suggests that this care wasn’t about coddling or sheltering the child but encompassed a commitment to support the growth of the child. As one parent points out, this care was reciprocated by a closeness between teachers and students and a sense of trust and fairness that the children attributed to the teachers. Parents identified this reciprocity as the foundation of the community or village-like orientation at Marshall that existed not only between teachers and students, but also embraced the families and communities associated with Marshall. These “communal bonds” (Morris, 1999) that parents identified were evident in formal and informal ways, and in and outside of school interactions. Expressing this one parent said,

“...it [Marshall] actually it saved my life, like I felt like it was a community. Like there was no problem I had I couldn’t bring to school and Gwen would try and solve it with other parents. So it wasn’t just a school for me, it became a way of thinking of a community. Like you’re not gonna sound like another school where you don’t have a place to live, so you’re gonna be homeless and trying to get your kid to school, you know. Gwen, they’re gonna fix that problem because you can’t be homeless, you know, so parents are all gonna come together and figure out what to do and how to help you.” (parent interview, 2/3/11)
Indicating that these bonds extended beyond the academic lives of the students, this parent outlines the level of inclusion, collective responsibility, and support experienced by members of the Marshall community. The sentiment expressed by this parent wasn’t speculative. For example, one parent shared that even after her child had graduated from Marshall she was still active in the school when one child’s mother became deathly ill and was hospitalized for more than a month. The child stayed with the alumni parent until her mother recovered (parent interview, 2/21/11). The alumni parent and the parent that fell ill weren’t necessarily friends, but it was through the connection to Marshall, and the recognition that one had something that the other needed—i.e. a willingness to care for the child—that the support occurred.

Parents indicated that these communal bonds with Marshall encouraged and welcomed them to share their cultural wealth with the larger community, and was not limited to the forms of “involvement” at other schools that only legitimized regimented, previously agreed upon types of participation. Instead, parents shared that at Marshall they gave “what they could, when they could” (parent interview, 2/21/11). These included things like an alumni’s grandparent providing piano lessons after school, using family members’ culinary expertise or connections for fundraisers, allowing families to volunteer at Marshall in exchange for tuition support or towards educational or community credit hours, having parents run errands for the school, or donating supplies to the school (various fieldnotes, 2010). Parents responses indicate that this reciprocity allowed the parents to “parent” (Walker, 1996) Marshall, serve as the re-enforcers of their children’s education, to trust and sincerely interact with Marshall teachers, and allow Marshall to help to raise their child(ren).

Parents juxtaposed these family-like experiences at Marshall with their experiences in other schools where they felt disconnected and excluded often because of race, class, or other stigmas. At those schools, parents did not have close relationships with the faculty or administration, did not trust them, and did not see a reciprocal interest in working together for the benefit of the child and the community. More importantly, parents saw this lack of reciprocity as affecting the quality of education their child(ren) received at other schools. Black and non-Black parents expressed these sentiments and shared that even when they questioned or tried to enhance the quality of the other schools they felt that this was not received well or was actively resisted despite their attempts to seem non-confrontational or judgmental. At Marshall, parents shared that they felt included, their support and suggestions were welcomed, and that the environment of reciprocity and community was integral to the holistic success of their children.

**Teach and reinforce students’ racial and cultural pride**

As earlier excerpts demonstrate, parents associated the philosophy and practices of reciprocity and communal bondedness at Marshall as allowing for teachers to really get to know and care for their children. Parents also indicated that because of these philosophies and practices at Marshall, their children were not quickly “labeled” or “stereotyped” in ways they saw occurring in other schools, but instead were able to be understood and cultivated as individuals. Citing their concerns about the racial and cultural isolation in other schooling environments, parents shared that they saw their kids shifting in other schools from being nice young kids to being “monsters” (fieldnotes, 6/9/11), angry (parent interview, 2/17/11), or as one parent described, “he was having such a hard time just such a hard time. Um, children would call his name and he would run to go play with them and they would run away from him. So, every day when we would come home he would ask me, ‘Mom what’s wrong with me, what’s wrong
with me?’ and when I would ask him, ‘Why are you asking me that?,’ he said, ‘Well every time the children call my name, when I run to go play with them they run away from me.’ So those are the kinds of things he was dealing with. They would rub his skin to see if his skin color would come off…. these are the things that he’s experienced in public school in [town name] in the first grade.” (parent interview 2/24/11)

Given these isolating and racialized experiences at other schools, parents noted that a critical expectation they had for Marshall was that it would racially culturally validate their children, support their cultural/racial pride, and build up their self-worth. As one parent noted,

“I wanted him [the child] to have a strong sense of self and know who he is and be proud of who he is, and that’s a young African American male I wanted him to know that and be proud of it, to know the accomplishments of his people and be proud of it and not feel ashamed of himself or not to feel inferior because of his race.” (parent interview 2/24/11)

Parents felt that this type of confidence and self-possession was possible at Marshall because there “we appreciate ourselves and we accept ourselves for who we are….I want her [the child] to be at peace with herself.” (parent interview, 1/27/11). Each of the parents interviewed made strong statements about the degree of self-confidence, self-worth and/or self-possession they saw develop in their children as a result of attending Marshall. Here are a few key examples:

“They have a confidence about them, the majority of the kids, not all of ’em. But the majority of the kids that leave here have a confidence about who they are and what they are and you could see it when they walk. You know, you could see it when they walk into a room. If they’re here long enough to get everything they need and have a parent who’s giving them the rest of what they need, you can have an awesome person walking out this door. Not solely just um, emotionally, but academically.” (parent interview, 2/21/11)

“But he feels empowered through Marshall so when he speaks now, he speaks with a veracity; a confidence; a strength that he didn’t have before. He may have had it; he just didn’t use it. But it’s coming out there.” (parent interview, 2/18/11)

“I think it works to produce children who are, uh, like I said successful, self-possessed, really aware of who they are….able to communicate, uh, proud of being African American, proud of what that history is, have the tools to negotiate race. And, uh, love learning most of all.” (parent interview, 2/18/11)

These statements underscore the impact that parents view Marshall as having on their children. They attribute advances in students’ self-confidence and self-possession to Marshall, and to a sense of empowerment that is taken up by the child that spans beyond just academic preparedness. Parents saw these shifts in their children’s communication styles, desire to learn and ability to negotiate race. As one parent notes, these qualities likely already existed within their child, but were not drawn out until they came to Marshall. Another parent qualifies that the development of these qualities requires students to stay at Marshall for a certain degree of time and requires a degree of involvement and commitment from parents, i.e. that it just cannot be the job of Marshall and that these shifts are not instantaneous. Parents articulated that those parents
who put in the time and effort with their children, and for whom the philosophy and practices at Marshall were an extension of what occurred at home, there were remarkable benefits. One parent describes the transformation they saw in their child,

“at some little program we all came and saw and I saw [child’s name], it was like a different child, a really different child. Spring in her steps, looking right at you when talking to you. Um, it was great, it was really great.” (parent interview, 2/24/11)

Another parent commented upon the growth they saw in someone else’s child and expressed their anticipation about seeing that child grow and move forward:

“I’m just waiting. I’m just waiting to see what’s gonna happen with him. When he does his poetry and stuff, you can see that confidence in him. Like he says, ‘I don’t give a damn. I don’t give a damn what nobody says. I’m in my zone. I gotta present this piece and I worked hard on this piece and I’m getting ready to give it to everyone, you know?’” (parent interview, 2/21/11)

This parent’s statement also shows how important for parents the performing and creative arts were relative to developing these poised characteristics among Marshall students. Connecting back to the type of Education they want for their child, the two quotes above reference the practice of reciting poetry that occurs weekly at Marshall and the focus on engaging students’ in participating in other types of performances as having been viewed as highly beneficial by parents. Another distinguishing aspect about Marshall that parents viewed as having an impact on students’ self-confidence, self-worth or self-possession was the focus on incorporating African and African American perspectives and history into the pedagogy and curriculum.

Parents saw these elements as having an impact on their children’s sense of self-worth and on their racial and cultural pride and identity. Parents felt that teachers at other schools “didn’t understand the African American culture and just couldn’t relate” and were “sheltered… and not very open to new experiences and new ideas, just living in their own little private communities and not really wanting to deal with or be bothered by other cultures” (parent interview, 2/24/11). Parents often saw the “problem of achievement” for African American children within schools being a result of assimilatory organizational structures and policies and a history of erasing, rather than affirming, students’ culture. At Marshall, however, parents saw their children as learning “stuff that every other school learns but from a black perspective” (parent interview, 5/3/11). Parents indicated that what was really important to them was that:

“That they are equal in the history of people, you know, their history and where they came from and... is just important as any other history, um, and that the people that look like them that contributed to the world, they knew about and so they could step out and say somebody like me contributed to this. Whereas you know at the schools where they go now... the most they're gonna get is some Martin Luther King some Harriet Tubman and maybe Frederick Douglass but they're not touching on any of, you know, they're not getting poems by Langston Hughes and Nikki Giovanni, they're not gonna get the art, they're not gonna... um, none of the scientists and inventors none of that is coming out, where it all did at Marshall. And not only did it come out but there was a strong understanding; it wasn't just in February.” (parent interview, 5/3/11)
Parents wanted their children to have exposure to African and African American history and contributions throughout the curriculum, not just in history class when they talked about slavery or as an annual aside during Black History Month. They wanted these contributions to be treated on equal footing with the other histories and contributions to human civilization. Parents did not believe that this recognition of the contributions of African and African Americans could only occur at a Black school, but shared that it wasn’t happening at the other schools.

This parent, like others, notes that it is important for children to have their cultural history validated in the curriculum and to see someone that looks “like them” within books because of the implications for the children’s self-confidence and racial identity:

“As far as identity, I think the fact that she [Gwen] had books that showed Black faces as well as others, where some schools you just don't get that. You don't, ...there's not a lot of books with Black faces in them or the contributions that Black people made, um, I think that just that would help anybody from any culture go out into the world and know that somebody that looked like them, um, was intelligent enough and capable to contribute to their world. And then also, um, some of the, um, like a big thing that they do on ancient civilizations um, just at the beginning of time, you know what I mean, that these were some of the most intelligent people, that these were some of the tools that they used, these are things that were built you know centuries ago that people today still don't get, you know.” (parent interview, 5/3/11)

Here the parent references seeing the contributions of one’s ancestors as being important to an individual’s own beliefs about their intelligence and capacity. Other parents echoed these sentiments, and also expressed concerns that the lack of these types of resources in other schools imposes a parallel set of negative messages. Earlier quotes from parents allude to these concerns about having to “reprogram” or “undo” (parent interview, 3/15/11) problematic messages that were presented at other schools and in society.

At the same time, Black and non-Black parents were uniform in their belief that the cultural focus of the school didn’t make their children Anti-White nor have a narrow definition of what it meant to be Black. When asked about this, several parents pointed out that non-Black students had attended Marshall:

“There’s been a couple of kids, some of them were teacher’s kids who came here. I know a couple of years ago one of the ladies who was teaching here, her daughter went here. Little White girl, loved it. Hated to move away. She was just as content. I think if you have a parent or guardian who is color blind and just accept people for who they are, yeah, you can go here. Anyone can go here, if you’ve been taught to be color blind. But how many people have been taught to be color blind? It’s just a handful.” (parent interview, 2/18/11)

Noting that past non-Black teachers had sent their children to Marshall and that these children were happy with their experience at the school, this parent did not give credence to the presumption that an all-Black school or environment was necessarily anti-White. The parent went on to explain that their concern was not about the racial environment at Marshall, and whether or not it would be accepting on non-Black students and families, rather whether or not such families would be tolerant and accepting of those that were not like them. A non-Black parent also mentioned the level of racial tolerance and diversity at Marshall:
“I know how tolerant Gwen has been with the few white kids that have been there. I mean and that- What’s White? You know. Um, I really like that there’s people of all shades of color in that school and that the kids are encouraged to, um, there’s a phrase that I can’t quite think what it is, it’s color conscious. It’s conscious of who’s light, who’s dark, and who’s in between. You know, and I think that, um, at least the kids at Marshall are really taught to tolerate anybody who wants to identify with that school that can hang, you know.”

(pARENT INTERVIEW, 2/17/11)

The parent above also mentions that non-Black students have attended Marshall. This parent’s comments also push on the earlier color blind statement from the previous parent to highlight that students at Marshall were not taught to be color blind but to be politically conscious and open to dialogue about the power of colorism. Both parents’ statements refer to the level of tolerance at Marshall and that there is not an issue of acceptance at Marshall but of non-Black students being willing to identify with and attend Marshall. The latter parent’s comment also alludes to the presence at Marshall of a dialogue around race, which other non-Black parents of Black children and of multiracial students at Marshall also indicated that they appreciated.

Similarly, parents didn’t see the school as narrowly defining what it meant to be Black or to “act Black.” Rather, parents noted that before coming to Marshall their child didn’t “want” or “enjoy” being Black because they had a very “deformed” (parent interview, 3/5/11) or negative view about being Black that parents felt they picked up from school, television, or other social mediums or institutions. Documenting their conversation with their child years ago when they had to dispel some of these negative stereotypes, one parent shared:

“I’m a news fanatic... And one day [on the news] she [their child] saw this little white girl who’s father was dying of cancer, he had been an Olympic swimmer. They lived in the Bay Area and he wanted to leave his daughter a legacy, so he taught her swim- the legacy he left her was his swimming. And he had this little girl swim in the Bay from I think Alcatraz or something and my daughter saw it and she says, ‘I don’t wanna be Black anymore’ and I say ‘Why?’ She said, ‘because the White people they always do fun stuff.’ And I was like, “Well, what do they do?” She was like, ‘Well, they swim, this little girl was swimming.”’ And I was like, “Well, your grandmother got a swimming pool. If you want to learn how to swim you can go up to your grandmother’s.’ But because of what society shows us, such negativity, that’s all she ever saw of Blacks. But when she got here, it was like a floodgate opened. She realized that you know, man, I’m BLACK, I’m smart, I’m intelligent, I’m proud, I’ve got dignity, I have grace, and she just here learned how to put ‘em all together somewhat cohesively so that she could move forward, because she did not like being Black” (parent interview, 2/18/11)

This parents’ recollection of their dialogue with their child documented how their child had internalized some negative perceptions about being Black, namely that it meant she couldn’t have fun or have particular types of fun—like go swimming. The child had the misperception that in accepting a “Black” identity that also meant she had to forego certain types of activities or behaviors. The parent notes that beyond their efforts at home, the environment at Marshall allowed her to recognize positive attributions of Blackness and embrace her own racial identity. This parent later pointed out that Marshall’s curriculum included swimming, tennis, yoga, and other activities that challenged the racialized stereotypes their daughter was making about what Black people do and do not do.
Other parents similarly refuted the idea that there was an essentialized idea of Blackness at Marshall and likewise pointed to what they saw as a school environment where children were allowed to eschew racialized positionings and embrace their individuality. A non-Black parent commented, “No. I don’t think it’s about that at all. No I think it’s a much gentler… I don’t think it’s so, um, Black and White (laughs)” (parent interview, 2/17/11). Another recalls their first experience visiting Marshall and said, “it was like the first time when I saw a bunch of nerdy Black kids, you know, [who were] like, “Oh, don’t take my pencil!” It was a trip!” (parent interview, 2/3/11). In reflecting on what they thought about the alumni at Marshall, one parent commented that, “To me they strike me as very eccentric people, kind of worldly, even kind of hippy-like some of them. Um, well rounded individuals and very unique.” These parents’ comments suggest that rather than their being a narrow notion of Blackness at Marshall, the heterogeneity of the student population there actually allowed for students to cultivate less racialized, stereotyped, identities allowing for a broader spectrum of Blackness to be expressed.

Other parents pointed out that what Marshall did was prepare their children to be culturally flexible navigators (Carter, 2005), which the parents themselves at times struggled to do. One non-Black parent talked about this in the context of their child’s rich, all-White private school:

“I don't feel, uh, I don't feel as comfortable there... I don't have very much in common with those parents. And so I don't feel as comfortable as I did at MLS. At MLS, I felt like we were all kinda in the same boat and I enjoyed spending time with the um... I just don't feel as comfortable there. I don't feel like I have anything in common with the parents. I mean there are some, every now and then I meet a few, handful of people there that I enjoy. But for the most part, [the child]’s always telling me, ‘look I had to make friends, you need to. She brings me to school events and tells me, ‘Mingle, mingle!’ and I'm like no, I wanna go back to my Marshall friends. But I just know where I’m, uh, comfortable. I mean superficially because of race... yeah.... but these are people who... make huge, obscene amounts of money and they live in multi-million dollar houses and that's just not ever been my life or been the life of anybody that I've ever been close to. So it's a whole new experience for me and it's a new experience for [child’s name] too, to be in exposed to that kind of wealth. It was a whole 'nother thing that she had to deal with. And she's better at it than I am. She's much better than I am. I'm too old and set in my ways I guess. But she's really good at it. She's, she's made some friends. (parent interview, 2/18/11)

In outlining the differences they felt because of class issues, rather than race, this parent highlights how their child was better prepared and more willing to interact than the parent was, and in fact tried to push the parent to be more social despite the cultural class barriers they saw between themselves and the other parents.

Teach students about racism, injustice, and activism

In addition to the racial and cultural aspects of Marshall, parents also talked about the political environment at Marshall and how the political clarity of teachers was embedded in all aspects of Marshall and often was similar to their own political inclinations. In calling out what they appreciated about Marshall, one parent said: “The cultural and political. The politics of Gwen and Adebiyi [the “father” of Marshall] are on a parallel with the politics of us. They’re one branch of something and we’re another with us” (parent interview, 2/24/11). To highlight the political philosophy and environment at Marshall, parents described their children’s experiences at Marshall where they performed political plays about Rosa Parks, Fredrick Douglass, and other
historic Black and multicultural figures (various interviews), and engaged in different forms of political action from letter writing, protests, attending demonstrations, and other types of direct and indirect political action. One parent referenced a “trait of consciousness in [Marshall] students” (parent interview, 2/18/11) that is clear “once you start talking to them” (parent interview, 2/18/11).

One example of Marshall’s cultivating students’ political agency and tools relative to speaking out against injustice, was an incident shared during a parent interview (2/21/11). The school had to use a different set of tennis courts, near a prestigious White school, because of construction happening at their usual courts. As soon as the Marshall students arrived, the students from the other school who were at recess, kept pointing and staring at the Marshall students. Uncomfortable, the Marshall students communicated this to the parent, tennis teacher, and to Gwen. Telling the students to pay the other children “no mind,” the tennis teacher told the students to begin running their warm up laps around the courts. As soon as the Marshall students started running, coincidently in the direction of the other school and its students, the students from the White school began to scream and run away in apparent fear. When they returned to Marshall, Gwen and the parent facilitated a conversation with the students about how the incident made them feel. The students were outraged and decided to write a letter to the school chronicling the racist experience and indicating that the administrators of that school needed to address this with their students. The other school’s response was to ask the Marshall students to come and lead a workshop on sensitivity, an offer they declined (parent interview, 2/21/11).

This incident came up again during an observation when students were considering which schools they were going to apply to for middle school. Recalling the incident that had occurred more than a year prior, many indicated “I’m not going to that racist place” and refused to apply there, while one student indicated that he might have to go there and wasn’t excited about it but felt that he could handle it (fieldnotes, 4/12/10).

Relative to the philosophy and environment at Marshall itself, parents indicated that in sending their child to Marshall they hoped to “inoculate” their child from the “toxins” of racism (parent interview, 3/4/11) as a “first line of defense,” (parent interview, 2/3/11) against bias they might encounter at other schools and elsewhere. As touched upon in earlier sections, parents generally felt that this type of preparation to deal with bias occurred, although perhaps not to the level of being immune to racism. As one parent explained about his/her daughter,

“...she is so self-possessed and so luminous, I mean she is just, is very sensible. she rolls with the punches and she also is able to call people on their shit in a way that invites dialogue as opposed to alienation and she learned that from Gwen. She definitely learned that from Gwen, ‘cuz I’m not good at that. “ (parent interview, 2/18/11)

Referencing the student’s sense of self worth and ability to speak out, this parent viewed their child as being prepared to deal with bias in a productive way and also attributes this ability to Marshall.

While most parents, like the one above, embraced the political orientation and how the curriculum of the school was situated around developing students’ political awareness, other parents expressed varying degrees of comfort with it. One parent was concerned with the appropriateness of it for young children who couldn’t really understand the complexities of racism and injustice more broadly.

“Um it hasn’t taught my son how to deal with racism ‘cause he’s faced with it every day at school and he can’t deal with it any better than he did prior to Marshall. So I don’t believe it
teaches them how to deal with racism, what I do think is that it makes them biased. And that’s my honest opinion. I think that they begin to see things as only Black and White......at the school that she’s [the child] is at she sees everybody as rich and White. Well everybody at the school are not rich and white, 25% of the school children there are on scholarships. No. But she’s now looking through the world through very small lenses where she was more open before and she’s more, um, she just looks for injustice now more than she every did. Everything’s about race now, everything’s about race. And she wasn’t that way before and I think it kind of hindered her in that aspect. (parent interview, 2/24/11)

This parent felt that being taught about racism at Marshall made their child more aware of racial inequities, but less willing to understand other injustices around class that may also be present. The parent felt that their child focused on seeing everything as “Black and White,” a biased perspective they felt hindered their child. Instead, the parent was hoping that their child would be able to have an “open dialogue, but I realize that that’s expecting a lot” from a younger child. The parent shared that their child would often get angry and frustrated with the students at their school and call them a “bunch of primadonas” who “feel like they can do things to me but when I do things back to them, then they don’t like it and they run off and cry.”

This parent shared that their concerns about the ability of a child to deal with these complex issues in part stemmed from the fact that their child started at Marshall in the later part of their elementary school years and because they felt that there should be a middle school portion to Marshall:

“I would recommend Marshall to other parents um if they had a chance to start their child off at the kindergarten level or just early on in their school career. ....So if they had a chance to.... you know, just to start them off, if they had a good start at Marshall I definitely would recommend it. .....um I just wish [child’s name] had more time there and she didn’t have enough time there in my opinion. So, yes I would highly recommend it but I would recommend that the child start at a younger age. .....Well if it went through K-8, if Marshall went K-8, she would be there until she graduated 8th grade. At 9th grade I think she would be a little better prepared, I think she would be.”

Talking about adding a middle school portion reflects the parent’s concern that pushing the child from the nurturing environment at Marshall into middle school might be too much and that they would be better prepared to handle the issues at other schools when they were more mature. They also stress that a longer period of time spent at Marshall would have been more beneficial. This parent’s statements bring up questions about the appropriateness of dealing with social and political issues for younger children, especially in situations where children might not have the time to more fully explore those issues and instead receive only partial awareness. When other parents were probed about this, one parent of an adult alumnus responded, “

“Um, and they’re not especially happy....as adults, so I can’t give that to Gwen, I mean they’re not especially miserable either, um, but .... they’re really, really wonderful uh, in terms of morality, ethics, the way they treat people. And they’re loved for that. And um, you know, I think we get a lot of credit for that but Gwen does to ‘cuz they could have been deformed. You know? I mean, people that’s in the system for 12 or 15 years without a lot of back up are likely to get pretty deformed. So... I’m pretty proud of how [child’s name] may have turned out as people- as the way they treat other people. And they way that they approach life, conscientiously and so I got to give Gwen some credit for that. That’s
probably goes along with why they’re not necessarily so happy, you know what I mean? I mean with Gwen - it’s a whole other challenge. It’s a huge challenge to deal with this world the way it is and, um, and still be a good person even. But then to learn to accept it and be okay with it, and and, um, [child’s name] is still struggling with that a little bit” (parent interview, 3/5/11)

Complicating the other parent’s concern, this parent of an older alumnus points out that while their child is not “happy,” they are conscientious which may itself lead to greater difficulties with living in the world because of the level of awareness one has about injustices. These parents’ perspectives call into question whether or not educating children about racism and injustice is psychologically healthy or developmentally appropriate.

At the same time, earlier excerpts from parents that point out the unwelcoming, and at times hostile and racist, environments their children encountered in schools brings up the counter question of how to deal with that set of issues. If children are going to experience racism in schools, do you teach them about it? Relatedly, how do you teach them about it in a healthy way? Most parents of Marshall alumni indicated that they felt the approach to trying to teach students about racism and injustice at Marshall was both healthy and beneficial. Others questioned this, but their apprehension is cautioned by their belief that their child would have been better served if they began earlier at Marshall as well as if Marshall went until the 8th grade. Their critique therefore is less about Marshall’s approach or its importance, but about the developmental time needed for students to be able to learn how to productively engage in this process of questioning racism and injustice, and trying to engage in activism.

A broader view: Parents’ perspectives about the goals and possibilities of Education

The perspectives and evaluations of Marshall by parents reflected many of the beliefs/pedagogical goals underlying Marshall’s attempts to challenge racism and positively racially socialize students. Parents’ interview responses suggested that some of Marshall’s philosophies and practices were especially salient and impactful. Taking a step back, what do their responses mean relative to African American’s struggle for racial advancement through education? Specifically, what do Marshall parents’ perspectives and evaluations tell us about the possibilities for liberation in and through schools, and what do they see as the constraints?

This section will analyze the above findings within the context of the macroanalytic frames (moral, psychological, social structural, and cultural). Marshall parents’ responses interchangeably draw upon aspects of the four macroanalytic frames and make claims about the types of racial advances in and through schools they view as necessary, possible, and having occurred for their children. Their statements reflect the complex nature in which these different frames overlap and intersect with one another within African American’s expectations of schools, particularly Black schools.

Connecting with the moral frame, parents’ responses indicated that at Marshall their child developed a personal sense of self-worth and self-confidence that was rooted in the dignity he/she had in his/her work as students. Parents frequently saw their children as resilient despite the dehumanizing and demoralizing effects of institutionalized schooling environments that parents were wary of and/or escaping. Parents’ appraisals of and belief in the need for students to develop a sense of personal responsibility and efficacy in school also relates to the moral
frames’ focus on individual development, self-determination and personal control as the building blocks for individual racial mobility. In talking about how the morning meeting and the elder model at Marshall cultivated the “whole child” and their mutual respect for others, parents’ statements often resonated with the beliefs about the need for individual moral development that characterizes this frame. Finally, Marshall parents frequently cited that their children, through being at Marshall, were able to cultivate their love of and for learning. This echoes the experiences of scholars like Washington and Douglass who argued that intrinsic to African American’s humanity was a resilient spirit of inquiry that drove them to want to learn and to continually engage in a process of personal betterment through education. Parents viewed these aspects of the moral frame as both being beneficial and necessary components for providing African American students with an Education.

Relative to the psychological frame, Marshall parents oriented to the importance and impact that Marshall had in developing the positive self-concept/identity of their children. Their statements about the anger, confusion, and other affective experiences of their children within other schools and the shifts they saw at Marshall and later on, reflect this frames’ focus on the tensions of identity relative to awareness of one’s social positioning. Parents’ comments pushed on the effects that schools and social messages have on affecting students’ beliefs about their individual capacities and abilities, as well as African Americans’ attributions and behaviors as a group. The significance of this frame can be seen in Marshall parents’ reflections of their children’s experiences that made them question their own identity (i.e. “I don’t want to be Black anymore”; “What’s wrong with me?”) and the pathologizing attempts of schools to label or diagnose African American children rather than respond to the environmental and interactional concerns brought forth by parents. The parent’s reference to the morning meeting as a “mini-therapy” session also aligns with the psychological frame in advocating for a humanizing approach to education that develops the “whole child” and recognizes the internal tensions that African American youth grapple with in an oppressive society. Likewise, parents’ beliefs about the positive effects on students’ sense of self-worth and self-concept that comes with learning about African diasporic history and through such a perspective, also reflects their invocations of the psychological frame.

Relatedly the institutional and interpersonal care that parents saw as distinguishing the nurturing environment at Marshall with other schools, echoes DuBois’ concerns about the need for “sympathetic touch” between teachers and students that is embodied through an expressive, honest discourse. Marshall parents also invoked Baldwin in noting that this ethic of care was based in an inherent respect for children and a reciprocal understanding of them both as children and as equal beings. Equally important was Marshall’s belief in the infinite capacity and educability of African American students, which parents indicated they did not encounter at other schools. Parent’s pointed out Marshall’s tradition of having high expectations without regard for developmental restrictions and its philosophy of cultivating students’ critical thinking skills, two aspects that also fit within the purview of the psychological frame.

Marshall parents’ criticisms or initial concerns about Marshall may also resonate with aspects of the psychological frame. Parents’ concern about Marshall’s academic rigor perhaps reflects the psychological frame’s argument that African Americans have internalized a dominant discourse around the quality of schools and what counts as “good” academic training in ways that may discount their own institutions or curriculum honoring African Americans in favor of legitimizing that of mainstream institutions and dominant perspectives. To be sure, the whole scale discounting of African American models of education was not evidenced in the data. At
the same time, parents’ concerns about their ability to evaluate the learning outcomes of Marshall students without standardized test scores, validates the dominant discourse that positions these tests as effective indicators of learning and/or aptitude. Parental concerns that did not validate the assumptions of these tests, but pushed for Marshall to practice them, may also be assimilatory in their acceptance, versus resistance to, the social value and power ascribed to standardized tests. While a moral frame is often critiqued as accommodationist, the psychological frame is likewise critiqued as assimilative rather than transgressive.

The cultural frame was also evident in parents’ responses. As with the psychological frame, Marshall parents’ assessments of the benefits of incorporating African diasporic history and perspectives as a way to validate students’ identity, namely their racial and cultural identities, reflects the cultural frame. Again invoking the cultural frame, parents’ viewed this inclusion as being integral to the curriculum, pedagogy and schooling environment at Marshall rather than something that occurred once a year or in a fashion only limited to talking about slavery or Civil Rights icons that have been more readily accepted into mainstream curriculum and discourses.

Also overlapping with the psychological frame were parents’ evaluations of the institutional and interpersonal care at Marshall. Important to the cultural frame, however, are parents’ responses that attribute this care and reciprocity to the shared cultural values of African Americans or that of oppressed people. This was seen in parents’ statements about not having to “reprogram” children at home and indicating the alignment between the beliefs and values at Marshall with those of the home. The levels of trust and perceptions about fairness that parents shared that they, and their children, had relative to Marshall teachers’ disciplinary practices and overall approach to Education, also are characteristic of the cultural frame.

The cultural frame was also apparent in parents’ descriptions about their and their children’s experiences of being treated as culturally deficient or racially stereotyped at the other schools that their children attended, and that they did not view as being an issue at Marshall. Marshall parents’ brought the cultural frame into play when they evaluated how Marshall served to Educate Marshall students as African Americans who need to be prepared to deal with and understand bias relative to colorism and race, as well as be taught about tolerance. Lastly, parents’ statements about their children’s perceptions of Blackness before and after Marshall also connect with the cultural frame, as do their statements about whether or not Marshall promotes anti-White sentiments or essentializes Blackness. This latter point about essentializing Blackness is a main critique made about the cultural frame. Although Marshall parents used the cultural frame to identify many of Marshall’s philosophies and practices, they did not see Marshall as falling into the trap of limiting what it meant to be or to act Black. In fact, they saw the environment at Marshall being much more liberatory or “free” in that it cultivated students’ individuality and allowed students to be “who they are all the time” rather than putting limits upon what were or were not acceptable forms of Black identity or activity.

Marshall parents’ act of and reasons for opting out of traditional schooling environments and notions of education are some examples of the social structural frame. Parents’ used their political agency to call out the injustices and discrimination at other schools and identify those injustices as acts of racism, classism, liberalism, etc. Parents’ evaluations of the community orientation at Marshall that incorporates and advocates tolerance for interracial and interclass dialogue and learning space is another example of the social structural frame. Based on Marshall parents’ assessments, the orientation at Marshall seems to align with the structural approach in that at Marshall each family is viewed as having something to contribute and that their social position reflects social inequities rather than personal or group deficiencies. Marshall parents
talked about how Marshall drew upon the cultural wealth of community members, whereas in other schooling environments certain contributions were given a higher status than others or some were delegitimized or not welcomed altogether.

The social structural frame can also be seen in parents’ responses that indicate that non-Black students have attended and have been welcomed at Marshall, and in the comments of non-Black parents relative to their feelings of inclusion within the Marshall community. Their comments reflect a perspective that the education at Marshall isn’t just for African American children, but is likely beneficial for all children if their parents are tolerant and conscious people. Likewise, parents’ feelings of inclusion reflect the diverse alliances that are advocated for by this frame.

Parents’ discussion about Marshall’s development of students’ critical thinking abilities, generally and relative to understanding racism and injustice, also relate to the methods at the foundation of the social structural frames’ argument for racial uplift. Parents’ attributed Marshall’s progressive and non-traditional philosophy and its practices to the political clarity of its teachers, a “trait of consciousness” that they also saw taken up by students. In line with this frame’s push for political activism, parents documented the forms of political action that Marshall students engaged in while attending Marshall and that were part of the curriculum there, as well as the strategies for activism that were modeled. Parents also described how students’ were or were not being prepared to deal with racism and bias.

This last point reflects concerns about whether attempts at developing students’ understandings about racism and classism is developmentally appropriate for elementary school children and what types of outcomes can be expected from students’ increasing awareness. Parents deemed it important and necessary to prepare their children to deal with racism, especially because of their children’s racialized and problematic experiences in other schools before and after Marshall. At the same time, some parents felt that children who did not spend the majority of their elementary school years at Marshall were not able to sufficiently develop their political analysis and that their awareness was more a hindrance than a help. Their concern mirrors the psychological frame’s claims about the tensions of identity that develop when African Americans become aware of their oppressed social positions and society’s perceptions of them that do not align with their perceptions of themselves—e.g. DuBois’ rhetorical question to Black America “How does it feel to be a problem?” (1903, p. 2) and Baldwin’s statement that “it isn’t long… before he [the student] discovers the shape of his oppression” (1963, p. 221).

Although the parent saw a potential resolution if children were able to complete most of their elementary school experience at Marshall and/or if Marshall were to expand to have a middle school, their concerns about what can and should happen in schools still remains. Marshall parents agreed that part of what should constitute racial justice in schools is children’s freedom to be children and to be who they want to be versus being positioned relative to racialized discourses. They saw these affordances at Marshall as types of freedom their children took up and that had long-standing impact but were not available in other schooling contexts.

Their concerns about the appropriateness and effectiveness of other types of racial advancements at Marshall suggest the tensions of present in trying to use schools as vehicles for racial advancement. Although parents appreciated that Marshall was able to resist against the rampant stereotyping and racialized othering they saw in schools, they also wanted Marshall to accommodate certain structures, curriculum, or practices they saw at other schools that were not oriented towards transgressing the norms of schooling. Parents evaluations of Marshall also point out the complex entailments of each of the frames, some aspects of which parents may be willing to endorse, while others conflict with their commitments to other frames. For example,
parents were generally united in their positive evaluation of the critical thinking that was
developed at Marshall. However, if they identified this philosophy as coming from the cultural
or social structural frame, some viewed the outgrowth of this type of questioning and social
critique as being problematic and even harmful. This assessment by parents more closely
resembles a concern of the psychological frame that awareness about one’s oppression and the
contradictions between external social perceptions and one’s self-concept can lead to internal
tensions, pathological or otherwise. Picking up on the concerns and tensions brought up in this
chapter and those alluded to by alumni in the following chapter, Chapter V, the final chapter of
this dissertation deals with these larger, on-going questions about the function and possibilities of
schools and education within the African American struggle for racial advancement and
liberation.
CHAPTER V

Transformational v. Institutional: Alumni perceptions of Marshall Langston School

Harriet Tubman

Harriet Tubman didn’t take no stuff  
Wasn’t scared of nothing either  
Didn’t come in this world to be no slave  
And wasn’t going stay one either

“Farewell!” she sang to her friends one night  
She was mighty sad to leave ‘em  
But she ran away that dark, hot night  
Ran looking for her freedom

She ran to the woods and she ran through the woods  
With slave catchers right behind her  
And she kept on going till she got to the North  
Where those mean men couldn’t find her

Nineteen times she went back South  
To get three hundred others  
She ran for her freedom nineteen times  
To save Black sisters and brothers  
Harriet Tubman didn’t take no stuff  
Wasn’t scared of nothing neither  
 Didn’t come in this world to be no slave  
And didn’t stay one either

And didn’t stay one either  
- Eloise Greenfield

In interviewing alumni a name that frequently surfaced was that of Harriet Tubman. Alumni recalled learning about her, seeing her sentinel at the school gate, playing the recess game “Underground Railroad,” or reciting the above poem that seemed to anchor every Friday recitation and graduation ceremony. Paralleling Tubman’s own liberatory story, the experiences alumni shared and their evaluations of Marshall, laudatory or critical, were marked by a sentiment of personal ownership of themselves and the school, and by their commitment to aid in the African American collective struggle for racial justice. Marshall alumni often talked about Marshall as a “freeing” experience distinct from the structures and strictures of institutionalized education they experienced elsewhere, and argued for the need for Education in other schools.

In this chapter, I analyze alumni evaluations about Marshall’s philosophies and practices and discuss them relative to the microanalytic framework of politically relevant teaching. This will foster an examination of alumni perceptions of Marshall’s attempts to challenge racism and to racially socialize its students. The attempts and evaluations of alumni will also be considered within the macroanalytic frames as a way to understand how these present experiences in schools can inform our thinking about the goals and possibilities of using schools to address historic racial inequalities and continue the African American struggle for racial advancement.
First, the survey data is presented to highlight the philosophies and practices that alumni identified as salient. This data helps to verify if these philosophies and practices were perceived to shift or remain consistent across Marshall’s 31-year history. Second, I use the alumni interview data to further explore alumni responses and provide first-hand testimonies from alumni about their perceptions and evaluations of Marshall. As with Chapters III and IV, the interview responses are analyzed underneath the rubric of the microanalytic beliefs/pedagogical goals. At the end, I reexamine the alumni findings using the macroanalytic frames to discuss the types of racial advancement that Marshall’s philosophies and practices afford.

**Challenging racism and racially socializing students: Alumni survey responses**

Beginning in summer 2010, a 30 question, multiple-choice survey was used to gather data from Marshall alumni that ranged from recent 2010 graduates to the first students at the school during its inaugural year (1979-1980). Some qualitative data was also retrieved from the survey if the alumnus filled out the text box provided after each question. As presented in Chapter II, 52 alumni completed the survey or approximately 31% of the alumni population. Of those alumni, 29% came from Cohort I, 38% from Cohort II, and 33% from Cohort III.

The survey data indicate that alumni from Cohort I and II were more likely to stay for longer periods of time at Marshall and to begin their elementary school experience there earlier. Some students in Cohorts I and II arrived after the 2nd grade, but most enrolled at Marshall in kindergarten or 1st grades and graduated from Marshall in the 6th grade. By contrast, alumni from Cohort III often started at Marshall in the 2nd grade or later before graduating. For those that started in 4th grade or later, some indicated that they were held back for an additional year. Across the cohorts, alumni reported coming from middle to lower-income households. The participants in the alumni survey do not necessarily align with the parents that were interviewed, nonetheless the incomes that they reported fall along a similar distribution with over 80% being below the median income. All of the students identified as African and/or African American descent, with some also indicating Native American or White ancestry or identifying as Bi-racial or Multiracial. Of these, 53% listed their mother as their primary caretaker, 13% their father, 27% two parents, and 7% listed a grandparent. Gender was not a required response, but the qualitative responses including statements like “As a Black woman” or “Boys like me” indicate that male and female alumni completed the survey. Of the alumni that were over 18 years of age, 100% had completed high school, 82% of which had graduated or were attending 2 or 4 yr. colleges, and 27% had attended or were attending graduate school.

*Teaching style, relationships, and perceptions of the school community*

The data highlights the favorability and importance attributed to Marshall’s teaching style and practices, the school size and composition, the relationships and interactions, and the curriculum. Ranking their responses 1 through 10, with “1” representing what was most liked, survey responses indicate that alumni most enjoyed Marshall’s teaching style and practices. Alumni also liked the connection to Gwen, the School size, and the School Philosophy. Interestingly, even though Marshall is largely African American the School composition item did not rank at all within the top 3 rankings while every other category did.
TABLE 8: Alumni “Most liked about Marshall”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>#1</th>
<th>#2</th>
<th>#3</th>
<th>#4</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School size</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>43%</td>
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<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching style and practices</td>
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<td>14%</td>
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<tr>
<td>School philosophy</td>
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<td>14%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School composition (mainly African American)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School curriculum (African centered)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection to other families at Marshall</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Connection to Gwen</td>
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<td>29%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection to other teachers</td>
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<td>14%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection to other students</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>14%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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<td>0</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE 9: Alumni “Greatest Impact on Educational Success”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>#1</th>
<th>#2</th>
<th>#3</th>
<th>#4</th>
<th>#5</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School size</td>
<td>33%</td>
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<td>17%</td>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching style and practices</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School philosophy</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School composition (mainly African American)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School curriculum (African centered)</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection to other families at Marshall</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>50%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Connection to Gwen</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection to other teachers</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection to other students</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

In another survey item (Table 9), alumni viewed Marshall’s teaching style and practices as having the greatest impact on their educational success, and was selected either as the 1st or 2nd choice by all alumni. School size also was viewed to have a strong impact and was a frequent 1st or 2nd choice beyond teaching style and practices. Connection to other teachers also received 17% of the first rankings. School philosophy was third and was followed by School curriculum in level of importance of impact. Connection to Gwen and Connection to other families also were viewed as having had an impact on alumni’s educational success but to a lesser degree than the previous items. It is possible that Connection to Gwen is lower than might be expected because of its overlap with Connection to other teachers and with Teaching style and practices.
Alumni were also asked “Was the teaching style at Marshall the same as other schools you attended?,” to which 86% of the alumni responded that it was “Very different” and 14% that it was “somewhat different.” This suggests that the teaching style that alumni liked the most and that they viewed as having the greatest impact was unique to Marshall and not present at the other schools they attended. Alumni responses about the teaching style and their relationships with teachers provide additional evidence that they saw Marshall’s teaching style and environment as unique. In responding to “Was the teaching style and schooling environment at Marshall more or less caring than that of other schools you attended?,” 72% responded “Much more caring,” 14% “more caring, and 14% equally as caring. This positive evaluation of the teaching style and its impact, as well as the affect of the teaching style and school environment, was reinforced by findings about the scope of the relationships that alumni had formed with Marshall teachers. In answering the item “How would you describe your relationships with Marshall teachers while you were a student?,” 43% responded that the relationships at Marshall were family-like, 29% that the relationships were very personal or socially connected as well as connected to schoolwork & behavior, and 29% that the relationships were equally about schoolwork & behavior as they were about personal/social connections. Confirming these family-like and personal/social connections, alumni indicated that they interacted with their Marshall teachers not only at the school or school-related events but also at social events held at their home, other homes of Marshall community members, at Marshall teachers’ own homes, and even saw them at their other schools after they had left Marshall.53

Beyond their relationships with Marshall teachers, Marshall alumni indicated that they also had a special relationship with Marshall as a school. When asked to describe their relationship with Marshall as either a school they attended, a good school, their favorite school, a community, or a family, 57% of Marshall alumni viewed Marshall as a family, 29% viewed it as a community, and over 14% described it as their favorite school. No alumni indicated that it was just another school that they attended or that it was a good school without further affiliating themselves with it. Indeed, 86% of alumni indicated that they were more involved with Marshall than they were with any other school they had attended. A similar percentage (86%) indicated that they had an excellent experience at Marshall, with 14% saying it was a good experience.

To summarize, Marshall alumni most enjoyed the teaching style and practices and saw them as having the greatest impact. Additionally, alumni saw their relationships with Marshall teachers to be closer, more caring, and distinct from those with teachers at other schools. Moreover, their connections to Marshall teachers, other Marshall students and families, and their evaluations of the impact of the school’s small size, its curriculum and its composition, were all important factors perceived to have an impact on their educational success. Finally, alumni also identified Marshall as a family, a community, or their favorite school.

Perceptions about racism and racial socialization

Findings indicate that alumni perceived that the philosophies and practices at Marshall challenged racism and racially socialized students into positive racial identities. Alumni were asked, “Does Marshall deal with issues of race and racism at the school? If so, how? (Check all that apply).” One participant indicated that Marshall didn’t deal with race or racism at all. The remaining 98% indicated Marshall did, and all 98% agreed that this occurred in the curriculum.

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53 Alumni indicated that those “sightings” of Marshall teachers at other schools they attended included times when teachers had come to visit or check up on them or to deliver materials for them and stopped in to say “hello.”
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Provide a non-racist schooling environment</th>
<th>Develop students' racial identities</th>
<th>Cultivate student responsibility/accountability</th>
<th>Build community</th>
<th>Foster student independence</th>
<th>Promote academic development</th>
<th>Promote emotional development</th>
<th>Promote social development</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Morning Meeting/Compliment &amp; Complaint Circle</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elder system</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>33%</td>
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<td>Student chart system</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>83%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>17%</td>
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<tr>
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<td>33%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>33%</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steppin' Up, Steppin' On</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>83%</td>
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<td>33%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
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<td>0</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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</table>
in the teaching style and practices, in the school philosophy, in the school activities, in the interactions between students and in the interactions between students and teachers. Only 86% believed that Marshall dealt with racism in its interactions with families. Alumni were asked if they had encountered racism at other schools and if their experiences at Marshall shaped how they felt or handled those experiences, 6% said they had never had racist experiences at other schools, and 94% said they had encountered racism in other schools and that Marshall shaped how they felt or handled those experiences. The curriculum, teaching practices and school philosophy were viewed as the most helpful in dealing with racism, followed by the school activities. Interactions at the school between teachers and families, between students, between teachers and students, and the school being African American were viewed as helpful with dealing with racism but to a lesser degree than the top three choices. Alumni unanimously agreed that Marshall’s approaches to dealing with racism were “very different” from the approaches at other schools. Alumni were asked if Marshall supported positive racial identities or other types of identities. All alumni indicated that Marshall supported positive racial identities and artistic/performance identities, 86% indicated that Marshall supported academic or school related identities, 71% said that Marshall supported child or adolescent identities, and 57% indicated that Marshall supported subject specific identities and athletic identities.

With respect to the practices and structures at Marshall, alumni were asked what they thought these practices did for them as a student, i.e. what function they served or impact they had. Focusing on Table 10 relative to racial socialization and challenging racism, 83% of alumni indicated that the morning meeting served to provide a non-racist schooling environment and 50% said it helped to develop students’ racial identities. For the elder system, 17% said it helped to provide a non-racist schooling environment and 100% said it helped to build community. For the graduation ceremony, Steppin’ Up & Steppin’ On54, 50% said that it helped to provide a non-racist schooling environment and 67% said that it helped to develop students’ racial identities. Looking at the other responses within the politically relevant teaching framework that encompasses goals of challenging racism and fostering racial socialization, some of the remaining categories also become salient. For example, 100% of students said that the morning meeting and elder system helped to cultivate student responsibility/accountability and to build community. All alumni respondents also said that Steppin’ Up & Steppin’ On helped to build community and to foster student independence. These practices, along with the chart system, had the highest percentages of responses relative to the type of impact that they had.

Analyzing politically relevant teaching: Philosophies, structures, curriculum, and practices

In the next section, alumni interview responses and qualitative survey responses are used to explain the quantitative survey results. In particular, the philosophies and practices that alumni

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54 Steppin Up & Steppin’ On is the graduation ceremony at Marshall. It is also an end of the year community showcase of students’ work. Teacher and student awards are given out, certificates are awarded to the 6th grade graduates, student work and projects are on display, and all students participate in solo, group, and whole school performances from their recitation, dance, percussion, and singing classes, and even a recital by those that take piano after school. Students prepare performances for this event throughout the school year, and it is usually has an alumni keynote and MC. The coming year’s elders may also be initiated at Steppin’ Up and Steppin’ On and presented with their elder sashes. It is the school’s biggest event of the year and is attended by many alumni and the extended Marshall community.
orient to and view as having had an impact are analyzed via the microanalytic beliefs/pedagogical goals framework.

*Schools should provide an Education*

Alumni survey responses allude to the types of education they felt they received at Marshall and the impact that it had on their educational success. Beyond just education, many alumni felt they got an Education at Marshall that extended beyond the school walls and the bounds of academics. One alumnus indicated that Marshall “was a great foundation, artistically, politically, spiritually, morally. It gave me a positive base to spring from, and a positive perspective to understand myself and others by,” (alumni interview, 6/2/11). The alumnus’ statement also recognizes the salience of the following subthemes under this belief/pedagogical goal: performing and creative arts, positive self-concept/identity, whole child, school context affects identity or whole person, and citizenship.

Elaborating on the perspective of this alumnus, several alumni made comments about the expressive discourse at the school that allowed students to share what they were thinking in a non-judgmental or punitive environment. In describing this discourse and their perceptions of it, one alumnus said, “Also, at Marshall, students really have a voice, which is how my family raised us kids, which was a factor in why I enjoyed the school so much. We were allowed to speak our minds, be challenging and curious, and feel like it all mattered. And to Gwen, our friends, and the other teachers, it did” (alumni interview, 5/3/11). In talking about this expressive discourse as intellectually liberating and enjoyable, the alumnus stressed that it wasn’t just about letting the student talk, it was about others listening to the student and validating that they had something to meaningful to contribute. This alumnus also noted that at Marshall students were encouraged to be curious and challenge things, aspects of critical thinking, and that these practices aligned with their home environment. Another alumnus clarified that this open, honest communication did not mean that you could just “be rude” (survey response), instead “You can be yourself as long as who you are does not physically or emotionally abuse another member of the family. Things weren't all PC either, but that's where the open communication came in” (interview 5/3/11). At the same time, as this alumnus notes, being respectful didn’t preclude honesty or mean that all views had to be shared or appreciated by others.

Many alumni indicated that an expressive discourse permeated the interactions at Marshall, and was particularly present in the morning meeting. Here’s how two alumni describe the morning meeting as occurring:

“Alumni 1: Sometimes one particular person would lead it. There were subjects to be discussed, there were, um, did you knows-

Alumni 2: Which were, um, facts that you wanted to share about things happening either around the world or anything current you know that you felt particularly smart about and wanted to share with the class. There was compliments and complaints which were if you wanted to, you know, give props or if you had a complaint that you didn’t appreciate what happened yesterday when you kinda (waving hand motion)... it was a place to hash things out and start all on the same page. Did you knows, compliments, complaints...” (alumni interview, 5/3/11).

Another alumnus echoed this description of the meeting, and also related back to what they felt they had learned from engaging in that activity:
“The circle or "meeting time" was a time that we all came together to talk about current events, to talk about school social dynamics (compliment/complaints), to talk about whatever was on our minds. It was in these circles or meetings that I learned how to problem solve, understand group dynamics.” (survey response)

According to alumni here and in the survey, the morning meeting was an opportunity to discuss things as a community and to build community. Alumni also viewed the morning meeting as a space for social development and for the development of life skills (like understanding group dynamics). In encouraging students to bring in their own information or interests with the “did you know” there was also an opportunity for academic development by discussing these topics and listening to those brought up by others.

Outside of the morning meeting, alumni perceived the academic development at Marshall to also be non-traditional in its format, partly because it was child-centered. One alumnus describes this as allowing students to be “the leaders, kind of, in our education. But they [the teachers] were there to kinda guide us; the teachers were there to guide us through our learning process” (alumni interview, 3/30/11). This alumnus points to the guiding and supportive role of teachers and the central role that students played in their own learning. Another alumni also spoke about this and also talked about how much it developed student independence and hard work:

“here you’ve got little kids who are responsible for their own learning, but it worked. I remember working harder than I ever worked—before or since—but I don’t remember a whole lot of forced structure....but I felt like when I went there I was busting my chops to make sure I had my homework because you couldn’t hide...you couldn’t hide, you didn’t want to be that dude coming to class [without their homework].” (alumni interview, 3/12/11)

This alumnus’ recalled “working harder” than they had to in any other school. Even in the context of a non-structured environment where they were able to direct their own education and had to be self-regulated. They attribute this both to their own work ethic but also to the small size of the school where “you couldn’t hide” and subtly allude to the high expectations that they wanted to live up to. In referencing school size, their comments are an interesting contrast to larger schools where perhaps students don’t have the same level of motivation because they don’t feel as visible.

Other alumni talked not only about the different educational philosophy, but also about the non-traditional teaching style and learning activities. Alumni explained that many of the learning activities were creative, fun and sometimes athletic,

“Alumni 1: We’d play these games which were really learning games. She’d [Gwen] make rows of three and she would say, “State.” And you would have to like run across the room, run around a chair, sit down, whoever got there first would be able to answer the question -
Alumni 2: Oh,... relays!
Alumni 1: Relays!
Alumni 2: That's how you learn. That is how you learn!
Alumni 1: Her [Gwen] spelling tests, everything you know you line up you have groups, you run...or it'd be some obstacle, but it was all about learning your spelling words or giving the definition of a spelling word, you know what I mean...
Alumni 2: Right.
Alumni 1: "Everything was just super interactive. Huge rug with the states and capitals on it. That’s how you learn your states and capitals; you're on it every day. You see it every day.” (alumni interview, 5/3/11)

The alumni’s expression, “That is how you learn!” highlights the alumni’s receptivity to these alternative approaches to learning that are distinct from didactic methods of instruction that often involve students sitting in a seat and being addressed by a teacher. The description of learning activities like the spelling tests, as having occurred in groups and being interactive also shows the ways in which the interaction between students was key to the learning process. These alumni statements confirm the findings of the survey that suggest that alumni perceived a connection between the teaching style and their relationships with the teachers and one another with that of their performance as students. Likewise, the affect with which the alumni explained this process and expressed “This is how you learn!” demonstrates how these approaches at Marshall also cultivate an interest in learning, which is key to the notion of providing an Education. In making this connection to Marshall providing an Education, and one that includes cultivating a love of learning and of teaching life skills, one alumni described what they saw as the educational vision at Marshall and its impact:

“I would say it's to not only teach your students but like help them learn how to live and be better people and it's like, I couldn't even tell you what it is 'cuz it's just so broad, it's not just about education...it’s like about life education. And not just like reading books and stuff, you know, it's about learning to like love learning and that's not something that really stops when you graduate, because it just kinda stays with you.” (alumni interview 3/30/11)

This vision of Education at Marshall and its practices were viewed as non-traditional by the alumni, yet many alumni pointed out that this is what they loved most about Marshall and why they felt it was “the most transformative educational experience” (alumni interview, 3/12/11) they had experienced until or including their collegiate experiences. 

Schools should be guided by a principle of reciprocity

A subtheme that also came out as having a strong impact was the size of the school and the level of connectedness between members of the school community, especially student’s relationships with their teachers. Alumni indicated that these things were connected “because Marshall was about the size of 1 class, we got a lot more one on one time with Gwen, and she was also our guardian for the entire day, particularly at lunch, so we got to play with her as well. We had great relationships or not so great, but we KNEW her, which is often more than I could say for many other teachers” (survey response). Alumni thus oriented to the one on one time with Marshall teachers as being an important factor in getting to know them, through play and other means, and that knowing of their teachers was an important thing and did not always preclude there being tensions in the relationships. Fostering relationships with teachers in and of itself was viewed as an important aspect.

Other alumni built upon this to talk about relationships not only between teachers and students, but also in talking about intergenerational, inter-student relationships and a shared sense of history. One alumni termed it the “same formula” (alumni interview, 3/12/11) that existed at Marshall across time, another also talked about this shared history across alumni:
“and they were also classes that generations of students had taken, with the same materials, methods, stories, rhythms, etc. So they stand out because when we remember back, we all can quote "African Civ, where we Smash the lies! and dig up the truth!" and we can remember the guaguancó rhythms, or the bomba” (survey)

Being part of a community was thus oriented to as an important aspect of the Marshall environment. For another alumni this connection with the community was also an interdependent one that related one person’s well-being with that of others. They make the argument that students at Marshall cultivated a sense of personal responsibility and accountability to themselves and to a larger community:

“I remember a lesson that was taught that left me with the impression as a young child that even if I have everything that I want—materially—but my people—enlarge to community/humanity—don't, then how can I be happy. I can't be happy unless I help them get to where I am. That message was sent through giving back, what we learned about history, through our excursions. The school impacted me to my core.” (alumni interview, 2/27/11)

Like the Harriet Tubman poem at the beginning, this alumni was left with the impression that their happiness and success, however great, is also reliant upon their giving back and helping others, perhaps sharing their social, navigational or other forms of cultural wealth that they obtain over their life course. This personal responsibility isn’t enforced by some external means but is an internal commitment to service. Many alumni saw this reciprocity as also occurring at the level of personal identity that recalls belief/pedagogical goal #1, but also fits here. As one alumni commented, “Marshall taught me how to be myself and to encourage others to be themselves” (alumni interview, 3/12/11). In this case personal identity is linked with a collective endeavor in that the cultivation of one person requires its transmission onto others that they interact with and see themselves in solidarity with.

As one alumnus shares, “The school [Marshall] was one tribe, one family, regardless of age or gender. We had different classifications depending on our educational progress……. Gwen fostered a family dynamic. We looked after each other whenever we travelled outside our little house/school” (survey response). This interdependence and intergenerational support for some students also overlapped with their personal feelings of closeness with teachers, much in the vein of the communal bonds that were discussed in Chapter IV. Explicit about this connection, one alumni mentioned, “Gwen is like my mom. I can tell her anything” (fieldnotes, 2/22/10) and indeed later that day the alumnus shared how they were dealing with school, what was happening at home and asked Gwen for advice about how to handle a delicate situation.

Another alumni shared, “My experience at Marshall taught me that school can be a growing and thriving community that looks after one another. It was more of an extended family that cared about your personal and academic growth” (alumni interview, 2/27/11). Connecting this idea of the Marshall community being like a family and having relationships that went beyond the traditional teacher/student paradigm, the following excerpt from an alumnus also touches upon the institutional and interpersonal care at Marshall:

‘it was more just like family, you know, you could talk to your teachers about what was going on; you could just like be yourself with the teachers like there was no question about being accepted; there was no question about saying the wrong thing, you know, it was like it was like family...when you're with your family you can say stuff you wouldn't necessarily say to somebody else just because it's like you know they're accepting you, they're loving you for
who you are...and not for you know you're just a student in my class. There wasn't that like line of disconnect, you know. It was like the teachers actually cared about you like you were their own child. And it was really obvious, you know, it was apparent that, you know, if you made a mistake you weren't scared to go to your teachers and be like, 'Hey I don't know what I'm doing' or 'I made a mistake,' you know. Or 'I need help,' like where at public schools and stuff sometimes it's like students get discouraged because they get embarrassed or...the teacher might look at them like they're stupid if they ask like a stupid question, you know. I [the student] know this is a really stupid question, but I'm gonna ask it anyways 'cuz I'm not sure, you know. You could do that at Marshall, but at other schools it's kinda like [referring to the teacher], 'Ok, yeah this child is stupid. I'm just gonna put them on my stupid list,' you know.....It takes a village to raise a child, you know. And it definitely does and Marshall is that village; it's like because you don't only have one person teaching, you've got a whole variety and you learn something from each different person and because it's such a community based, um, education and it's such a.... close knit community... it is like a village. It's... it's a just like home, you know, it's I don't know how to put it any other way.”

(alumni interview, 3/30/11)

In talking about the level of care at Marshall, the “loving you for who you are,” the alumnus also shares the impact they perceived that this had on allowing for an expressive discourse at the school, as well as fostering students’ willingness to trust the teachers’ intentions, take academic risks, and ask them for help. They also talk about how within such an environment, there wasn’t just one person teaching but that there was a feeling of reciprocal teaching and learning going on among members of the Marshall family.

A practice that many alumni identified as fostering a sense of reciprocity in teaching and learning, and building community and personal responsibility was the elder model. In writing a school entrance essay about “the person that influenced you the most” one alumnus wrote:

“Gwen runs her school with a system of elders and middle elders. In order to be a middle elder or elder, students must demonstrate maturity, responsibility, good judgment, and helpfulness. You become an elder because of those qualities, not because of how old you are or because you have reached a certain grade. Middle elders have their own responsibilities, but also help Gwen look after the other children. An elder, on the other hand, has much more authority than the middle elder. If a child is acting out, then the elder gives warnings and if necessary removes the child from their activities. Elders also are judges, mediators and teachers (I taught phonics to first graders). The day I found out that I was going to be an elder I was thrilled. I had been a middle elder since I was 8, and I was happy that Gwen believed I was ready to become a elder at only 10 years old. The elder ceremony is usually held during our Kwanzaa celebration, where there is singing, dancing, poetry, toasting our ancestors, and lots of delicious food. The new middle elders and elders receive recognition and special sashes. I felt very happy because being an elder was something I had aspired to for a long time.

In this essay, this alumnus describes the responsibilities of an elder, the process to becoming one, and the qualities a student must possess in order to make this transition. They also share what they view as being the purpose of the system and their own affective investment in becoming an elder and receiving that recognition from their teacher. Here this student outlines what can be viewed as a developmental model of interdependence as well as of academics. The elder students have to have levels of maturity, responsibility, and interpersonal care as well as a firm grasp of
the academic material such that they can teach that to younger students and to their peers. This essay also illustrates the structures of care that for alumni distinguish the Marshall school environment from that of other schools.

Alumni, however, did not indicate that this interdependent or reciprocal nature of Marshall’s teaching and learning environment took away from their individual sense of freedom or ability to be personally responsible or accountable. To the contrary, alumni expressed that at Marshall they had a great degree of personal freedom and responsibility, and that that too had an impact and pushed them to achieve and accept:

“I love the freedom of being able to take my day into my own hands. I felt responsible for my learning, and when I lacked in responsibility and my learning suffered, it was my own fault which motivated me to do my best.” (survey response)

This alumni’s response parallels that made by alumni in other interviews, including the alumni in the section on Education that talked about their self-motivation and commitment towards working hard at Marshall even when their wasn’t a lot of formal structure. Alumni shared that they had both never been in a schooling environment that was so free relative to letting them take charge of their learning, but also so personally demanding of their own efforts as a student, as a person, and as a community member. Here, the driving force of motivation was both at the level of personal responsibility and accountability but was also driven by an interdependent, collective sense of responsibility.

*Teach and reinforce students’ racial and cultural pride*

Frequent in the comments of many alumni are reflections about what they recognize now in their experiences at Marshall that they likely did not appreciate when they were students there. It was not uncommon to hear alumni say, “I didn't really know it then, but Marshall…..” (alumni interview, 5/3/11). For one alumni this was particularly an issue relative to his sense about how his racial identity and understanding of Black history had informed his world view. He recalls being exposed to African and African American history during his time at Marshall, but shared that it wasn’t until high school or even college that he began to understand the impact of what he had learned at Marshall in terms of racism and racial identity. In spite of that slow germination, he argued that, “I wouldn’t be who I am if it isn’t for Marshall. I know that for a fact” (alumni interview, 6/20/11).

Another alumni was more explicit about Marshall’s effects on its students’ racial identity:

“At White schools, Black students can only present themselves in one way, or fight for one single goal because they need to be in solidarity with one another and they are under attack or feared. At Marshall, we can truly be ourselves because there is already commonality and we don’t have to prove ourselves or explain or justify everything about ourselves or about Black culture before other people can get to know us as individuals.” (alumni interview, 6/2/11)

In decrying what they viewed as the cultural/racial isolation that Black students feel in white schools, this alumni shares what they see as the Black students’ burden of always having to “represent the race,” or having to worry about challenging stereotypes/labels rather than being able to express their individual opinions or be themselves. By contrast, at Marshall they felt that they were not essentialized and actually were allowed to “truly be ourselves.” This alumni’s
perspective rejects a common assumption that Black schools are necessarily rigid in their definitions of Blackness or in what is viewed as acceptable for “Acting Black.” Instead, this alumni, and others, make the argument that it is being positioned in contrast to White students within White schools that they are essentialized and positioned rather than within Marshall where their heterogeneity is appreciated and expected.

This finding also intersects with other literature about perceptions of African American students “acting Black” or “acting White.” While some research, such as Fordham & Ogbu (1986) have made important contributions to the ways in which we view historical racism and institutional oppression having shaped African Americans’ orientations, the data from this study complicates the “oppositional” scenario about African American students (Carter, 2005). Rather than rejecting school in order to preserve their cultural or racial identities, many of the Marshall alumni view their experiences at Marshall as having pushed them to accept school in order to maintain their racial or cultural identity within a context that appreciates the history and contributions of African civilizations and African Americans as well.

At the same time, alumni also indicated that in attending White schools they had often been told that they’re not “like any Black person” that the individual had seen before and that “it threw off people and they didn’t know what to think of me” (alumni interview, 5/3/11). Marshall alumni interview responses suggest that their cultural diversity that was appreciated at Marshall was not necessarily appreciated in other schooling environments. One alumus noted that at their new school “they got beat up and called names because people said I talked like a ‘White girl’ (interview 3/5/11). Other alumni talked about seeing former Marshall students, particular in middle schools, struggling to reject a performative Black identity that was expected of them or that they took one up as a protective barrier against the harassment of other students or even teachers (various fieldnotes). Thus even though these alumni themselves feel racially identified and there is evidence to support that they and their parents felt that Marshall prepared them to be culturally flexible navigators, it was not always the case that the environments they moved on to were equally prepared to receive them.

Teach students about racism, injustice, and activism

Alumni shared that their awareness and consciousness about racism, injustice and the means by which to engage in political action to some degree played into the difficulties they experienced in transitioning into other schooling environments after Marshall. Consistent with some of the parents’ concerns, alumni argued that their understanding about their rights to speak out and engage in political action made the harsh realities of other schooling environments that much more visible because teachers didn’t “care what you had to say” or that others felt threatened by them because they “knew how to cope” or speak out when somebody was being mean to them (alumni interview, 3/30/11). Other alumni reflect on that time in their schooling as “priceless” because of the freedom they had to express themselves and engage in open dialogue: As one alumni shares,

“My connection to Gwen, my family (meaning--biological and non-biological classmates I met while attending), the school size and the holistic curriculum are priceless. Looking back, it was the best environment I’ve been in. A space where genderism, racism, shadism, sexism, ageism, homophobia, and bullying seemed non-existant. Where we could freely talk about the "-isms" of the world and everyone thought a super hero or "shero" was a freedom fighter
from the civil rights era, not batman or superman. I was certainly shaped into the person I am today because of my roots at Marshall.” (survey response)

Other alumni highlighted similar experiences in discussing social and political issues and events, as well as in having activism modeled for them while they were “protesting against Apartheid and corporations that did business in South Africa. Protesting against injustice, demonstrating to keep our local library open” (alumni interview, 5/3/11). This awareness of injustice and cultivation of activism didn’t just deal with explicit methods like protesting or direct political action. Alumni also indicated that in the morning meetings and during class discussions, they also engaged in such politically spirited analysis:

We talked about how black people are perceived in Hollywood, how black, brown, people of color in general, are perceived in society. We talked about how girl characters in Saturday morning cartoons were generally not strong leaders, they often followed a male character around or had to be saved by a male cartoon character. Gwen drew our attention to the hidden messages that teach us gender roles so we did not blindly accept them. We talked about the genocide of Jewish people, Ann Frank, slavery, the Middle Passage, the Black Power Movement, the birth of the U.S. Civil rights movement. I digress, I also recall visiting the Castro, learning about George Mascone and Harvey Milk’s assassination and Dan White’s ridiculous twinkie defense. I recall having discussions about shadism, how kids with lighter skin were often perceived as smarter or more attractive then darker skinned children. We would notice this treatment first hand when we went on fieldtrips. I remember we went on a fieldtrip and at some point there was a skit/play about oral hygiene. In the play the protagonist was someone dressed all in white and the evil character as is often the case, was wearing black, had on black makeup, and lurked about. Even though I was probably 6, I started clapping for the character that everyone else was booing, hilarious when I look back on it.” (survey response)

This alumni explains that embedded within the curriculum and discourse at Marshall was a social critique about racism and injustice that affected African Americans and included the histories of other oppressed peoples around the world, such as ethnocentrism, gender equality, and sexual orientation. As the alumni shares, their discussion and critique wasn’t limited to history but also involved an analysis of current events and social messages that students were engaging with on a daily basis. For example, discussions about race and racism were both about collective oppression and also considered the implications and power behind “shadism.” This alumnus’ response also indicates the degree to which these experiences had an impact on students at an early age and outlines some of the activities they participated in as a student that were formative to their social analysis. The following alumni excerpt expands upon the type of social analysis that was fostered at Marshall and also talks what it meant for how students were taught to treat one another at Marshall and the ill affects of racism and prejudice on all who engage in it:

Gwen often took the time to explain to us how we should act toward one another, and how racism and prejudice affected our relationships with each other and anyone else. We went to field trips dealing with subject matters of race, and teaching us that racism could be found in anything that made us feel lesser because of our race (TV, interactions, etc). (survey response)
In evaluating the impact of these experiences, alumni credit the political clarity of their teachers at Marshall and cite how they prepared them to deal with bias and discrimination in other schools or settings and to speak out versus to internalize the oppressive discourse that may be going on around them:

“So, I guess she [Gwen] realizes that she's not keeping us forever so she teaches us the stuff that we need to know to deal with life. And...it's like it gives you the tools to just be yourself. And you know what's racist, you know, and be like, 'I'm gonna teach you'...and not by telling anybody that, 'You're racist, I can't deal with you,' you know.....but just by being yourself“  (alumni interview, 3/30/11)

Noting the clarity of Gwen’s approach, this alumni credits Marshall with giving students what they “need to know to deal with life,” including how not to personalize racism or allow it to shut you down but by continuing to express yourself consistent with your beliefs and to teach by example. By contrast, many alumni felt that at other schools these types of conversations were both not happening, and that the schools and teachers themselves were not invested in making conversations about race, racism, discrimination, etc. and purposely overlooked these issues:

Other schools often tried to sweep issues of race, class, sex, sexual orientation under the rug instead of embracing it as teaching moment for all. The Marshall philosophy teaches love of humanity. We learned about oppressed populations, what it means to abuse power and subjugate others for your own advancement. I got the message that it's not okay for me to exploit you to get ahead, which seems lost on many people I encounter today. Gwen taught me to stand up for all people regardless of the shape of their body, color of their skin, style of speech, rich or poor. (survey response)

These alumni’s comments juxtapose what they see as the practices at other schools with the humanizing philosophy and approach at Marshall. Marshall, in this alumnus’ opinion was a unique place that helped students to begin to analyze the means of oppression and their role in perpetuating oppression. It was also a school that helped them to develop the tools to work towards dismantling it. As one alumnus commented, “I think Gwen had shaped me into a Champion of Liberty, a Freedom Fighter, and well, a hero without the spandex and cape”  (alumni interview, 2/13/11).

Smash the lies! And dig up the truth!

According to the alumni, the teaching style and practices at Marshall had the greatest impact on them. From the interview responses, the political clarity of Marshall’s philosophy and of its educators was a main factor that allowed their message of high expectations, community and personal responsibility, and political awareness to be communicated to alumni through a variety of distinct and overlapping ways (Walker, 2009). In the survey data, however, some alumni indicated that these positive messages were not useful in other more hostile settings where their individuality and perspectives were not appreciated. Some alumni during informal conversations or during interview also discuss that not all alumni agree with the perspectives shared here. There thus appears to be two distinct sets of Marshall alumni experiences, with one being more prevalent than the other. This section analyzes the findings of alumni within the context of the macroanalytic frames for racial inequality and racial advancement in order to consider what each
of these sets of alumni view as necessary and possible through schools and to contextualize their perceptions and critiques of Marshall within this context.

On the one hand, alumni comments suggest that there is a strand of alumni for whom “Marshall messed their heads all up” (alumni interview, 6/24/11). Consistent with the psychological frames concerns that social awareness and critical thinking can create dehabilitating tensions of identity, alumni point to Marshall’s cultural approach (Afrocentricism) and/or political orientations as bringing up more issues than they were able to resolve or hindering alumni because these orientations and schooling practices were not validated (or explicitly undermined) in other school environments. They also suggest that their experiences at Marshall, including the social and personal freedoms they were afforded, were disconnected from the structural and political realities of African American students and communities they encountered in other schools. This finding echoes a frequent critique of the cultural frame’s use in education (e.g. Ginwright, 2004) as being based upon middle class values about culture that are not ble to account for the social realities of poverty that many African Americans face. This set of alumni perspectives suggest that Marshall’s positioning within the cultural frame as an Afrocentric school may have hindered them in one of three ways: 1) Culturally, i.e. giving them the perception that they could address racism by being themselves or by having a strong racial identity rather than explicitly preparing them to deal with oppressive realities of racism and other types of oppression; 2) By being too political and non-traditional such that it made it difficult to transition to more rigid schooling environments where critical thinking wasn’t appreciated and knowing about racial and other injustices made them more visible without providing support to change the system; or 3) As not being political enough, and focusing instead on individual student development rather than academic or political development that would have given them the tools to fight back either in the classroom or outside of the classroom.

A second, larger strand considers Marshall to be “the most transformative educational experience” (alumni interview, 3/12/11) they’ve ever had. These alumni perspectives were evidenced in the vast majority of the survey and the interview data. The perspectives and evaluations of these alumni did suggest that Marshall has largely been successful in its attempts to challenge racism and positively racially socialize students. Invoking the moral frame, many of the alumni responses suggest that Marshall’s focus on teaching to the whole child and cultivating students’ self-worth, self-confidence or efficacy as individual students was liberatory. The perspectives of these alumni suggest that in spite of the difficulties or oppressive circumstances they may have experienced within other schooling environments, the individual qualities and strong sense of self that they developed at Marshall through the morning meeting and elder practices made them resilient and able to deal with other hostile dynamics in and out of schools. Relative to the psychological frame, Marshall alumni largely viewed the development of their positive self-concept/identity as capable students as being beneficial to their later educational success. Alumni attributed this to the caring and demanding teaching style, connections with teachers, and to the small school size that created a family-like environment at Marshall. The alumni shared that these components of the environment at Marshall both helped to create a psychological nurturing environment and taught them as students how to critically think, problem solve, and generally have an understanding of how to deal with life situations. The morning meeting was particularly perceived as allowing for an expressive discourse between students and teachers in ways that made alumni feel that they were respected, innately viewed as legitimate, and not stigmatized when they had questions or didn’t understand something.
The cultural frame also came up frequently in alumni responses, especially relative to their discussions about their understanding of the history of oppressed people and their positive feelings about their own racial and cultural identities. Alumni saw the morning meeting, the Steppin’ Up and Steppin’ On program, the curriculum, and their interactions with teachers as positively impacting their racial identities. Alumni felt that the atmosphere at Marshall allowed for a variety of expressions of Blackness that did not stereotype or label them, or require them to act in certain ways that felt disingenuous to who they saw themselves as. Rather, they saw this expansive notion of Blackness as allowing them “to be who they are” and willing to accept and foster the diversity and individuality of others. Alumni sharply contrasted this approach with other schools where students’ views about the parameters of Blackness were much more limited. Alumni also invoked the social structural frame in talking about how Marshall taught them how to deal with and critical analyze racism and injustice, as well as engage in social activism. Alumni perceived Marshall as helping them to cultivate a socially critical lens and as having exposed them to political action via discussion and direct participation. Alumni responses indicated that because of the discussions, activities, and the fieldtrips they had at Marshall, they felt prepared to deal with bias and injustice in interactions as well as critiquing the biased social messages that were embedded within the media and elsewhere. Alumni attributed their preparedness to the political clarity and purpose of their teachers, and the conflict resolution, interactional, and communicative skills they developed through the morning meeting. One alumnus’ perspective sums up the sentiments of others, “[at Marshall] I remember being very aware of the world and always having a sense of the world at large and participating in it. We were out in the world regularly” (alumni interview, 3/12/11).

Although the majority of alumni perspectives were laudatory, there is a stark contrast between an alumni perspective that claims their experience at Marshall as “transformational” and one that views their experiences as harmful. These polar distinctions may, in part, relate to the primacy that certain alumni are placing upon a given frame for understanding racial inequality and racial advancement and what they believe to be its affordances within schools. For example, the alumni survey results were surprising in that although Marshall was largely African American and positioned itself as Afrocentric, these elements were perceived to have less an impact on alumni’s educational success than the teaching style, school size, and the philosophy of the school. It could be that alumni see the Afrocentric orientation and school composition as overlapping with the teaching style and the school philosophy and thus the selection of one doesn’t necessarily negate the salience of the others. Alternately, alumni could perceive that the cultural orientation and racial composition that defines the school as a cultural project were simply less important than the psychological or social structural aspects of Marshall.

Either way, the alternative alumni perspective suggests that a constraint of a model based on the “liberation” of individual students or schools versus more widespread structural changes outside of schools may be limited in that other institutions may not take up this charge. Another factor affecting alumni’s perceptions of Marshall success as a cultural or political project were based upon whether students saw the orientation at Marshall as supporting or being distinct from the families. Those students who indicated that what occurred at Marshall reflected the culture of their home appeared to have had an overall better experience and perceived Marshall’s impact to have been more positive and more widespread. Several of these alumni indicated their commitment to African American’s collective advancement and suggested that their individual empowerment was being used in the service of the larger struggle.
Despite the overall laudatory trend that marks most of the alumni responses, the tensions between the two sets of alumni experiences raises questions about what is appropriate to teach younger children and what is required to teach them given the contexts of oppression that they will encounter in other schooling environments and in society. Similar to the concerns brought up by Marshall parents, the tensions between the two strands of alumni evaluations also brings up critical questions about the role and capacity of schools to address social inequalities and its power for engaging in racial justice, i.e. can schools be transformational or are they inherently institutionalized manifestations of an oppressive system? These broader questions about racial uplift are a main focus of the discussion in the next and final chapter.
Chapter VI

1st class Schooling, 2nd class Education: Hoping for freedom and struggling for inclusion

Freedom?! You asking me about freedom? Asking me about freedom? I'll be honest with you; I know a whole more about what freedom isn’t than about what it is, ’cause I've never been free. I can only share my vision with you of the future, about what freedom is. Uhh, the way I see it, freedom is—is the right to grow, is the right to blossom. Freedom is—is the right to be yourself, to be who you are—to be who you wanna be, to do what you wanna do. – Assata Shakur

The above quote reflects one perspective on freedom, and one that Marshall parents and alumni appear to agree with. In focusing on Marshall, this dissertation has been about understanding one school’s attempts to explicitly challenge racism and positively racially socialize students, and about examining the contours of African American’s on-going struggle to use education as a primary tool against mis-education and towards freedom. Each chapter of this dissertation contributed to this discourse through presenting a macro or micro-framework that was used for analysis or by examining the philosophies, practices, and/or perceived impact of Marshall.

In Chapter I, I outlined four macroanalytic frames for understanding how African Americans have conceptualized racial inequalities and proposed strategies or critiqued the limitations of attaining racial justice through education. In Chapters III, IV, and V, these frames were used to analyze the affordances and constraints of Marshall’s structures, and its pedagogical philosophies and practices relative to its institutional aim of racial justice. In Chapter II, in addition to describing the focal site and the research methods, the lens of politically relevant teaching was introduced as a microanalytic tool for evaluating Marshall’s philosophies and goals towards challenging racism within students’ schooling experiences and towards racially socializing students’ into positive racial identities. As with the macroanalytic frames, the microanalytic lens was used in Chapters III, IV, and V; however, the purpose of that framework was to analyze the intentions and attempts of the educators and parents’ and alumni’s impressions of those efforts.

In each of these analyses it was clear that for the teachers, families and the students that attended Marshall, the issue of racism in schools remained a central concern and was viewed as an issue that was often overlooked and under-regarded in schools. This perception was consistent throughout Marshall educator’s reflections upon their own schooling or teaching experiences, within parents’ concerns about how their children were being perceived, treated, and educated, and within alumni’s experiences in schools other than Marshall. At Marshall, teachers, parents, and alumni viewed the endeavors to mitigate and reverse the affects of racism within its institution as largely successful. Many also perceived the schooling experiences at Marshall as having had longer-term impacts on students’ educational success, and more saliently on their general well being. Others, however, questioned Marshall’s impact and whether or not its efforts were even feasible given its own constraints and the constraints of attempting liberation through schools. These tensions provide insights into what the implications for this study are conceptually and practically, and what types of additional research needs to follow. The following section examines the conceptual contributions of this dissertation, namely how the macroanalytic frames operate within the context of Marshall and what this tells us about the possibilities of using today’s schools for African Americans’ on-going struggle for racial justice. After that, I examine what these possibilities mean for educators and educational institutions. Finally, I consider areas for future research.
Education by any means necessary: Considering liberation through schools

The findings from this dissertation suggest that the “problem” of the 21st century, at least within schools, is as much about the “color line” (DuBois, 1903) as it was in the 20th century. Surely, these racialized issues are complicated by the intersectionalities of class, gender, regionality, and a host of other dynamic factors. At the same time, the findings at Marshall suggest that the forms of racism that African American families and non-Black parents of African American children are struggling with in schools echo those outlined by past African American scholars cited in Chapter I. The problems Marshall teachers, parents, and alumni describe with the educational system are not only about the lack of physical and material resources, teacher quality and retention, or other oft mentioned issues (Kozol, 2005) that are believed to plague failing schools or schools with large populations of African American students. Instead, the concerns of the Marshall community members are fundamentally about racialized and problematic ideologies of the educators and administrators, structures of schooling, environments within schools, and the very notions of “education” that undergird the American educational system.

Marshall teachers’ efforts, and Marshall parents’ and alumni evaluation of them, suggest that their perspectives and attempts to combat racism in schools are rooted in overlapping and intertwining commitments to the moral, psychological, social structural, and cultural frames for understanding racial inequality and proposing strategies for African Americans’ collective advancement. These frames differentially locate and prioritize the fundamental issues of ongoing racial inequality, yet the real-world entailments of racism often mean that they are simultaneously invoked within an individual person’s perceptions about racism or about how to address racism.

Marshall teachers, parents, and alumni themselves demonstrate various commitments to these frames and varying levels of agreement about how these frames operate within their school. Notwithstanding, members of the Marshall community were resolute in identifying the political clarity (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 1999) that marks Marshall teacher’s practice as politically relevant teaching and as part of a tradition of Black educational practice. It is this teaching philosophy and style that Marshall parents and alumni orient to as being distinct from that which they’ve experienced within other schools. It is also the element at Marshall that they like the most and perceive as having the greatest impact on their educational success. Figure 6 represents how the macroanalytic frames inform a politically relevant pedagogy, and how educators enacting this pedagogy share a similar set of beliefs/pedagogical goals that define their practices and their relationships vis à vis students, their families, and the African American community. Using the findings discussed in earlier chapters, this representation also depicts the relationships that Marshall parents and alumni identified as existing between the sub-themes of politically relevant teaching and Marshall’s structures and practices.

Specifically, Figure 6 shows how this dissertation attempts to contribute towards a open up, newer, deeper ways of understanding African American educational thought and the role of individual schools or educators in challenging racial inequalities and pushing for racial justice. It shows that each of the frames of racial inequality and racial advancement feed into the politically relevant teaching style that characterizes the approach at Marshall. The main purpose of this approach is to challenge racism, racially socialize students, and use education towards African American liberation.
FIGURE 6: Racial uplift and Marshall’s Politically Relevant Teaching Style & Practices
This approach to teaching is broken down into four distinct beliefs/pedagogical goals (shaded in black) that reflect these larger aims and support specific pedagogical philosophies and practices (shaded in gray). Marshall parents and alumni identified its institutional structures and activities (presented in the diamonds) and interpreted their impact in ways that corresponded with philosophies and practices of Marshall’s educators. As discussed in Chapters IV and V, the figure shows how Marshall parents and alumni perceived Marshall’s structures and activities as having many affordances towards challenging racism and racially socializing students that were not seen to be present within other schools. They thus critiqued those institutions for “schooling” rather than Educating their children.

It is also important to note what this figure does not, and arguably cannot, show. This figure does not attempt to show each belief/pedagogical goal relating back to an individual frame on racial inequality or racial uplift, nor does it attempt to show how a given structure or activity at Marshall stemmed from one of these macroanalytic frames. These relationships are difficult to capture representationally for two reasons. First, each macroanalytic frame places primacy on a distinct source of racial inequality and views that as the focal issue that needs to be addressed in order to move towards racial uplift. At the same time, some of the beliefs embedded within each frame, and the strategies proposed, may overlap across frames. For example, the psychological and cultural frames both recognize tensions of identity because of African Americans’ oppression within society. However, the psychological frame views this tension as stemming from an individual’s consciousness of their oppression and how they are perceived while the cultural views the tension of identity being resolved by a collective racial or cultural consciousness. Both frames recognize the tensions of identity and argue for a type of consciousness, but evaluate the effects of this awareness process differently.

Secondly, each educator, parent, and alumni utilizes different configurations of these frames to make sense of their racialized experiences. Each educator may prioritize and enact these beliefs/goals at Marshall differently from moment to moment; similarly, the priorities and evaluations of Marshall parents and alumni are also dynamic and not always straightforward. Despite the variation in enactments and impressions, Marshall parents and alumni were united in their critique of the lack of many of these goals, structures, and activities at other schools and I their suggestions that some aspects of the Marshall were needed within schools because of their impacts on students’ educational success and personal development.

Let us turn to considering how the macroanalytic frames operate within the context of Marshall and what the microanalytic frames suggest has been happening within this school. From a moral frame, the findings at Marshall suggest parents and alumni view it as necessary that schools and teachers: 1) encourage African American youth to develop a sense of dignity and pride in themselves and their work; 2) believe in the educability of African American youth; 3) recognize African American youth’s willingness and interest in learning, i.e. their resilience to learn despite oppressive experiences in and out of schools; 3) develop the abilities and work ethic of African American youth; and 4) should provide African American youth with access to educational resources so that they can be cultivated as valued social, and potentially economic, contributors and members of society. In endorsing these aspects of the moral frame, parents and alumni agree with Washingtonian notions that argue for the necessity of developing a sense of self-worth, and the role of schools in cultivating students academic and life skills for self-determination and social mobility.

At the same time, they contradict this endorsement by resisting some of the accommodationist leanings of this frame. In relaying their accounts of escaping public schools or mostly White
private schools and opting to enroll their child at all Black school, Marshall parents are rejecting the notion that their children are fully resilient to forces of oppression and are rejecting that the impetus should be solely upon the child to prove their educability through their work as opposed to their educability being assumed. As a school, Marshall too is contradictory in its assertion about resilience of African American youth while at the same time being concerned about their lack of resilience and the possibility that if these youth are “not treated with respect” they will become “casualties of a society—particularly a school system” (Marshall pamphlet). In creating a separate school for African American students, the resilience of these youth is called into question, however this occurs within a school context where the philosophy includes developing students’ personal responsibility, self-worth, and accountability. These contrasts suggest that the moral frame is to some degree being resisted while in other instances is being taken up.

Relative to a psychological frame, the findings from Marshall suggest that parents and alumni view it as necessary that schools and teachers: 1) foster positive self-concept, racial and academic, in African American youth and develop their self-efficacy relative to school; 2) have high expectations for their potential to perform on par with that of other children, i.e. recognize African American youth’s inherent intelligence and ability; 3) recognize the critical developmental period of elementary school students, including their emotional and psychological needs as children and as African Americans engaging in an oppressive society; 4) endeavor not to racially pathologize, stereotype, or label African American youth; 5) cultivate African American youth’s critical thinking abilities relative to the academic material; and 6) establish positively affective relationships with African American youth that extend beyond an interest in their academic preparation and performance.

Parents’ and alumni’s perspectives about Marshall indicate that they align with the psychological frame in being concerned about the possibility and actuality of African American youth’s being vulnerable to internalizing racism in settings that do not cultivate the whole child, recognize the potential affects of oppression, and/or in which the child’s capacity was in question based upon assumptions about their racial group. Marshall parents and alumni complained about the problematic, stereotype-ridden environment within schools, and considered Marshall an alternative to the pathologizing that occurred within those settings. Yet they, and Marshall as a school, argued for the need for student counseling and often noted the psychological and behavioral issues of entering students who had not yet been inculcated into Marshall’s practices. The morning meeting, the expressive discourse, the focus on developing students’ positive self-concept, along with other Marshall approaches were all instantiations of the psychological frame that the school promoted and parents and alumni endorsed. Marshall’s philosophy of developing students’ critical thinking so as to push back against stereotypes, however, was a point of contention, where some parents saw its utility as a liberatory devise and others viewed its impact as worsening their children’s ability to cope with racism and injustice.

With respect to the aspects of the moral and psychological frames that were agreed upon between the school and Marshall parents and alumni, it appears that schools in general were viewed as important players in the struggle for racial justice. The Marshall community seemed united in their advocacy that educational institutions should provide an Education that includes academics, life skills, and address the social and emotional needs of African American youth. Indeed, many Marshall parents indicated those were key reasons for why they chose Marshall and left their previous schools. Marshall parents viewed, and alumni agreed, that the job of the school is to educate the “whole child,” not just the “head” and the “hand” but also the “heart” and the “spirit” or the soul.
Gwen articulated a similar idea when critiquing the practices of teachers used to the public schooling system as needing to learn that, “You can work students hard. They [students] can do that. But this isn’t public school. [At Marshall] We teach without breaking students’ spirits” (fieldnotes, 11/13/09). In talking about Gwen and her school’s impact on students, one parent said:

“She’s touched so many people’s lives and you can see with her and Richie [Gwen’s husband], it’s not just about a business. It’s really about making that—that child. Getting everything you can out of that kid. And loving it and nurturin’ it and, you know, designing it where they can break out of that shell and maybe not so much confidence, and make them feel like “I got it now. I got that confidence. I got it going on.” You know what I’m saying? That’s what she gives them. She builds them up so even when they fall it’s not like “Oh my God, I fell. I hurt myself.” It’s like “Aw shit. I fell. Gimme some peroxide. Don’t put Band-Aids on it ’cuz I got to go. I gotta get back up. I gotta keep moving forward.” (parent interview, 2/21/11).

Her statement reflects the perspectives of other parents and alumni that perceive Marshall as a successful Educational institution that is able to foster the holistic development of African American youth. Their perspectives align with recommendations by African American scholars (e.g. Baldwin; 1963; DuBois, 1934; Steele, 1997) that argue that schools must be involved in students’ academic preparation and in their broader cultivation as youth in ways that allow for individual development and success in and out of the classroom. These perspectives advocate that collective racial advancement can begin through the success of individual African American students and through individual ideological changes that teachers and administrators make.

The fact that parents, alumni and/or Marshall as an institution resisted and contested aspects of the moral and psychological frames while embracing others, highlights the complicated and dynamic way in which African Americans and Black institutions take up or endorse these frames of racial inequality and advancement. It also points out that in trying to use schools to challenge racism and advocate for racial advancement, there are inherent tensions of accommodation and resistance. Parents, alumni and Marshall educators expect Marshall to be able to confer power and legitimacy to its students as African Americans, as students, and as Americans. On the one hand, this requires that Marshall as an institution resists some of the mainstream ideologies and practices that retain the social order in favor of a more racially affirming and politically transgressive vision of schooling and education. On the other hand, Marshall teachers, parents and alumni, have expectations about Marshall’s ability to confer the same degree of power and legitimacy of other schools. This requires, to some extent, that Marshall accommodate some mainstream ideologies and schooling practices (e.g. types of curriculum, academic content, standardized testing, grading rubrics, etc.), including ones they may disagree with.

Similar tensions can be seen with the other two frames. Some aspects of the social structural and cultural frames were also mentioned by parents and alumni as being present at Marshall and as being necessary in schools, while other aspects were more contested. Most aspects of politically relevant teaching enacted at Marshall that relate to the cultural frame were evaluated positively by alumni and parents and were seen as elements that should occur in other schools. This included parents and alumni perceptions that schools and teachers should: 1) validate students’ cultural histories, values, and home-life experiences in the curriculum and pedagogy of the school; 2) encourage and strengthen students’ racial and cultural identities; 3) challenge racial stereotypes and biases; 4) provide a non-racist schooling environment; 5) support students’ sense of self-worth and confidence; 6) cultivate students’ skills to be able to navigate various
social and cultural environments; and 7) create a cohesive school community based upon shared values and a collective commitment to the advancement of African Americans.

These elements of the cultural frame that were present at Marshall and were positively evaluated demonstrate parents’ and alumni’s focus on the need to respect and incorporate a diverse set of perspectives and experiences that they do not presently see in schools. The Afrocentric approach at Marshall was seen as helping to validate students’ own backgrounds and challenging problematic stereotypes that parents, alumni, and the school saw occurring in mainstream schools such that it hindered the schooling experiences and academic performance of African American youth. Marshall as a school, and its parents’ and alumni, also saw this approach as important towards helping alleviate the tensions of racial and cultural identity that came out of mainstream schools’ attempts to assimilate African American students towards a “mythical norm” (Lorde, 1998) and ignore their social and cultural needs and contributions.

At the same time, the acceptance of these aspects of the cultural frame hinged upon Marshall’s agreeing to cultivate students’ ability to navigate the multicultural landscape in and out of schools, versus developing students’ awareness about their racial and cultural identity and the system of oppression in ways that made students want to remain within a segregated schooling environment. When this latter outcome occurred, including when students expressed extreme frustration about being in mostly White schools or not being able to maturely challenge stereotypes or bias, the value of Marshall’s endorsement of a cultural frame was called into question. These contradictions challenge the idea that collective racial advancement can occur through the cultural liberation of individual African American youth without more systematic structural changes occurring within schools, and other institutions, outside of Marshall.

Some of the components of the social structural frame that Marshall parents and alumni agreed upon, and that the school promoted, were beliefs that overlapped with the cultural frame. This included the need to challenge racial stereotypes and biases and to provide a non-racist schooling environment. Distinct to the social structural frame, Marshall parents and alumni also saw it as important that schools and teachers: 1) develop students’ understanding and practices of tolerance and respect of differences; 2) teach students conflict resolution skills and the importance of maintaining dialogue across affinity groups and differing perspectives; and 3) develop students’ critical thinking skills. Marshall parents and alumni also saw this as happening at Marshall and endorsed these practices as a necessary part of Education. These practices were viewed as having had positive effects on individual students and as helping to contest the problematic ideologies around difference and normativity they saw occurring such that African American youth were being institutionally, interactionally, and categorically “othered.” Marshall parents and alumni saw this trend as being challenged at Marshall and viewed it as a salient shift that needed to occur within other schools.

Aspects of the cultural and political frames that were enacted at Marshall were also critiqued. Some alumni questioned Marshall’s adherence to a cultural frame by challenging that its approach to cultivating students’ strong and non-essentialized racial identities collided with the experiences of African American students that they encountered at other schools. Some Marshall alumni saw Marshall’s cultural approach as positioning them to embrace practices that are usually outside of normative definitions of Blackness, and thus make them susceptible to public critique by Blacks and non-Blacks once they’ve transitioned out of Marshall.

These concerns about the cultural approach at Marshall suggest that Marshall’s Afrocentric orientation caused tensions, as did its approach to fostering an expansive notion of Blackness and Black experience that wasn’t limited to certain set of behaviors, cultural values, or activities,
stereotypical or otherwise. For example, some Marshall alumni indicated that the school’s incorporation of mainstream middle class White values and practices, e.g. learning to swim, play tennis, having confidence to speak out in class against majority perspectives, etc., set them up to be outsiders with both Black and non-Black students in schooling contexts other than Marshall. Others saw this approach to be transgressive and necessary towards pushing away from narrow notions of “cultural” Blackness. Each of these views pushes upon what the boundaries of Afrocentrism and Blackness are, and challenges what types of racial understandings are being taught at Marshall and what their impact should be.

Some Marshall parents also questioned the appropriateness and success of Marshall’s adherence to the social structural frame’s goal of preparing students to deal with bias. Some parents felt that this was a tall order for students that were so young, and especially for those that could not spend their entire elementary careers at Marshall. Others questioned whether 6th students leaving Marshall for middle school would be mature enough to deal with the complexity of racialized issues in other schools, and if Marshall should extend into middle school. They argued that Marshall’s development of the racial awareness of students hindered them because as youth they were only able to see things in “Black and White” versus understand the complexities of racial and other injustices. These parents argued that this incomplete and immature awareness made their children angry and oppositional, instead of preparing them to be tolerant and better able to advocate for themselves or others about perceived injustices or biases.

Another critique of the social structural frame and of Marshall’s philosophy and practices, involved parents’ apprehension about appropriateness of preparing students to engage in political action and giving students’ the sense that they had the agency and political savvy to critique institutional oppression and social stratification. Parents were fearful that their children’s use of a critical lens would subsequently position the child as difficult or problematic because of their tendency to speak out and seek change, thereby making it more difficult for them to participate and be positively evaluated in schools outside of Marshall.

These concerns by parents and alumni bring up questions that have historically plagued African American educational thought, namely what types of racial advancement can be expected, and are even possible, through schools. Relatedly, what types of schools (integrated or segregated) are needed to provide an Education, and what issues should be exclusively the purview and burden of adults versus which should be introduced and dealt with by children? These are questions of on-going import. At Marshall, frequently the goal of racial justice was viewed as a possible and necessary outcome of schools, especially Marshall, even if it occurred at the level of the individual student. The moral and psychological frames, in particular, were taken up more readily towards achieving this goal although there were concerns about the limitations of youth in dealing with the tensions of personal and racial identity with that of the assimilatory and socializing nature of mainstream schools.

The parents and alumni that were invested in how the cultural frame was enacted at Marshall, seemed to believe in dealing head on with the “mis-education” within schools and saw the individual liberation of African American youth from biased perspectives as a necessary and fundamental step towards racial justice. These investments may reflect these parents and alumni’s concerns about the impacts that problematic ideologies and practices present within integrated school environments may have on younger African American children and push for the types of institutional and interpersonal care that was seen at Marshall. By contrast, some parents and alumni also have investments in the social structural frame and may consider the goal of racial justice through schools as being too lofty a goal for schools to handle given the
reproductive and assimilative nature of institutions. They may also believe that adults, rather than elementary school students, need to be on the front lines in the battle against institutional oppression that effects schools as well as other institutions. They may view political action and agency outside of schools as being more effective and able to address institutional racism, poverty, etc. Equally as likely is that they embrace the opposing perspectives of the opposing positions that were just discussed.

Others that take up a social structural perspective may push to reconstitute schools as integrated, politically conscious learning communities that eschew the formal structures and assumptions of schooling altogether. Given these conceptual framings, and the perspectives of parents and alumni at Marshall, what kind of school is Marshall and what is it a case of? Based on Marshall teacher’s political clarity, and the impact that Marshall parents and alumni see it as having, I would argue that Marshall is an African American school that has attempted ideological and structural shifts aimed at the moral, psychological, cultural, and social structural frames. In seeking to challenge racism and racially socialize students, it is primarily a cultural and psychological project that focuses on individual liberation although it does attempt to foster interdependence and collective uplift. It also takes up and challenges some aspects of the moral and political frames.

Marshall does have African centered elements to its curriculum; however, its teaching approach, the diversity of its faculty and parent population, suggest an attempt at interracialism and interclass alliances that are not typical of Afrocentric schools (Ginwright, 2004). Marshall is thus less an example or an argument for segregated schools as it is an indictment of the current state of schooling and a way to reconceptualize what an integrated, child-centered learning community might look like.

Even more clearly, Marshall is an example that the claims of a “post-race” America are premature and that we are not yet at the place where our critiques of education can allow for superficially deraced conversations about leaving no children behind or addressing historic inequities through simply designing better tests and better curriculum. These steps are indeed needed, but must be coupled with a national conversation about what we mean by “education” and how we plan to deliver that not only to those who have been diserved by schools, but also those that have been systematically disenfranchised within society and its other institutions. For many African Americans, and other oppressed communities, the lofty ideals that are spouted politically and socially about the purpose of education and its hoped for outcomes, do not match the policy recommendations for schools nor the realities within schools.

Marshall parents and alumni recognize that Black students are being caught in the crossfire of systematic inequalities and that few coalitions, intra or interracial, or comprehensive efforts are being made to shield or to arm them against the forces of oppression. They understand that increasing the numbers of African Americans students that perform closer to the level of White students on standardized tests will not address their concerns about racism in schools, nor will it address the concerns of a majority of frustrated African American families and students. At the same time, it is also clear that Marshall is not perfect, nor is it necessarily the place for every child. Instead, like other schools, students’ success at Marshall often depends upon their needs, the perspectives of their parents, and how that is able to align with what the school is able to provide. This does not take away from the powerful educational experiences parents and alumni share have occurred, and continue to occur there. Instead, these findings are not surprising in their suggestion that Marshall alone cannot solve all the problems of Education and society more broadly, or even for the small population that it serves. Marshall can serve, as it does, as one
element among a network of organizations, entities, and persons that are working towards racial justice for African Americans.

**Rethinking education as Education: Implications for practice and preparation**

Empirically, there are several contributions that this dissertation makes. Relative to teachers, this dissertation highlights the cultural competency and responsiveness (Delpit, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1997; Lee, 2001) that elementary teachers can engage in if they are willing to question their own biases, rethink schools and education, and enlist the support and mentorship of more senior teachers. This dissertation also contributes empirically to the literature by assessing how teachers, parents, and alumni view these practices as more than just culturally relevant, but as politically relevant (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 1999). Relatedly, the findings of this dissertation suggest that teachers who are working with student populations that may not match their own demographic histories can, with the appropriate mentorship and open-minded teaching philosophy, enact practices of cultural relevancy, and even of political relevancy.

The findings of this dissertation also contribute to our understanding about the racial socialization practices that often occur in Black schools, and how parents and alumni in such schools may view their impact. Such analyses open up the conversation around the role of socialization, and particularly racial socialization practices in schools, and how educators can more explicitly convey their socialization goals rather than assume that such socialization is not occurring. In so doing, educators can more deeply consider which practices they might use to achieve their goals. This finding is connected with the contributions that this dissertation makes towards examining how schools are attempting to counter racism, and the philosophies, practices, and structures that might be useful to consider in working towards this aim.

Particularly in Chapter II and III, I open up a dialogue around what constitutes African American pedagogical practice and how addressing issues of racism and working towards racial justice may be central components of this legacy. I also attempt to understand how the contours of this pedagogy, and of African American schools like Marshall, can help to inform the process of preparing and mentoring more culturally competent, non-racist, politically relevant teachers and school leaders (King, 1991; Tatum, 1992); push for the rethinking of educational and schooling; and encourage schools and educators to recognize and build upon the capacity and desire to learn that all children have, particularly those who have political goals to reshape schools and society.

Also important are the empirical findings of this dissertation relative to the perspectives of parents of African American children. There are relatively few first-hand accounts about these parents’ perceptions about race and racism in schools; much less their evaluations of strategies that are attempting to address these concerns. It is my hope that the findings in Chapter IV open up the conversation about parents of African Americans’ selection, orientation, and concerns about schools; their inclusion and support within schools; and their evaluations about what truly constitutes an Education that they can stand behind and trust to best prepare their children. Hopefully the findings presented here will give teachers and schools insights into how to mitigate some of the barriers to parental support that may fall along racial, class, and educational backgrounds, and instead build upon the cultural wealth present in this diversity in ways that welcome parents into being part of the school and of their children’s academic lives.

Finally, it is important to document these teaching and parental elements of African American schools, as well as the alumni perspectives about their practices and impacts, because
of the financial crisis that often leads to the closure of many such independent and private schools. Many of these closures occur much to the dismay of the community and participating families because of the stabilizing forces that these institutions (Anderson, 1988; Morris, 1999; Walker, 1996) serve within the increasingly fragmented and geographically dispersed African American communities around the country. These schools still play a crucial, and undocumented, role in contemporary communities and fewer and fewer of the older ones that have a history of African American achievement are able to keep their doors open for their students and communities, much less open them up to empirical research.

**Looking forward: Areas for future research**

Almost too redundant to mention, but seemingly necessary to note, is that in opening the window into an African American school there is again evidence that African American teachers, students, and families continue to be invested in education, public and otherwise, and African American students remain as educable and able to achieve as any other student. Further evidenced in this dissertation is that African American students and their parents don’t see these basic assumptions to be widely shared or endorsed within schools or by teachers themselves. Nor do they see schools as aligning with their visions of Education, reciprocity and inclusion, racial and cultural awareness and pride, and cooperative advancement towards cultivating youth into being just and active citizens who redefine the social order. In studying Marshall, it was clear that the goals of politically relevant teaching were considered to be important and necessary elements of schools by Black and non-Black persons who viewed schools as having some degree of social and political power.

Also evident was that when deep investments by the school were perceived, the perceived impacts of those investments were viewed as equally profound. That is to say, that when African American students and their families felt invested in by a school like Marshall, they in turn saw the positive impact of the school and reciprocated by investing back into the school as individual students, parents, and as a community members. The findings from this dissertation further debunk assumptions that rely upon cultural deficit explanations or other racialized perceptions, or fail to question the ideologies of authorities and the practices of institutions in favor of less messy, less critical reforms that continue the trend of relying upon more and newer resources, tests, curriculum, or abstract notions of teacher quality.

Future research, then, would benefit from examining if the critiques that Marshall parents and alumni have about other schools, and the distinctions they make between them and Marshall, are similar or different from other African American school communities’ critiques of schools and impressions of their own schools. Expanding the research conducted at Marshall to other African American elementary schools would also provide a better perspective of the degree to which Marshall’s approach and parents’ evaluations might be based upon regional or institutional nuances, or are reflective of broader trends that occur within distinct communities whether or not they have the same political, social, and cultural histories of northern California, of Marshall, and of its educators and families. These nuances may provide additional conceptual clarity to the parameters of politically relevant teaching philosophies and practices. They may also serve to help further distill the patterns of African American pedagogical practice and propose elements that may have not been present within the current sample.

Research at a non-Black institution using the macroanalytic and microanalytic frames could also be fruitful towards understanding and/or critiquing the practices within environments that
may or may not be attempting to challenge racism or racially socialize students in ways that may differ from or resonate with the practices at Marshall and other Black schools. Such research would allow for an analysis of how politically relevant teaching is being attempted in an environment that more squarely fits the parameters and rigidity of a public school setting rather than the one room schoolhouse, privately run schooling environment at Marshall. Research in such a setting might provide insights into how the lessons learned from Marshall, and similar schools, could be applied to larger and more racially diverse educational settings.

Another area of future research could include using elements of the politically relevant teaching model to analyze, train, or mentor pre-service teachers or current teachers’ into more inclusive, holistic and politically guided pedagogies. The focus here would be to analyze the possibilities for change at the level of individual teachers and the effects it would have on their classroom environment and students’ experiences within it. While the other areas of future research focus more squarely on the school as the unit of analysis, here the teacher development and teacher-student relationships would be more central.

These proposed lines of future research, like this dissertation, ultimately endeavor to contribute to the research about racism and schooling. I hope the findings of this dissertation and the implications it has for future research, will help to reopen what may be considered to be “old” concerns about the purposes of education and the possibilities of using schools for social change. Perhaps it will also generate new conversations that push us to rethink our ideals, our schools, and make explicit our Educational strategies and hidden agendas.
References


Morris, J. E. (2002). A 'Communally Bonded' School for African American Students, Families,


Appendices

Appendix A: Marshall Fieldnotes Sample

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<thead>
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<th>Name of Observer:</th>
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This is my first time coming to the schooling on a Tuesday. After my first couple of visits, I learned that different subjects are taught on different days. Usually one of the groups, big kids or little kids, are taught in the morning, and then it rotates to the next group right after lunch. Gwen often asks the children who went first last time so that the groups rotate who sees the teacher first and second. It seems as though most classes are divided into little kids and big kids, but some classes are divided into the 3 groups, including a group of middle kids. I need to find out how those groups are constructed and if there are particular classes for which they are divided into 3 groups versus 2 groups and why. There also appears to be some classes that they all do together. I pick this up from students’ talk about their classes to one another that bridge across the big/little kid distinction, e.g. “We didn’t do that last week, that was the week before.”

Entering into the school, I see Gwen at the teacher’s table near the blackboards. She has all of the kids with her. I’ve usually seen them broken out into groups when they are working with Gwen, so I’m curious what they’re doing. I’m still learning their names but I know Reynold, Ingrid, Sonny and Regina’s names. Two other I also know Shane and Samuel as those two names stuck out to me for some reason. Other kids are also there, two of them I later figure out, Hannah and LaKresha (everybody calls her Kri). There is also another African American adult present, who I wasn’t sure whether they were a teacher or parent at first. After observing for a while, I figure out that the adult is Kri’s mother. I’m still not sure if she is just volunteering at the school or why she’s here. Either way, Kri seems happy about it.

Gwen is talking about the Day of the Dead (she also says Dia de Los Muertos) and its history for Mexican and Mexican Americans. She explains that it’s a tradition that comes from the Aztecs and was part of their religion. She asks the students if they know that the Aztecs were there before the Spanish came and conquered the land. Gwen emphasizes that the Europeans Spanish weren’t just satisfied with taking the land, but that they also wanted to conquer the people and take away their beliefs, language, and religion. She says it’s like what Christopher Columbus and the other Europeans did to the Native Americans. They were already here but the other people wanted their land and their resources. Rather than working together, they wanted to control everything.

Gwen relates this to slavery and to the holocaust, when they use other people to do work and say bad things about them to justify how horribly they treat them. She also references how people in these conditions were often not able to have their own houses but were kept in stables, like horses, sometimes having to stand up all the time with no place to sleep or even food to eat. She mentions that the Japanese that were sent to internment camps were only allowed to bring one bag. She asks students how they would feel if all of a sudden that had to move to some place they didn’t choose and all they could take was one bag. She asks them what they would take. Some kids say a TV, Gwen responds that it wouldn’t fit, how would they know that they’d have
somewhere to plug it in. Students comment on how that sounds "crazy" and "doesn’t make sense.” Gwen says that at that time there was a racial slur for Japanese, “Japs” which was a derogatory word, like “nigger.” “If you ever hear that word, you know that someone is being racist and you need to say something to them.”

Gwen then begins a discussion with the children about their own beliefs about how people should be treated and what they would do if “someone wouldn’t let you celebrate, worship, or believe what you wanted to?” Various students call at that they wouldn’t let that happen, or that they would leave that place, or fight back because that’s “not right.” Ingrid even says, “I’m going to believe what I want to believe. They can’t control my mind. Shoot.” Then she laughs.

Gwen returns to talking about the traditions of the Day of the Dead, including how the families usually make mole and tamales together, put marigolds around the graves or on the alters for the deceased. While they are talking the school phone rings. I assume that Gwen will answer it or have another adult answer it, or just ignore it. I’m therefore surprised when one of the older kids gets up, runs into the office, and very professionally says, “Meadows Livingstone School, this is Ingrid, how can I help you?” Ingrid quietly comes back in and whispers something to Gwen. Gwen asks her to take a message. While this is happening, I’m trying to figure out how the student knows how to do this. Gwen must have trained her. It was also interesting that she was the only one that jumped up when the phone rang, which makes me wonder if this is her job/responsibility. After a minute or so, Ingrid comes back into the class and sits down again.

Seeing Ingrid answer the phone like that and handle that responsibility makes me reflect on the way in which Gwen handles the discussion with the students. Rather than being the sage on the stage, she seems very intentional about letting the students guide the discussion and being responsive to their comments. She definitely seems to have an agenda, but it’s very fluid and there is a lot of room for students to share their thinking or talk about what’s interesting to them. This takes a lot of time, but Gwen doesn’t ever seem to be rushed to move onto the next thing. Perhaps because this is a private school there is more flexibility and since it’s her school, Gwen doesn’t feel beholden to a rigid schedule or curriculum.

At 10:20 the activities switch. Gwen says she wants to meet with the “fraction girls,” which turns out to be the middle girls, Kri, Hannah, and Reema. I must have missed the other teacher, Jessie, walk in because I now notice that she is starting to work with Ciara on doing an alphabet puzzle. I thought that Jessie was the science teacher, but it seems that she may also be a reading specialist. I ask her about this at lunch and she confirms that she has a special credential as a reading specialist. I’m now getting a sense of the teachers that are at this school. So far I’ve met the music teacher, Dana, a middle aged, white woman who seems to come on Fridays. Then there is Jenny who teaches science, but apparently also does reading specialist stuff on Tuesdays. I’ve also met Molly, a thirty-something white woman who seems to teach math, or what Gwen refers to as special math. I’ve seen Gwen also teach math, so perhaps Molly is given individuated instruction or teaching some other form or level of math to the students. I do see her take both the big kids and the little kids, but she also pulls out individual students some times. Apparently Molly originally came 5 years ago to replace the K-1 teacher. After teaching that for a few years, she moved on to teaching math. There is also Jamie, who is the art teacher, but I think she mentioned that she had also taught writing and science, and perhaps even the K-1 class very briefly. I’ve also met Jim, the tennis instructor, who is a Black middle-aged man. I believe that Gwen also takes tennis lessons from him. Then there is Adebiyi, who everyone calls Biyi, who seems like he’s been here forever. He teaches African Civilizations and the African
Percussion class. Finally there is a couple, Rebecca and Winston, a Jewish woman and a Black (Trinidadian?) man. They are both dancers and teach the African dance class together. She seems like she does most of the choreography, but he demonstrates the moves and plays the drum for the class.

Not too long after Gwen helps the girls to begin their fraction work, which seems to be out of a workbook that each of them have, Gwen walks over to the parent and asks her if she’s ready. It seems as though Kri’s mom will be teaching a lesson or doing some sort of demonstration or talk. At 10:45, Gwen has rounded up the students and has them seated in the desk room, each seated at their desk. Gwen is telling the students that they are going to be learning about Nutrition. Sitting on top of a desk with her back to the wall, Kri’s mom has some WIC posters and handouts. I think she must be a nutritionist for WIC or something. Kri’s mom begins talking about eating habits, including talking about the different food groups and the importance of reading the ingredients that are listed on food packages. She also recommends monitoring your TV habits to see if you’re just interested in eating certain foods or certain brands because of the commercials and media images you see on TV. She asks students to write down and sign a personal commitment that they will keep for a week, until next Tuesday. The personal commitment is to avoid high fructose corn syrup. Some students ask about how they are going to determine which foods to avoid. Another student reminds them that Kri’s mom had just told them to read the ingredients on the packages. Kri’s mom agrees that that’s how you know if something has high fructose corn syrup or not.

Kri’s mom explains that it’s not just about eating different foods, and not eating some things for a little while. She says that the point of her talk today is to help each of them develop a consciousness around what they are eating and to make sure that we have choices and make good decisions about what we put into our bodies. Although the information that Kri’s mom was sharing was really useful, I could tell that she wasn’t used to teaching little children. She didn’t really know how to manage the behavior or make sure that all of the students were following her. While she was talking Gwen would follow up her questions and model an interactional style of not just talking at the students, but getting them involved in simple tasks like paper passing, asking each other questions or encouraging Kri’s mom to respond to their questions and build on their responses. Even still, Gwen wasn’t leading the class herself and so some of the kids weren’t paying as much attention as they could to Kri’s mom. Whereas usually other students would say something to the students that were acting out, the other students remained quiet and didn’t reprimand those that were talking.

When Kri’s mom finished, Gwen made the students stay in their seats and she reminded them that they should be giving respect to anyone that is speaking, a teacher, another adult or a student. She tells them that Kri’s mom took time off from work to share information with them and that they should have been more respectful of her time and of what she was trying to teach them. Gwen reminds them that this is not “how kids at our school act” and that they probably need to have a little “physical activity” to get themselves together. In the last 15 minutes before lunch (it’s 11:20) she has the students do 50 pushups. The students lay on the ground, Gwen joins them and then count off their 50 pushups together. They are allowed a minute of rest between each set of 10 pushups. I’m surprised that there isn’t more complaining from students or out right refusal. Instead, the younger kids seem excited about doing pushups and the older kids seemed resigned to dealing with the physical reprimand.

After the pushups, Gwen tells everyone to line up for lunch. The students scramble up, some running to the bathroom, others running to get their lunches or jackets or engage in some other
last minute task. When the students are lined up at the school door. They do their count-off, from the oldest to the youngest. Everyone seems to know everyone else’s number because if one student isn’t paying attention and doesn’t call out their number at the appropriate time, the other students yell at them to call out their number. As we walk out of the school, students fall into their pairs, one older student with a younger student. They usually walk somewhere near each other or hold hands, because as they walk through the parking lot or across a driveway, they all scramble to grab the hands of their younger peer or their elder. This intergenerational responsibility is instantiated through formal mechanisms such as the counting off and the pairing up of students as well as through interactional and disciplinary norms. Earlier in the day I saw a younger student petition for less push-ups saying that they were not engaging in the talk but that they were asking other students to be quiet. When she enlisted the support of an elder who vouched for her behavior, Gwen responded and allowed that younger student to do fewer pushups than she was originally assigned.
Appendix B

Marshall Langston School Alumni Survey

My name is Maxine McKinney de Royston and I am a doctoral candidate at UC Berkeley. I have volunteered at Marshall since fall 2009. I am interested in the teaching style and schooling environment at Marshall and how it shapes students' experiences there. I invite you to complete this survey to help teachers and researchers, like me, to understand more about African American students' experiences in schools. Gwen has given me permission to conduct this research at Marshall and is aware that I am sending out this survey.

Your participation in this survey is voluntary. You do not have to answer any question that makes you feel uncomfortable. You can skip any question that you prefer not to answer and you will still be able to submit the survey. You are also free to stop the survey at any time. The identities of participants are confidential. When a survey is submitted, it is randomly coded in order to protect the anonymity of the participant. Please be honest in your responses so that I can best understand students' experiences at Marshall.

BEFORE TAKING THE SURVEY, YOU NEED TO GIVE YOUR CONSENT!

Please make sure to read the above section that introduces the researcher and explains the purpose of this study. Once you have read it, indicate if you consent to participate in this survey. Even if you give consent, you can stop at any time or opt out of any question.

☐ Yes, I consent to participate in this survey.
☐ No, I do not consent to participate in this survey.

If you do not give consent, please submit your survey now.

If you have provided consent, please make sure to READ THE INSTRUCTIONS for each section and those that accompany each question before responding.

If you have any questions, please contact me at 510-xxx-xxxx or xxxxxxx@berkeley.edu. If you are in contact with any students that attended Marshall for any length of time (they didn't need to graduate!), please forward my information on to them. The more responses, the better!

Thank you,
Maxine
Demographic Information

This section asks information about you and your family while you were attending Marshall. The next section will ask you more current information.

1) Please select every year and every grade you attended Marshall, even if you did not complete that year or grade at Marshall. You can note that you did not complete a given year and/or grade in the comments section after the question. Make sure to scroll to the right if you don't see the year(s) you need.

| Year | 79-80 | 80-81 | 81-82 | 82-83 | 83-84 | 84-85 | 85-86 | 86-87 | 87-88 | 88-89 | 89-90 | 90-91 | 91-92 | 92-93 | 93-94 | 94-95 | 95-96 | 96-97 | 97-98 | 98-99 | 99-00 | 00-01 | 01-02 | 02-03 | 03-04 | 04-05 | 05-06 | 06-07 | 07-08 | 08-09 | 09-10 |
|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
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| 1    |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |
| 2    |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |
| 3    |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |
| 4    |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |
| 5    |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |
| 6    |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |

Comments:

2) To understand the economic status of Marshall students, what was the income level of your family when you went to Marshall? If you attended Marshall at various times, please note the income level that best reflects your family's general economic status while you were at Marshall. You can also provide additional information or explanations in the comments section.

- ☐ under $5,000
- ☐ $5,000 - $10,000
- ☐ $11,000 - $15,000
- ☐ $16,000 - $20,000
- ☐ $21,000 - $25,000
- ☐ $26,000 - $30,000
- ☐ $31,000 - $35,000
- ☐ $36,000 - $40,000
- ☐ $41,000 - $45,000
- ☐ $46,000 - $50,000
- ☐ $51,000 - $55,000
- ☐ $56,000 - $60,000
- ☐ $61,000 - $65,000
- ☐ $66,000 - $70,000
- ☐ $71,000 - $75,000
- ☐ $76,000 - $80,000
- ☐ $81,000 - $85,000
- ☐ $86,000 - $90,000
- ☐ $91,000 - $95,000
- ☐ $96,000 - $100,000
- ☐ above $100,000

Additional comments:
3) Please choose the guardians that you *mainly* (more than half of the time) lived with while you attended Marshall. If you split time between more than one household, check the box for the one where most often lived and then note the other one in the text box below.

- ☐ Mother
- ☐ Father
- ☐ Mother & Father (includes step-parents)
- ☐ Grandparent(s)
- ☐ Uncle and/or Aunt
- ☐ Foster parent
- ☐ Cousin
- ☐ Other (please explain below)

Comments:

4) How would you describe your racial or ethnic background? Check as many boxes as needed. If you wish, you can provide more detailed information in the text box below.

- ☐ African American/Black
- ☐ Afro-Latino
- ☐ Asian American/Pacific Islander
- ☐ Biracial or Multi-racial
- ☐ Caucasian/White
- ☐ Chicano/a or Latino/a
- ☐ Indian/Native American
- ☐ West Indian or Caribbean

Comments:

5) To the best of your knowledge, what is your current economic status? If you are under 18 years old, indicate the economic status of your parents/family/or your guardian(s) that you most often live with.

- ☐ under $5,000
- ☐ $5,000 - $10,000
- ☐ $11,000 - $15,000
- ☐ $16,000 - $20,000
- ☐ $21,000 - $25,000
- ☐ $26,000 - $30,000
- ☐ $31,000 - $35,000
- ☐ $36,000 - $40,000
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- ☐ $81,000 - $85,000
- ☐ $86,000 - $90,000
- ☐ $91,000 - $95,000
- ☐ $96,000 - $100,000
- ☐ above $100,000

Comments:
6) If you are under 18 years old, please choose the adult family members with whom you mainly (more than 50% of the time) live. If you split time between more than one household, choose the one that you are most often with and, if you want to, you can note the other one in the text box.

- Mother
- Father
- Mother & Father (includes step-parents)
- Grandparent(s)
- Uncle and/or Aunt
- Foster parent
- Cousin
- Other (please explain below)

Comments:

7) Indicate the highest level of education you have completed. If you are still in school, also select the level of education you currently attend.

Currently Attending  Completed
- Middle School
- High School
- 2-year College
- 4-year College
- Graduate or Professional School (e.g. M.A., M.S., PhD, JD, MD, etc)
- Other

Other (indicate other program/degree goal):

Please list the schools (middle school, high schools, colleges, etc.) that you attended since MLS.

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**Experiences at Marshall Langston School**

The following questions ask you about your experiences at Marshall. Please use the text boxes following each question to give examples, highlight certain practices, share particular experiences, or provide any additional information.
For the questions that ask you to rank the responses from 1 to 10, a ranking of "1" is the highest-or most important item- and a "10" is the lowest or least important item. If you do not see a choice that you think is important, select an "other" rows, rank that "other" choice you highlighted, and then write a description for that choice into the text box after the question. You do not need to rank all 10, but please make sure to rank your top 3 choices for each question.

8) Why did your parent(s)/guardian(s) enrolled you at Marshall? Rank your answers from 1 to 10, with "1" being the most important reason. Use the text box to explain your top choices.

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What other reason(s)? If more than one, please indicate which ranking you are referring to.

9) How did you or your parents/guardians find out about Marshall Langston School?

- Gwen
- A friend of Gwen
- A teacher at Marshall
- A friend of a Marshall teacher
- A parent of a current or former Marshall student
- A Marshall student or alumni
- Majors Community Center
- On-line
- A private school registry
- Other

Comments: 
10) What did you like most about Marshall? Please select and rank your responses from 1 to 10, with "1" being what you liked most. If you selected "Other," write in your own answer. You can also use the text box after this question to explain your rankings in greater detail.

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Comments:

11) Thinking about the rankings you made in the last question, give some examples of the things about Marshall that you like the most. For example, if you put "Teaching style and practices," indicate what it was that the teachers did or said (that is, their practices) that you really liked.

12) What was your most memorable Marshall class and/or teacher? Why?
13) Was the teaching style at Marshall the same as other schools you attended? Why or why not?

- Very different
- Somewhat different
- Different
- Somewhat similar
- Similar
- Very similar

Please explain your answer:

14) Was the teaching style and schooling environment at Marshall more or less caring than that of other schools you attended? Explain your answer in the text box below.

- Much less caring
- Less caring
- Equally as caring
- More caring
- Much more caring

Why did you choose your answer? Please explain.

15) How would you describe your relationships with Marshall teachers while you were a student? Use the text box if you would like to give a more detailed explanation.

- Relationships were limited to schoolwork & behavior.
- Relationships were mainly based on schoolwork & behavior, but included some personal/social
- Relationships were equally about schoolwork & behavior as they were about personal/social
- Relationships were limited to schoolwork & behavior.

Comments:
16) When you were a Marshall student, where did you interact (see, talk, hang out, etc.) with Marshall teachers? Select all answers that apply. If chose "Other," please write in the text box what you mean by "other." (Check all that apply)

- At the school (Marshall)
- At Marshall activities held at places other than Marshall
- At other activities/events/etc. not related to or held at Marshall
- At my birthday party/graduation party/or other celebrations not held at Marshall
- At my other schools
- At a Marshall teacher's home
- At my home
- At another of my family member's home
- At someone else's home who is connected to Marshall
- Other
- Other

Comments:

17) Does Marshall deal with issues of race and racism at the school? If so, how? (Check all that apply)

- No, Marshall does not deal with race or racism at all.
- Yes, in the curriculum (courses, homework, textbooks, etc).
- Yes, in the teaching style and practices.
- Yes, in the school philosophy.
- Yes, in the school activities (fieldtrips, extra-curricular events, etc.).
- Yes, in the interactions with parents/families.
- Yes, in the interactions between students.
- Yes, in the interactions between teachers and students.
- At someone else's home who is connected to Marshall
- Other

Please choose 2 to 3 examples to explain the selections you made above.
18) What kinds of identities do you think are supported at Marshall? Select all that apply. Scroll to the right if all the options are not displayed.

- [ ] Academic or school-related identities
- [ ] Subject-specific identities
- [ ] Racial or ethnic identities
- [ ] Artistic or performance identities
- [ ] Child or adolescent identities
- [ ] Other (please explain below)
- [ ] Other (please explain below)

If you can, provide examples of what you mean.


19) Marshall has a lot of practices that are unique. What do you think these practices did for you as a student?

Look at the practices that are listed in the rows below. You can use the "Other" rows to add practices that are not listed. Next, look at the column headings running across the top that list possible outcomes of those practices (for example Community Building, Emotional Development). You can use the "Other" column to add another outcome. For each practice, select as many outcomes as necessary. Make sure to scroll to the right to see all the columns.

If you used "other" to add or practice or to add an outcome, use the text box following the question to explain why you selected "other" and whether its a practice or an outcome. You can also use the text box to provide more information about the rest of the selections that you made.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practice</th>
<th>Provide a non-racist schooling environment</th>
<th>Develop students' racial identities</th>
<th>Cultivate student responsibility/accountability</th>
<th>Build community</th>
<th>Foster student independence</th>
<th>Promote academic development</th>
<th>Promote emotional development</th>
<th>Promote social development</th>
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151
Comments or if selected "Other" please explain below:

Experiences after Marshall

Like the last page, these questions ask you about your experiences at MLS. Please use the text boxes following each question to give examples, highlight certain practices, share particular experiences, or provide any additional information.

20) Which one of these statements best describes your relationship with Marshall?

- No, Marshall does not deal with race or racism at all.
- Yes, in the curriculum (courses, homework, textbooks, etc).
- Marshall is a community.
- Marshall is a family.
- Marshall is my favorite school.
- Marshall is a business.
- Marshall is a good school.
- Marshall is one of the schools that I attended.

Please explain or give more details about your selection.

21) Since you've left Marshall, do you visit Marshall, or participate in Marshall activities? If so, how often?

- Never
- A few times since I’ve left
- Every year or so
- A few times every year
- Several times a year
- Almost every month
- A few times a month
- Weekly
- More than once a week
22) If you have visited Marshall or participated in any school activities since you left there, in what capacity have you done so? Select all that apply.

☐ As a visitor/former student  ☐ As a speaker  ☐ Racial identities  ☐ As a performer  ☐ As a volunteer  ☐ As a family member to a student  ☐ As a teacher  ☐ As a parent

23) How would you describe your relationship with teachers at Marshall now?

☐ No relationship, not in communication
☐ Rarely ever see/talk
☐ Sometimes see/talk
☐ Often see/talk
☐ Always see/talk

24) Thinking about your answers to the last few questions, are you involved with Marshall to the same degree or to a different degree than you are with the other schools you've attended?

☐ Not involved with either school
☐ Much less involved with MLS
☐ Slightly less involved with MLS
☐ Involved to the same degree
☐ Slightly more involved with MLS
☐ Much more involved with MLS

25) Which of these elements at Marshall has had the greatest impact on your educational success? Please select and rank the options from 1 to 10, with "1" being the element that had the greatest impact. Use the text box after the question to explain your selection of "other," or to give more details about your rankings.

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26) Thinking about the top 3 rankings you made in the last question, how do you think each of them have an important impact on your educational success?

Comments:

27) Currently, where do you interact (see, talk, hang out, etc.) with Marshall teachers? Select all answers that apply. If chose "Other," please write in the text box what you mean by "other." (Check all that apply)

- At the school (Marshall)
- At Marshall activities held at places other than Marshall
- At other activities/events/etc. not related to or held at Marshall
- At my birthday party/graduation party/or other celebrations not held at Marshall
- At my other schools
- At a Marshall teacher's home
- At my home
- At another of my family member's home
- At someone else's home who is connected to Marshall
- Other
- Other

Comments:
28) If you have had any racist experiences at other schools, did your experiences at Marshall in any way shape how you felt about or handled those racist experiences? What about how you felt about schools? Please select all answers that apply. In the text box, please explain your answer choices and give examples or identify specific practices at Marshall that were useful.

☐ I never had racist experiences at other schools.
☐ No, MLS didn't shape how I dealt with racism I experienced at other schools and it didn't change how I felt about schools.
☐ Yes, the curriculum (courses, homework, textbooks, etc) helped.
☐ Yes, the teaching style and practices helped.
☐ Yes, the school philosophy helped.
☐ Yes, the school activities (fieldtrips, extra-curricular events, etc.) helped.
☐ Yes, the interactions between teachers' and parents/families helped.
☐ Yes, the interactions between students helped.
☐ Yes, the interactions between teachers and students helped.
☐ Yes, the school being all-African American helped.
☐ Other

Why did that approach help? What are examples of that approach?:

29) Thinking about your response to the last question, was Marshall' approach to dealing with racism similar or different from other schools you have attended?

☐ Very different
☐ Somewhat different
☐ Somewhat similar
☐ Similar
☐ Very similar

If you can, provide examples of what you mean.
30) Overall, how would you rank your experience at Marshall? Please use the comments field to explain your answer.

- Horrible
- Bad
- Somewhat bad
- Average
- Somewhat good
- Good
- Excellent

Why do you feel this way?

If you are willing to participate in a focus group with 4 to 5 other Marshall alumni about your experiences at Marshall, please enter your email in the text box below and the researcher (Maxine) will contact you. Thanks!

You're done! Thank you.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey about your experiences at Marshall. If you can think of anyone else that should receive this survey, please email that person my information (xxxxxxxxxx@berkeley.edu). Thanks!
Appendix C

MARSHALL PARENT & TEACHER

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SURVEY

Maxine McKinney de Royston  
Graduate School of Education  
University of California, Berkeley

1. How would you describe your race or ethnicity?

2. **(FOR PARENTS ONLY)** What do you do for a living?

3. Approximately what is your household income?
   a. **(Alumni parents)** Is your income roughly the same as when your child was at Marshall?

4. What’s your educational background?
   - Middle school
   - High school
   - College
   - Graduate or professional school(s)

5. **(FOR PARENTS ONLY)** Along with you, who are the main caretakers of your child/grandchild (e.g. child’s mother, father, aunt, grandmother, etc.)?
• Asking for a 2 hour commitment

NAME_________________________________________________________________
DATE__________________________________________________________________

I. WARM-UP QUESTIONS:

• How did you know you wanted to be a teacher?

II. HISTORY & EXPERIENCE AT MARSHALL

1. How did you learn about Marshall? When and why did you begin teaching there?

2. Research on schools discusses the advantages and disadvantages of different school environments, namely small schools, racially segregated schools, culturally oriented schools, etc. What are your thoughts? Any of them factor into your decision to teach at Marshall?

3. What was your first year teaching at Marshall like? Ask for examples of poignant experiences, mentorship experiences, shifts in pedagogical beliefs/practices, etc.

4. Given your experience, do you think African American children benefit from separate school environments? Why or why not?

III. PEDAGOGY AT MLS

5. On Marshall’s website it says that it has “an afro-centric child-centered, peace-based educational philosophy” that has empowered children. Do you agree with
that statement? What does it mean to you? Is that similar or different from other schools you’ve worked or currently work in?

6. Do you think that your teaching style or pedagogy is the same or different at Marshall from other schools you’ve taught at or currently teach at?
   a. Ask for particular practices, curricular changes, or changes in beliefs. If so, how? Give examples. What about dealing with morning meeting, elder model, etc.?
   b. If different, did you receive any mentorship into teaching this way from Gail or other teachers? If so, give examples.
   c. Do you think it is the role of the teacher or school to deal with race and racism? Why or why not?
   d. If taught there a long time, is the pedagogy at MLS the same as it was when you started? Explain.

7. What about Marshall’s curriculum? Is it the same or different from other schools?
   a. Does Marshall deal with issues of race in its curriculum? If so, how?

8. Research indicates that identity development is a central task for children. Are there certain identities that are supported at Marshall?
   a. For each identity mentioned, what practices at Marshall support that identity?
   b. Does MLS limit the identities of its students? Why or why not? Ask for explicit examples, personal experiences, practices.
   c. If does not mention African American or racial identity, ask about it.

9. Marshall mainly serves African American students. Why do you think there are non-African American teachers?
   a. Can anyone be a teacher at Marshall? Why or why not?
   b. Have you helped recruit or hire teachers to Marshall? How are they selected?
   c. When new teachers begin at Marshall are they prepared to teach there? If not, what prepares them? What do they need to know or do differently? Give examples.
   d. Are there examples of teachers that just didn’t work out?

IV. TEACHER EXPERIENCE WITH AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS/FAMILIES

10. Are there expectations for parent involvement at Marshall? How do parents and teachers interact?
    a. Is it the same or different from other schools you’ve worked in or had your own child(ren) at?

11. The San Francisco Chronicle called Marshall an “educational village”? What do you think that means? Do you agree or disagree with that portrayal?

12. Does Marshall prepare students to deal with racism in or out of schools?
a. If so, what is Marshall’s perspective on how students should deal with racism? Practices or teaching strategies?

b. If there is a philosophy, or types of practices or strategies, is Marshall’s approach similar or different from other schools where you or your child(ren) have gone?

c. Do you think that students who go to Marshall deal with racism similarly or differently than African American students that have gone to other schools? Why?

13. When you see a successful (let them define what this means) African American student, what do you usually think is the reason for their academic success?

   a. Home /family background or support?
   b. Social class/resources?
   c. Cultural practices? Examples?
   d. Schools? Teachers?
   a. ?

V. WRAP UP QUESTIONS

14. If have children, did any or all of your children go to Marshall? Why or why not?

15. Are you in contact with any alumni of Marshall? You don’t have to name individuals, but how do you think they are doing educationally, professionally?

   a. Do you think their experiences are any different because of having gone to Marshall? Why or why not?
Appendix E

PARENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Maxine McKinney de Royston
Graduate School of Education
University of California, Berkeley

• Asking for a 2 hour commitment

NAME_________________________________________________________________
DATE__________________________________________________________________

I. WARM-UP QUESTIONS (Use one of the following):

• Are you from the Bay area? If not, where are you from?

• Tell me about your child. How do/did they like Meadows?

• How many kids do you have? Do/did they all go to Meadows?

II. RATIONAL FOR CHOOSING MARSHALL

6. How did you learn about Marshall?

7. Research on schools discusses the advantages and disadvantages parents have to consider in choosing schools for their children. Why did you choose Marshall?
   a. Did you consider schools that had a college prep focus, technology, arts, or etc.?
   b. Did Marshall’s being all African-American factor in to your decision?
   c. Did Marshall’s African centered approach factor in?
   d. Did the small school environment enter into your decision to send your child to Marshall?
   e. Any other factors?

8. What was your child’s first year at Marshall like? Poignant experiences, realizations, etc.

9. Given your experience, do you think African American children benefit from separate or special school environments? Why or why not?
III. PEDAGOGY AT MARSHALL

10. On Marshall’s website it says that it has “an afro-centric child-centered, peace-based educational philosophy” that has empowered children. Do you agree with that statement? What does it mean to you?

11. Do you think that the teaching style at Marshall is the same or different from where your child went before? Explain.
   a. Ask for particular practices or examples. E.g. Morning meeting, elder model, etc.
   b. If don’t mention racial practices, is how the school talks/deals with race the same or different from other schools?
   c. Is it the role of the teacher or school to deal with race and racism? Why or why not?
   d. If the parent/family member has been at the school for a while, is the teaching style at Marshall similar or different from what it was before? Be explicit.

12. Can anyone be a teacher at Marshall?
   a. If not, what do they need to know or do differently at Marshall? Give examples.
   b. Are there examples of teachers that just didn’t work out?

13. What about Marshall’s curriculum? Is it the same or different from other schools?
   a. Does Marshall deal with issues of race in its curriculum? If so, how?

14. Research indicates that identity development is a central task for children. Are there certain identities that are supported at Marshall?
   a. For each identity mentioned, what practices at Marshall support that identity?
   c. If does not mention African American or racial identity, ask about it.

IV. PARENT INVOLVEMENT & BELIEFS ABOUT AFRICAN AMERICAN CHILDREN

15. How do parents and teachers interact at Marshall?
   a. Was/Is your participation at Marshall or support you provided the school the same or different from what you did at other schools your child(ren) attended?
   b. What is Marshall’s expectation for how you participate at the school, engage with or support the school?
   c. Do you volunteer at the school? If so, doing what? With what frequency?
16. The San Francisco Chronicle called Marshall an “educational village”? Do you agree or disagree with that portrayal of Marshall? What do you think that means?

17. Does Marshall prepare students to deal with racism in or out of school?
   a. If so, what is Marshall’s perspective on how students should deal with racism? Practices or teaching strategies?
   b. If there is a philosophy, or types of practices or strategies, is Marshall’s approach similar or different from other schools where you or your child(ren) have gone?
   c. Do you think that students who go to Marshall deal with racism similarly or differently than African American students that have gone to other schools? Why?

18. When you see a successful (let them define what this means) African American student, what do you usually think is the reason for their academic success?
   e. Home /family background or support?
   f. Social class/resources?
   g. Cultural practices? Examples?
   h. Schools? Teachers?

19. Do you talk to your child about race and racism?
   a. What kind of conversations do you have with your child about race? Are they planned or spontaneous?
   b. How would you like your child to react when they encounter racism? Are there particular practices you try to support?

20. Would you recommend Marshall to other parents? Why or why not?
   a. Could any African American child benefit from Marshall
   b. What about any child, regardless of race?

V. CHILD’S EXPERIENCES & LIFE POST-MARSHALL

21. What was your child’s first year out of Marshall like? If there was an adjustment period, how long did it last? What were some key experiences and/or struggles?

22. What is your child doing now? Did they go to college? Graduate? Graduate school or current career path?

23. Do you think Marshall had a lasting impact on our child’s education or life? If so, how? Is it the same or different from the impact of your child’s other school’s?

24. Are you in contact with any Marshall alumni? In general, how do you think they are doing educationally, professionally?
a. Would their current experiences be the same or different had they not attended Marshall?

25. Are you in contact with any parents of Marshall alumni? In general, how do you think they feel about their child’s experiences at Marshall

   a. If you have contact information for them, can you either give them my information or pass on their contact info to me?
Appendix F

ALUMNI FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Maxine McKinney de Royston
Graduate School of Education
University of California, Berkeley

• Asking for a 2 hour commitment

DATE__________________________________________________________________

NAME_________________________________________________________________

NAME_________________________________________________________________

NAME_________________________________________________________________

NAME_________________________________________________________________

NAME_________________________________________________________________

NAME_________________________________________________________________

NAME_________________________________________________________________

NAME_________________________________________________________________

NAME_________________________________________________________________

NAME_________________________________________________________________

NAME_________________________________________________________________

Seating arrangement & participant names
I. WARM-UP QUESTIONS (get at least 3 responses):

- Do you know how your parent(s) or guardian(s) found out about Marshall or why they chose it?

II. SCHOOLING DECISIONS AND SCHOOLING ENVIRONMENT AT MARSHALL

2. Do you remember your first day or your first experiences at Marshall? What were your first impressions? E.g. poignant experiences, moments of realization, etc.

3. Marshall’ website says it has “an afro-centric child-centered, peace-based educational philosophy” that empowers children. Do you agree with that statement? What does it mean to you?

4. From your experience, do you think that there are certain types of identities—ways of being, ways of thinking about oneself or connecting oneself with a group of people, an activity, or even a school subject—that are supported at Marshall?
   a. For each identity mentioned, what practices at Marshall support that identity?
   b. Are there identities that Marshall doesn’t support?
   c. If does not mention African American or racial identity, ask about it.

5. How do students and teachers interact at Marshall? Is it the same or different from other schools you have attended?
   a. What should be the relationship between students and teachers?

6. How did your parents interact with the teachers at Marshall?
   a. Did they feel welcome/included at Marshall?
   b. How is it the same or different than other schools you have attended?

7. The [local newspaper] newspaper called Marshall an “educational village.” Do you agree or disagree with that portrayal? What do you think that means?

III. PEDAGOGY AT MARSHALL

8. Do you think that the teaching style or teaching practices at Marshall were the same or different from other schools you’ve gone to? Explain.
   a. Ask for particular practices or examples. Morning meeting, elder model, writer’s workshop, poetry/recitation, physical activities, etc.
   b. If different, how did that impact you as a student?
   c. If don’t mention racial practices, is how the school talks/deals with race the same or different from other schools? Examples?

9. Can anyone be a teacher at Marshall? Why or why not?
   a. Marshall serves primarily African American students. Why do you think there are non-African American teachers?
b. Is there anything they need to know or do differently at Marshall?
c. Are there examples of teachers that just didn’t work out?

10. What about Marshall’ curriculum? Is it similar to or different than other schools?
   a. Does Marshall deal with issues of race or racism in its curriculum? If so, how?

V. ALUMNI EXPERIENCES AT MARSHALL & ATTRIBUTIONS OF SUCCESS

11. What was the most important or memorable practice, activity or experience that you had at Marshall? Why? What did it teach you?

12. Does Marshall prepare students to deal with racism they encounter in schools? What about outside of schools?
   a. If yes, where there particular practices, teaching strategies, or experiences from Marshall that helped you learn how to deal with racism?
   b. Are these approaches similar or different from other schools you’ve gone to?

13. Think about your own experiences at Marshall, did they prepare you academically and/or in other ways?
   a. If academically, how?
   b. In your opinion, are Marshall students better prepared, as prepared, or less prepared academically than African American students from other schools? Why? Examples of real-life experiences, reflections, etc.
   c. If other, what ways? E.g. socially, politically, emotionally, etc. How were you prepared? Explain and identify practices, beliefs, incidents, etc.
   d. If other, does this distinguish Marshall students in that way (the way described by interviewee) from African Americans students from other schools?

14. A lot of Marshall students have done well in school and gone on to college. What do you think is responsible for their academic success? Probe for explanations. E.g. home/family background or support, students’ academic skill levels, cultural practices, school, teachers, etc.

15. Research on schools discusses the advantages and disadvantages of different schooling environments, like small schools, racially specific schools, and schools with cultural orientations and/or teaching styles. Do you think any of these factors had an impact on your experience at Marshall?
   a. If the student has been out of the school for a while, do you know if the teaching style now at Marshall is similar or different from when you attended? Be explicit.
VI. ALUMNI EXPERIENCES & LIFE POST-MARSHALL

16. Given your schooling experiences, at Marshall and elsewhere, do you think African American children benefit from or different or separate schooling environments? Why or why not?

17. What was your first year out of Marshall like? If there was an adjustment period, how long did it last? What were some key experiences or struggles? What did you miss from Marshall? What things at your new school did you like?

18. Since you left or graduated from Marshall, have you gone back and visited?
   a. What’s the purpose of your visit (e.g. volunteering, attending an activity, teaching, just visiting, etc)
   b. Why do you visit?
   c. Do you visit or volunteer at other schools that you attended?

19. Has Marshall had an impact on you educationally or otherwise? If so, how?

20. Are you in contact with any Marshall alumni? In general, how do you think they are doing educationally, professionally?
   a. Based on your conversations with them, do they think their experiences are any different because of having gone to Marshall? Why or why not?

21. Did/do any other family members attend Marshall? Do you have children that attend/have attended Marshall? If yes, did all of your kids go to Marshall?

22. Part of my research involves getting a sense of the total number of students that have attended Marshall. Can you think back and name other students that were at the school while you were there?
   a. If you have contact information for them, can you pass on my contact info to them?

Thanks!