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A CASE STUDY EXPLORING COLLEGE ACCESS FOR LOW-INCOME, FIRST-
GENERATION URBAN AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS AND THE CAREER
SUCCESS OF MR. SILAS PURNELL, 'THE MICHAEL JORDAN OF TRiO'

BY

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DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation uses a case study to explore issues of college access for low-income, first-generation urban African American students. This project also examines the work of Mr. Silas Purnell, the man I have deemed as ‘The Michael Jordan of TRiO’. He was a pioneer, leader, and in essence—a game changer in the field of Student Affairs and among the college going culture for students of color for nearly a half-century. His work in Chicago with students of color along with colleges and universities across the country from 1966 to 2001 is relevant and continues to resonate. Scholars suggest Purnell single-handedly changed the culture of college admissions regarding working with masses of urban students of color. Due to social stratification and inequalities critical resources and pertinent information for matriculation into higher education continues to be scarce and elusive to some. For more than a half-century, educational disparities have existed and persisted. No other population within the United States public education system has been as affected and positioned for failure than African Americans (Blacks) and male students, in particular. Black students continue to face plagues of environmental, social, familial and other related factors which impact can academic achievement. Purnell worked with tens of thousands of Black students and most of them came from low-income families and would become first-generation college attendees. Purnell’s unprecedented work and efforts yielded resources, opportunities, and access to college for many who otherwise would not have been afforded entrance into the doors of higher learning. Literally, an unconfirmed number of students who Purnell worked with went on to achieve success. Since issues of college access, college placement, and college completion remain a problem, I sought to delve into the work and legacy of Purnell to seek to discover tools

and tips he employed during his tenure. As educators, scholars, and practitioners seek viable approaches to further support increasing access and college attainment to similar populations of students, I chose to focus my research and thoroughly study the work and success of Purnell, who reportedly facilitated approximately 100,000 students' placement into college. The primary research questions that guided this study included:

1) What were the strategies and practices that Purnell adopted in working with students and families?; 2) How was he effective in placing students into schools and providing access to higher education?; and 3) How can current professionals and advocates for underrepresented, low-income, urban students apply the strategies and practices Purnell used into their work in increasing access to higher education? This qualitative study used individual interviews as the primary data collection method. 13 individuals were interviewed and they shared information which contributed to a data set organized into six primary themes. This dissertation study contributes to our understanding of maximal success in work related to college preparation services with underrepresented, underserved, and marginalized populations. This research reveals that in addition to intellectual capacity and expertise, it is also optimal to embody and implement soft skills and leadership qualities including: perseverance, resourcefulness and resilience in networking, cultural competency, caring and commitment; and the capacity to overcome many obstacles.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my future children, 6 Godchildren, (Shavaria, Nyilah, Anthony Jr., Alyssa, Kameron, & Baby Tyson), surrogate son, Devon, all my nieces and nephews both natural and spiritual; and to the Sisters and Brothers in and of the Struggle who are born and raised; strive and survive in places and spaces like the Dearborn Homes, Chicago's Englewood, and similar settings across the globe. Furthermore, and to our great ancestors including all of the heroes and sheroes who came before us; worked and sacrificed for so many others, including me to benefit. For all of them who like, Mr. Silas Purnell, Sr. were ordinary people who simply did extraordinary things. Thank you.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

This dissertation examines issues of access to college for underrepresented, and low-income, urban students of color. Some of the primary objectives of this work was to gain additional insight, and it further seeks to explore identifiable strategies, practices, and programs that have historically yielded significant success and contributions to increased college access to African American urban students. This project focuses on the career and work of Mr. Silas Purnell, who I have deemed ‘the Michael Jordan of TRIO’. Purnell was the founding director of the Ada S. McKinley Community Services, Inc. Educational Division Services TRiO Educational Talent Search Program. He is credited for working with thousands of families during his career and working with over 100,000 students from Chicago and the surrounding areas; and facilitating their admissions into colleges and university campuses throughout the United States between the late 1960s until one year after a new millennium. This research project explores the strategies, practices, and operating procedures Purnell used in his career as he became a household name to many, a pioneer in Student Affairs, and an unparalleled resource for tens of thousands of first-generation and low-income students and families seeking higher education opportunities.

Purpose of this research

The purpose and rationale for this study are multi-faceted. The professional record of Purnell as a leader and his outcomes are unprecedented and arguably greatly benefit countless academics and professionals (W. Trent, personal communication, October 16, 2014). Despite the shift in time and culture within society over the past few decades, an

account of his work can provide additional insight and help to inform the research and implementation of scientifically proven and accepted standard best practices in the fields of education and student affairs. From the elementary school level to the graduate school arena students, parents, teachers, administrators, and policy makers could all significantly benefit from the example and review of Silas Purnell's work and his story.

The primary subject of this study is a figure who was the first of his kind as he yielded an extreme and unwavering commitment to helping youth from the Chicago metropolitan area enter college. Purnell and his work may have unknowingly set the standard for working with underrepresented students and families and helping provide them access and admissions into college. He has been described as a pioneer and leader in his field who became the embodiment of excellence in the field of Student Affairs. He is a household name to the masses of African American scholars or professionals, over the age of 40 and beyond. Many who were raised or lived in Chicago or worked in the field of education in the state of Illinois during his time knew him or knew of him and his work. His story should be well documented and solidified in publications within academia. Despite the prowess and four decades of enormous success and contribution on the part of Purnell, few academics have focused their scholarship on his remarkable accomplishments. Notwithstanding, there are seemingly hundreds of stories and accounts of people who were his students or mentees that received support and resources for college. There are thousands of Black professionals, who range from people who attempted or attained an associate degree to doctoral recipients who all credit their success to Mr. Purnell and the information and resources he extended as a mentor, advisor, or friend. His professional record and success were second to none, and we can

reasonably understand *what he did*. One of the objectives of this study is to gain a better understanding of *how he did it*.

Background and problem

Some of the challenges of access to higher education exist because of limited social, cultural, and economic capital among students and families. For example, a first-generation and/or low-income student whose parents or family are unfamiliar with the college admissions process may be at a significant disadvantage to having the same information and access to the resources for matriculation into higher education as their counterparts. To further contextualize the magnitude of the ramifications of inequities in access to resources and opportunities, it is important to consider how college attainment or success in ‘higher education’ has historically been a significant game-changer. In particular to Western society and modern culture, obtaining higher education is significant because of the potential social and economic impact and influence and corresponding capital that may be then associated with an individual or family because of the education attainment. Specifically, African Americans citizens historically have viewed education as a ‘passport to freedom’ and catalyst to a better life while other groups at different times, such as sub-sets of the Native American population considered the administration of American education as a ‘pathway to extinction’ and a perpetuation of their demise (Poupart, 2003). Socially, economically, politically, racially and otherwise access to capital and resources have remained a point of contention in the United States since its inception. This is a systemic issue and has remained a problem that has received increased national attention more recently. A 2014 Executive Summary about low-income students from President Barack Obama’s Office shares a plan for the

United States to become first in the world rankings in college attainment by the year 2020. This report states that “increasing college access and success is critical” to meet the goal and currently, “college access and attainment remains unequal” and half of all people from high-income families have a bachelor’s degree by age 25, just 1 in 10 people from low-income families do” (Executive Office of the President, 2014).

TRiO Programs were created during the Civil Rights Movement era and were products of the federal government’s Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 as a response to the War on Poverty. TRiO programs emerged as strategies to increase the number of underrepresented and marginalized populations in their preparation for and participation in post-secondary education. Some of the initiatives included: the Higher Education Act of 1965; need-based grants being authorized; Educational Opportunity Grants and the Pell Grant Program were established; and later TRIO Programs would be expanded to provide support for underrepresented, and disadvantaged students into higher education (Heller, 2002). TRIO became the umbrella for Upward Bound, McNair Scholars, Student Support Services, Educational Talent Search and others programs with similar aims. These programs have historically proven to be beneficial and have provided information, resources, and direction for access in higher education to many disadvantaged and underrepresented students and families.

The first program that emerged was Upward Bound, which is a supplementary college preparation program that helps prepare low-income, first-generation, underrepresented high school students for matriculation into college. In 1965, the second outreach program created as part of the Higher Education Act was Talent Search (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Talent Search is described as a program that:

Identifies and assists individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds who have the potential to succeed in higher education. The program provides academic, career, and financial counseling to its participants and encourages them to graduate from high school and continue on to and complete their postsecondary education. The program publicizes the availability of financial aid and assist[s] participant[s] with the postsecondary application process (U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

Specifically, the reported goal of Talent Search is to “increase the number of youth from disadvantaged backgrounds who complete high school” (U.S. Department of Education, 2015) to enroll in and complete their postsecondary education. The bulk of Purnell’s efforts to be a bridge between students and colleges occurred between the 1970s and early 2000s. The student population he worked with was comprised of primarily individuals and families whose demographics included African Americans, low-income, and many of them would become first generation college students.

Why ‘the Michael Jordan of TRIO’ title?

As an African American boy who grew up during the 1980s and 1990s in Chicago, I was not aware of a more prominent, popular, highly regarded, or esteemed image and figure to aspire to than Mr. Michael Jeffrey Jordan. From his athletic ability to his personality, flash, popularity, commercial appeal most young Black boys and men I was familiar with and connected to in some way, shape, or form wanted to “be like Mike” in some capacity. Unarguably, Jordan helped take professional basketball to a global level. In addition to perhaps being the most internationally recognized sports figure in the last half-century, his stats and accomplishments collectively are unparalleled. As a six-time national champion, distinction as one of 50 Greatest Players in NBA History (1996); two-

time Olympic gold medalist (1984, 1992); and Basketball Hall of Fame inductee (2009), after almost 70 years in existence, the NBA or the sports world in general has not had a player whose career has reached a similar level of success or notoriety. Even since his retirement from basketball in 2003, Jordan and his performance and success achieved during his active playing years still appears to be the ‘standard’ by which all other players are compared to and aspire to surpass. Despite Mr. Purnell retiring in 2001 and passing away in 2003, in the field of Student Affairs and regarding access for African American students into college especially throughout Chicago and the state of Illinois the work, legacy, and efforts of Silas Purnell is still very much alive and the subject of much conversation.

Jordan remains a primary subject of debate and conversation in the sports world regarding athletes who displays greatness and ascend towards the distinction of being considered as the *best* player in their sport, or role or time. Only recently, twenty years later (2016) was the Jordan led, 1995-1996 Chicago Bulls team regular season record of 72-10 finally surpassed by the Golden State Warriors led by Stephen Curry. Although they had a remarkable regular season they but eventually lost to LeBron James and the Cleveland Cavaliers in the playoffs. Unlike many others before his playing days and none since his playing days, Jordan won-- he was successful in his field—which was the basketball court. He yielded success and recorded numbers and stats that had never been achieved.

Upon conferring a 2016 Presidential Medal of Freedom award to National Basketball Association (NBA) legend Michael Jordan, on November 22, 2016, President Barack Obama commented about him as a recipient, and proclaimed that Jordan is:

More than just the best player on the two greatest teams of all time — the Dream Team and the Chicago [1996] Bulls. He's *more than* a logo, *more than* just an Internet meme. *More than* just a charitable donor or a business owner committed to diversity. There is a reason you call someone '*the Michael Jordan of*' — Michael Jordan of neurosurgery, or the Michael Jordan of rabbis, or the Michael Jordan of outrigger canoeing — and they know what you're talking about. Because Michael Jordan is the Michael Jordan of greatness. He is the definition of somebody so good at what they do that everybody recognizes them. That's pretty rare. (Sweet, 2016).

I agree with this characterization and think Jordan will continue to be known to billions of people around the world past, present, and future as one who worked diligently and as a result became the world's greatest in his field during his era. A legitimate argument could be offered about Jordan's success being contingent upon other players on the Chicago Bulls team and the supporting cast including coaches, staff, and administrators. Undoubtedly, this is true, but unquestionably, the driving force and catalyst for the levels of success that were achieved was Michael Jordan.

Similarly, is the story and character of Silas Purnell and his work with the Ada S. McKinley Community Services, Inc. Educational Services Division featured TRIO Educational Talent Search Program. As did Jordan, Purnell had colleagues and a supporting cast that contributed to his capacity and record of success but also similar to Michael Jordan according to stories, reports, research, and data. Silas Purnell, who was known to many as 'Si', was the driving force and undisputed 'Michael Jordan of TRIO'. Regarding both of these men and their performance in their respective arenas, it can be asserted that to each, he became the *standard*, there was no person quite like him before his time, and the public and the world awaits the presence and emergence of others who

are able to rise to that standard and surpass it. In no way do I assert a comparison or likeness in personality between Jordan and Purnell. Perhaps, to a similar level to Jordan's personal drive to shoot the basketball, win games, and personally achieve in his field of sport was Purnell's drive of being selfless and his fierce, unrelenting determination to help others win and achieve in the field of education. As all men, these were two leaders in their fields with certain personal and professional flaws, however their names are remembered and often revered for the level of their achievement in spite of the course being yet uncharted.

Biography of Silas Purnell

Reportedly proclaiming that “the only designer initials Black people should be worried about are B.A., M.A., and Ph.D.”, Silas Purnell was born on March 10, 1923 to Silas Purnell and Rachel Haynes and raised on the South Side of Chicago, Illinois. His parents had previously migrated from the state of Mississippi. His father worked as a railroad porter and his mother raised the couple's nine children at home. He attended and graduated from Wendell Phillips High School and in 1942 enlisted in the United States Army. He served during World War II and spent three years in service (1942-1945). He was stationed in Tuskegee, Alabama and became a member of the Tuskegee Airmen and served as a Civilian Pilot Instructor. He reportedly had a medical condition that disallowed him to be able to fly but he was able to serve and teach others how to fly. He “had another way of still helping people reach the stars”, despite not being able to reach

the goal of flight himself, “he couldn’t get up there but he could help [others]” (R. Purnell, personal communication, February 22, 2016).

After returning home from military service, Marilyn and Silas Purnell were married in 1946 and later had five children: Rosalind, Rolinda, Donna, Ronald, and Silas Jr. For my research I had the opportunity to interview Mr. Purnell’s first-born child, Ms. Rosalind Purnell who shared thoughts and memories about her parents and the sacrificial work they were able to do. She described, her mother Marilyn who remained married to her husband for over 50 years as “a driving force” who was active in the community and “believed in education and also in the importance of it.” (R. Purnell, personal communication, February 22, 2016). During his entire life, Purnell was a resident of Chicago’s South Side and from 1950 to the mid-1960s; he lived in the Dearborn Homes with his family. He took great pride in his family and instilled in his children qualities that would sustain them throughout their lives. For example, Mr. Purnell was described by his daughter as an avid reader of newspapers and autobiographies and in addition to encouraging education; he also stressed other values to his children including: the importance of saving money, honesty, mindfulness of their public conduct, and to have respect for self and others. (R. Purnell, personal communication, February 22, 2016). Additionally, he was active in his community and according to the program for his memorial service; Mr. Purnell played a musical instrument with the Pilgrim Baptist Church band.

Purnell had an extensive work history in Chicago. Prior to helping students go to college, he worked as a laborer at various steel foundries in the 1940s and was a marketing manager for Coca-Cola for 12 years. During the Korean War, he recruited

military personnel to help economically disadvantaged youth further their education. When it was time for Rosalind, his oldest daughter, to go to college, he sought resources to help her navigate the college application and admissions process. According to her, “that is how he found out the college funding that was available for students and that is how it started. This really is what started him on the path to Ada S McKinley.”(Rosalind Purnell, personal communication, February 22, 2016). Ada S. McKinley Community Services, Inc. is a Chicago-based social services agency with roots back to the early 1900s.

Ada S. McKinley and Service

According to the Ada S. McKinley Community Services, Inc. website (2016), Ada Sophia Dennison McKinley, educator, Chicago social reformer and settlement leader, founded the South Side Settlement House in 1919. Her settlement house and community programs played a vital role in the city’s South Side communities during the post-war period and era of heavy African American migration from the South to Chicago. She was an African American woman who:

was a dedicated social welfare pioneer, devoted her life’s work to building community programs that addressed a variety of Chicago’s complex family and social needs. Her efforts impacted the lives of thousands in the city’s South Side communities during the post-war period and era of heavy African American migration from the South to Chicago. (Ada S. McKinley Services Inc. website).

She worked to address other needs including: shelter, jobs and food for the many who comprised the Great Migration population, soldiers returning from war, and other

community needs, McKinley was joined by other Chicago community activists, including: Jane Addams, Mary McDowell, and Harriet Vittum. Years later, the South Side Settlement House was renamed Ada S. McKinley Community Services, Inc., which now serves predominantly people of color and ‘minority’ populations with the goal to contribute to productive lives by providing various services to families and individuals.

Silas Purnell, Co-founder of the Educational Services Division

In the 1960s, motivated by a determination to get Black youth off the streets and support their efforts to attend college, Purnell worked as an unpaid volunteer with Ada S. McKinley for a year before his program received federal funds enabling him to draw an initial salary of \$300 per month. In 1966, Purnell resigned from a corporate career and his role as a District Manager of Coca Cola to help in the founding the Educational Services Division of Ada S. McKinley Community Services, Inc. Purnell thought that education was a key component of a full and productive life. With an initial program budget of \$47,000, he worked his first year without pay, instead sacrificing and opting to use the initial operations budget towards students going to college. Overall, he had a dual mission: to convince teens to pursue education and to find money to send them to school. He cast aside traditional indicators of success and embraced the idea that the students he wanted to help would need a lot of support. "I like to work with students nobody else wants," (p. 60) Purnell told *Emerge* in 1997. "I don't believe in making them jump through hoops to get into college but in making a path for them."

The first thing he did was make it easy for his target students to get to him. He worked out of his office in the Dearborn Homes housing project because "the people I am

trying to reach live down here," Purnell explained. For those people Purnell committed himself to providing an assortment of aid. If a person needed remedial training, he'd find it and get them started. If they needed eyeglasses or shoes, he'd find those too. He networked with hundreds of technical schools, colleges, and universities so that he could match students with the schools and programs that best fit their needs. He also secured the funding through grants and scholarships and other necessary resources for students. (Emerge, 1997, p. 60). Mr. Purnell offered all these services free of charge and often used his own money to help young college aspirants and their families. Securing funding for his efforts from the United States Department of Education's TRIO Talent Search Program and millions of dollars in grants over the years, Purnell ensured that he would not have to charge people to help them. In 1988, Purnell along with colleagues interviewed over 3,800 students and approximately 1,500 were admitted into various colleges and universities across the United States. Purnell was passionate as he recognized the potential for students to do well and he advocated for their college admission. He shared:

We got kids with test scores so low they almost tested off the chart and now their practicing professionals! I had a young man who used to work here who had low grades, low test scores (now) he has an Associate of Arts degree, a Bachelor's degree, a Master's degree, and an earned Ph.D.—not a drugstore Ph.D. (Baker, 1997, p. 6).

To be clear, Purnell was “not a magical negro” (W. Trent, personal communication, February 19, 2018) who was an anomaly or had supernatural powers. He was not a genie. He was simply an ordinary man who was driven and unwilling to compromise or abandon his mission to increase access for students who were poor,

students who were Black, students whose families had never been to college; and to many students who thought that they would never go to college--to this population Purnell was sent. This was his assignment and he did not take it lightly. As demonstrated and implicated through his participation and efforts in working with other groups, organizations and initiatives, Purnell clearly was a leader. He seemed to be comfortable and confident in his abilities to know what needed to be done, how it needed to be done, and why it needed to be done. Arguably, some of the leadership skills Purnell developed were gained from life experiences including working in management and being a part of the Tuskegee Airmen. (Being able to witness greatness and work alongside accomplished Black people, Purnell seemed to not be disillusioned and recognized the capacity for excellence and achievement. For some reason he was compelled to take up the mantle to convince others that poor Black youth could succeed and do well in college if simply given the opportunity. (C. Span, personal communication, February 19, 2018).

Through his unwavering sense and attitude of “I can do this—and I should do this” and a resolve to place students into college, Purnell actually “changed the structure of higher education.” In his consistency and persistence he permanently impacted the way practitioners and administrators thought about and dealt with college access and the types of students that should receive it. (D. Hood, personal communication, February 19, 2018).

By the end of his career, Purnell had become a legend. An almost constant line of college hopefuls appeared at his door. He retired for the final time after 37 years of service in 2001 and accrued many accolades for his service. Purnell was affiliated and a member in various organizations. Some of them included: the National Association of

College Admission Counselors, Illinois Association of College Admission Counselors, Member of TRiO Advisory Committee, American Personnel and Guidance Association Non-White Concerns Division, College Entrance Examination Board Member of By-laws Revision Committee, Founder of Principal Scholars Program, Chicago Urban League, Life Member of NAACP, and the Chairman of the Nominating Committee for the Chicago City College Board of Trustees. In addition to honorary degrees and personal recognition, Purnell earned many honors including initiatives, scholarships, and college fairs and expositions in his name. The *Citizen Newspaper* reported that (1997) he was awarded an honorary doctorate degree in Humane Letters by Chicago State University.

On Tuesday, November 20, 2001 the City of Chicago held a ceremony to rename the block of State Street between 29th and 30th streets as ‘Honorary Silas Purnell Drive’. The street is directly across the street of the building that his office space was, located 2961 South Dearborn Street. The ceremony took place at the corner of 29th and State streets at noon. After the ceremony, the Chicago Area Health and Medical Careers Program (CAHMCP) [pronounced ‘Champs’], which helps underrepresented students pursue health related professions, Introspect Youth Services which is under the leadership of a director, Mr. Bernard Clay who is Research Participant #8 for this research study; and Illinois Institute of Technology (IIT) co-hosted a reception for Mr. Purnell and his friends, family and colleagues (IIT Campus newsletter, 2001). Furthermore, IIT created a full-tuition scholarship named after Silas Purnell. The Silas Purnell Scholarships are geared towards students from underrepresented populations with high academic merit and financial need.

The Final Transition of Silas Purnell

On Saturday, November 1, 2003, at the age of 80, Purnell, died of prostate cancer in his Chatham neighborhood home. At the time of his death he had a sister, June Phillips; a brother, Morris; six grandchildren; and five great-grandchildren. His service was held at Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago and officiated by the senior pastor and former spiritual leader of President Barack Obama, Rev. Dr. Jeremiah A. Wright, Jr. who offered ‘words of comfort’ to the audience at the funeral services. He left a lasting impression and touched the lives of many as one who was gifted in the art of encouraging, equipping, and empowering African American (Black) students to go to college. Based on many accounts and memories shared by those who Mr. Purnell worked with over the years, he was a source of motivation and inspiration like no other.

Made in Chicago

Silas Purnell was the program director for a Chicago based TRIO Educational Talent Search Program site which was connected with a local social services agency. This is important to consider as TRIO and the Educational Talent Search Program site served as the hub and platform for Purnell to work with tens of thousands of students and families and help them be admitted into 4-year colleges and universities and other institutions until his final official retirement in 2001. Purnell was integral to the initial 1965 establishment of the Chicago based TRIO Educational Talent Search Program. The site was situated in the social services agency, Ada S. McKinley Community Services, Inc. As I contextualize this research study and examine the findings therein it is important to consider the backdrop of the work that was done. The city of Chicago was the birthplace and home of Purnell and to the overwhelming majority of students and

families he provided services. His office space was located in the Chicago Housing Authority's (CHA) Dearborn Homes housing project which was the first high rise project building constructed by CHA. It was located on the south side of Chicago on State Street in the midst of several other housing projects, which hosted several buildings, some of them more than six stories high. These housing projects became the home for hundreds of thousands of African American children and families before many of them were later demolished by CHA.

From the time of the 'Daley Machine' and the latter [Mayor Richard J.] Daley administration, to the rise of organized crime through figures including Al Capone and Larry Hoover, historically Chicago has a rich and diverse history, structural layout, and political landscape. After several decades, it still remains one of the country's most segregated cities. Chicago has the third largest metropolis population of citizens behind New York and Los Angeles and gained a large number of African American citizens from the South during the first and second migrations earlier in the 20th century. Masses of African American citizens relocated to northern cities especially Chicago with the hope of greater and better economic opportunities. Reportedly, from "1915 to 1960, about five million rural southern African-Americans migrated to the northern industrialized cities of American." (Harrison, 1991, p. 7). In *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940-1960*, Hirsch reported, "ten times as many blacks lived in Chicago in 1966 as in 1920." (Hirsch, 1983, p. 3). By the mid-1960s, African American citizens accounted for about 30% of the city's population. Initially, as a response to the influx of African American families the local city government began to appropriate designated neighborhoods and living quarters to them. Later these

developments seemed to serve as a setting for perpetuated segregated communities and in a sense, population control. One such entity was the development of housing projects. Initially built with the masses in mind, they eventually became residency for predominantly African Americans. There is more in-depth discussion about Chicago, Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) and the projects, and demographic information included in Chapter 2, the Literature Review section.

In comparison to its counterparts, Chicago has the distinction of historically sending the largest numbers and percentages of African American students to college (C. Span, personal communication, September 9, 2015). Throughout the academy, Chicago is recognized as a hub and major producer of African American college students and graduates. The socio-economic landscape of the city and its population led to many low-income and under resourced families with little to no means to send their children to college. According to the documentary about the work of Purnell, he witnessed the peril and state of many of Chicago's youth and "he worked with those that many others wouldn't even give a chance." The location and site of the Ada S. McKinley Talent Search Program allowed for students and families who otherwise may not have been aware of the educational support services to access them.

Primary research questions and guiding interview questions

The population of interviewees included people of the following distinctions: contemporaries and colleagues of Silas Purnell; students he served and worked with to facilitate their matriculation into college; former employees of the social services agency which housed the TRIO Talent Search site that he led for over 30 years; and family members of Mr. Purnell. Some scholars suggest that the objective of generating theory is

to further our understanding of “basic human patterns common in social life” (Chenitz and Swanson, 1986, p. 3). Grounded theory is not preconceived theory or a *priori* theory but rooted in data that is methodically acquired during the course of the research (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). With this, the following questions were structured to gather information and prompt data findings for the research, which can inform the theory that will emerge through the data analysis.

My research questions seek to identify Purnell’s methods for success and to gauge if the best practices he employed are still used today. More specifically, the primary research questions for this study were:

- 1) What were the strategies and practices that Purnell adopted in working with students and families?
- 2) How was he effective in placing students into schools and providing access to higher education?
- 3) How can current professionals and advocates for underrepresented, low-income, urban students apply the strategies and practices Purnell used into their work in increasing access to higher education?

The following are subsidiary questions used during individual interviews with the research participants to guide the conversation about Purnell and his work in facilitating college access to the student populations he served. These questions were formed and based on discussion and extensive thought and feedback from other scholars after review of a more extensive list which included over double this amount the eventual number of questions used. The final list of questions that were selected for usage included the following:

- 1) What is your current professional role and what positions have you served in during your career working with students?

- 2) How did you meet Purnell? What capacity did you know him? How often did you work with him? Please share any and all specific details, dates you recall.
- 4) What was his professional reputation in the fields of Education, Student Affairs and the academy?
- 5) Based on your understanding and perspective what were his strategies and techniques for working with students and families? How was he effective in placing students into schools and providing access to higher education?
- 6) How familiar were you and/or are you with TRIO Programs overall and specifically the TRIO Educational Talent Search Program (Ada S. McKinley) site where Purnell was the Director?
- 7) Did you meet or work directly with any of the students that Purnell worked with and placed in colleges and universities?
- 8) Are you familiar with any special or outstanding (success) stories surrounding Purnell and his work with students?
- 9) What were the primary colleges, universities, and departmental programs Purnell affiliated with and worked with?
- 10) Did he have a special pipeline or connection with certain programs, colleges, universities, and/or departments?
- 11) How was the infrastructure within his organization and team dynamics that allowed him to operate and become a bridge into colleges?
- 12) What other people or groups do you recommend I contact or connect with to gain additional insight or information about SP and his work?

Organization of Dissertation

Following this introduction, Chapter 2 provides a literature review that includes a comprehensive discussion of historical trends which are pertinent to my research and dissertation study. I organized the literature review into three main sections: 1) A list of theoretical and conceptual contributions from the field of sociology which provide a lens to examine educational issues is provided; 2) A list of the prominent challenges to educational equality that sociology of education address in the study of schooling practices and policies that impact educational attainment; and 3) A discussion about

current issues in education and problems that illustrate the contributions and limitations of sociology of education in educational research. Chapter 3 discusses the research design, methodological approach and methodological considerations regarding this project and how the research was conducted. Chapter 4 presents biographical accounts of the thirteen research participants in this study. Chapter 5 presents an elaborated explanation and content of data findings, analysis, and significant themes that emerged from this study based on the guiding and primary research questions. Chapter 6 concludes this dissertation and offers reflections and implications of the findings in this study, and suggestions for future research.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter includes relevant literature and published scholarship reviewed to establish an academic foundation for this dissertation study. It offers an overview literature and discourse of the primary theoretical tenet in the dissertation, critical race theory, and the role race and culture plays in shaping educational inequality. Detailing the tenets of this theory, and providing a brief overview of the higher education policies that aided African Americans in their higher education pursuits, helps us better understand how Silas Purnell viewed the educational history, opportunities, and outcomes of the African American youth he sought to assist.

One of the most pressing issues in the field of education today is the issue of race and its impact in and on the American public education system. From institutional racism to overt racism, race has remained a contributing and for some, debilitating factor in their societal experiences and in particular, access to higher education. Issues and unresolved challenges to move the education system to a place of equity continue to persist. Critical race theory provides a lens to understand various perspectives and theories that examine race and education and consider the disparities within.

Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory offers a theoretical perspective for discussion and a different lens for understanding some of the realities that permeate throughout society as a result of racism in the United States.

Critical race theory (CRT) first emerged as a counterlegal scholarship to the positivist and liberal legal discourse of civil rights. This scholarly tradition argues against the slow pace of racial reform in the United States. Critical race theory begins with the notion that racism is normal in American society. It departs from mainstream legal scholarship by sometimes employing storytelling. It critiques liberalism and argues that Whites have been the primary beneficiaries of civil rights legislation. Since schooling in the USA purports to prepare citizens, CRT looks at how citizenship and race might interact. Critical race theory's usefulness in understanding education inequity is in its infancy. (Ladson-Billings, 1988, p.12)

Delgado and Stefanic (2001) describe the use of storytelling in critical race theory as “writing that aims to cast doubt on the validity or accepted premises or myths, especially ones held by the majority” (p. 144). UCLA School of Public Affairs asserts that critical race theory “recognizes that racism is engrained in the fabric and system of the American society. The individual racist need not exist to note that institutional racism is pervasive in the dominant culture. This is the analytical lens that [critical race theory] uses in examining existing power structures” (UCLA, 2015). Critical race theory posits that these power structures “are based on white privilege and white supremacy, which

perpetuates the marginalization of people of color. [Critical race theory] also rejects the traditions of liberalism and meritocracy” (UCLA, 2015).

The author asserted, “although racial categories in the U.S. census have fluctuated over time, two categories have remained stable-- Black and White” (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 7). She adds, “while the creation of the category does not reveal what constitutes within it, it does create for us a sense of polar opposites that posits a cultural ranking designed to tell us who is White or, perhaps more pointedly, who is *not* White!” (Ladson-Billings, 1998, pp. 8-9). The implications, benefits, and challenges in these label considerations were significant as some individuals who migrated to America inadvertently went through the proceedings and legalities in the courtroom to be declared White (Haney-Lopez, 1997). One leading argument proclaims:

the polar notions of race as either an ideological construct or as an objective condition both have shortcomings. That is, thinking of race strictly as an ideological concept denies the reality of a racialized society and its impact on people in their everyday lives. On the other hand, thinking of race solely as an objective condition denies the problematic aspects of race -- how to decide who fits into which racial classifications. Our notions of race (and its use) are so complex that even when it fails to ‘make sense’ we continue to employ and deploy it. (Omi & Winant, 1993)

Through the complexities in navigating the racial plain in discourse and selecting appropriate language to dialogue, ‘notions of conceptual whiteness and conceptual blackness’ have developed (King, 1995). These concepts include categorical measurements including: school achievement, maleness, beauty, intelligence, welfare recipients, basketball players, and the underclass. They are essentially categories created

and assigned to a particular racial distinction and ascribed to a particular inclination, either towards ‘conceptual blackness’ or ‘conceptual whiteness’. They are all positioned within the context of a racialized society where whiteness is positioned as normative and other groups and racial classifications are categorized in relation to whiteness (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Toni Morrison argues, “race is always already present in every social configuring [of] our lives (1992). Roediger (1991) adds, “even in an all-white town, race was never absent” (Roediger, 1991, p. 3).

However, more significant/problematic than the omnipresence of race is the notion that ‘whites reach the conclusion that their whiteness is meaningful’ (Roediger, 1991). It is because of the meaning and value imputed to whiteness that CRT becomes an important intellectual and social tool for deconstruction, reconstruction, and construction: deconstruction of oppressive structures and discourses, reconstruction of human agency, and construction of equitable and socially just relations of power. (Ladson-Billings, 1998)

Despite the rhetoric, statistics, and reports which would suggest otherwise in the ‘land of the free’ and the ‘home of the brave’ countless challenges and inequalities associated with race continue to exist. It seems clear and a stark reality that race in fact, does matter (West, 1992). Despite scientific findings and political discourse race has continued to be a prominent and seemingly unavoidable attribute taken into consideration by American society when dealing with individuals and groups within and outside of one’s respective race.

Race has become metaphorical, a way of referring to and disguising forces, events, classes, and expressions of social decay and economic division far more threatening to the body politic than biological “race”

ever was. Expensively kept, economically unsound, a spurious and useless political asset in election campaigns, racism is as healthy today as it was during the Enlightenment. It seems that it has a utility far beyond economy, beyond the sequestering of classes from one another, and has assumed a metaphorical life so completely embedded in daily discourse that it is perhaps more necessary and more on display than ever before. (Morrison, 1992).

Historically, America has used intelligence testing to legitimize claims of African American student deficiency (Gould, 1981; Alienikoff, 1991). According to another scholar, “one purpose of the African American in the racial-capitalist state is to serve as a symbolic index for poor [whites]” (Ladson-Billings, 2010, p.12) with a notion that comparatively if the working class white individuals are ‘achieving’ at higher levels than their Black counterparts then they can feel superior. This idea contributes the perpetuation of racial stereotypes, which are propagated as justification for poorer Blacks and their living conditions. “Crenshaw (1988) contends that:

the point of controversy is no longer that these stereotypes were developed to rationalize the oppression of Blacks, but rather, [‘The] extent to which these stereotypes serve a hegemonic function by perpetuating a mythology about Blacks and Whites, even today, reinforcing an illusion of a white community that cuts across ethnic, gender, and class lines. (p. 1371)

Different Racial Experiences

Patricia Williams (1995) explains differential notions of citizenship to be grounded in differential experiences of rights because one’s sense of empowerment defines one’s relation to the law and their regard or disdain for it. An example of

privilege and differential experiences is cited in McIntosh's (1990) article on 'White privilege'. Reportedly, a white woman shared a personal experience of going to a neighborhood supermarket, being rung up by the cashier, and then discovering she did not have her checkbook. The cashier told her she could take her groceries home and bring the check back later. In contrast to her experience, she shared it with an African American male friend and counterpart who repeated her course in the grocery store and reenacted the same situation with the same cashier who subsequently told him to "push the grocery items to the side while he went home to get his checkbook" (Williams, 1995, p. 98). It has been argued that these types of experiences or existing 'microaggressions' occur often among people of color.

Supporting Theories

Critical race theory addresses many aspects of the realities and implications, both covertly and blatantly about race and its place in American society. From the self-condemnation resulting from the 'demoralization of marginalized groups' (Delgado, 1989) to the concept that the perpetrating oppressor who inflicts harm upon others does not see their behavior as racist or damaging (Lawrence, 1987). Instead these dominant groups reportedly "justify its power with stories, stock explanations that construct reality in ways that maintain their privilege. Thus, oppression is rationalized, causing little self-examination by the oppressor" (Ladson-Billings, 2010, p. 14). Critical race theory scholarship emphasizes the importance of providing a platform for diverse individuals to share their experiences. However, critical race theory scholars pinpoint racial identification and takes into account their experiences and dual membership into specific classes, i.e., gender, nationality, sexual orientation, etc. (Delgado & Stafancic, 2012).

Another vital component of critical race theory is its insistence on a critique of liberalism. Crenshaw (1988) argues that the liberal perspective of the “civil rights crusade as a long, slow, but always upward pull”. The notion is problematic in its understanding of the current legal paradigms which serve as catalysts for social change and its emphasis on making significant strides forth. Critical race theory argues that racism requires sweeping changes, but liberalism has no mechanism for such change. Rather, liberal legal practices support the painstakingly slow process of arguing legal precedence to gain citizen rights for people of color (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 12).

Subsequently, a recurring theme in civil rights legal battles regarding schools and increased educational resources and access is the notion of ‘equal opportunity’. This was associated with the idea that students of color should have the same access to education as their white counterparts. This aim supported the agenda and argument for ‘equal treatment under the law’ and contributed to the reported mission of “moving African Americans from their second-class status” (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 18). Tenets of critical race theory suggest that in pursuing the goal to “catch up with their white counterparts”, there was additionally a “need to redress past inequities” (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 18). Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (2012) explain in their introduction to the third edition of *Critical Race Theory: The Cutting Edge*, “Our social world, with its rules, practices, and assignments of prestige and power, is not fixed; rather, we construct with it words, stories and silence” (p. 47). This contributes to many scholars’ emphasis on social activism and transforming everyday notions of race, racism, and power. (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

These efforts contributed to the establishment and implementation of affirmative action initiatives for African Americans and other marginalized citizen groups. One of the primary goals of affirmative action for these particular groups was “to insure that they were not systematically screened out of opportunities in employment, college admission, and housing” (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 18). The author presents a strong argument in suggesting that, “if we look at the way that public education is currently configured, it is possible to see the ways that [critical race theory] can be a powerful explanatory tool for the sustained inequity that people of color experience” (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 18).

Critical race theory is adamant in asserting the continual existence, perpetuation of dominant white culture as the primary guiding influential force in the American public school curriculum. What has been established and maintained is considered to be a White supremacist *master script* which is described as something that:

silences multiple voices and perspectives, primarily legitimizing dominant, white, upper-class, male voicings as the ‘standard’ knowledge students need to know. All other accounts and perspectives are omitted from the master script unless they can be disempowered through misrepresentation. Thus, content that does not reflect the dominant voice must be brought under control, *mastered*, and then reshaped before it can become a part of the master script (Schwartz, 1992, p. 341).

“This master scripting means stories of African Americans are muted and erased when they challenge dominant culture authority and power” (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 18). Often either a watered-down version of the truth, erroneous facts, or outright distortion and untruths are offered to students of color in public school curriculum. Another consideration which is inequitable is the quality and rigor of an ‘enriched’

curriculum and access to it. One extensive study reported the variances between the curriculum and quality of resources offered in a local white school which emphasized “critical thinking, reasoning and logic” (Kozol, 1991, p. 96) in comparison to sub-standard resources allocated for the Black school he worked with.

Grounded Theory

Grounded theory has been described as “an inductive, comparative, iterative, and interactive method” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 53). “Grounded theory is a form of qualitative research developed by Glaser and Strauss in 1967 for the purpose of constructing theory grounded in data” (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, p. 3). One of the primary aims of grounded theory is to discover or generate a theory. In its early stages of development within the academy it was defined as “the discovery of theory from data systematically obtained from social research” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 191). Grounded theory refers to a “systematic method for constructing a theoretical analysis for data, with explicit analytic strategies and implicit guidelines for data collection” (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2012, p. 347). An intention of grounded theory is to generate theory close to data that relates to a particular situation (Cresswell, 1998; Dick, 2002). Grounded theory allows the contextual explanations rather than the descriptions of what is occurring to be revealed. For this reason, grounded theory can also provide a theoretical lens for practitioners and researchers to improve in their workplace practices. As a current researcher and future practitioner, using a scientific approach that would allow the research findings to dictate and inform the trajectory of the data analysis is important. Glaser and Strauss (1967, p. 32) assert that grounded theory can generate two major types of theory, ‘*substantive*’ and

'formal'. They suggest that substantive theories are used as “a springboard or stepping stone to the development of a grounded formal theory” (Glaser & Strauss 1967, p. 79).

The scientific theory and framework for this study will adopt the symbolic interactionist perspective with constructivist grounded theory methods. The symbolic interactionist theory assumes that multiple realities exist, data collection reflects researchers and research participants' mutual constructions, and the researcher enters the participants' world and is affected by it. This approach allows “an *interpretive* portrayal of the studied world, not an exact picture of it” (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2012, p. 18). A constructivist approach takes implicit meanings, experiential vies, and grounded theory analyses as constructions as reality (Charmaz, 2000). This approach gives credibility to the exchange and interaction between the researcher and participants, and the researcher's perspective is accepted as a natural and necessary part of the process. This is particularly important for this study as the researcher will rely on personal understandings and the ability to contextualize the data to make sense of the findings.

There have been many versions and variations of grounded theory since its establishment in the 1960s due to the continual emergence of new grounded theory scholars and scientific findings in the field (Dey, 1999). All grounded theories share the following attributes in their approaches: 1) simultaneous collection and analysis of data; 2) creation of categories developed from data and not by pre-existing conceptualizations with respect to theoretical sensitivity; 3) discovery of basic social processes in the data; 4) theoretical sampling to refine categories; 5) writing analytical memos and vignettes during the process of data collection, coding, and writing; and 6) the integration of

categories into a theoretical framework (Chamaz, 2012). Grounded theory commonly uses interviews and observation for data collection in research.

Access and Equity in Higher Education

Into the 1960s, racial and ethnic minority populations, which include low-income families, underrepresented students, and people of color, were largely excluded from higher education through a combination of blatant laws and underlying structural and cultural practices, Ternaishi, 2010; Ogbu et al. 1986 suggest that African American and Latino/a students who aspire to high academic achievement are accused of “acting white” and are often shunned by their peers. African American students are significantly less likely to enter postsecondary education than their Caucasian counterparts and have a higher chance to end up in two-year colleges rather than four year colleges (Karen et al., 2005). Ogbu (1978) suggests that because Blacks have had limited opportunities in America historically, they developed an ‘oppositional,’ culture that connected academic success to the sub-cultural crime of ‘acting white’ (Jencks et al., 1998).

The gaps in enrollment and percentage of African American, Hispanic, and Native American populations continue to be an issue regarding access to higher education (Swail et al., 2002). One of the reasons for lack of access for these groups may be that there are not many programs for underrepresented, first-generation, and low-income students, which concentrate on early preparation for success in college. (Swail et al., 2002). Despite the United States system of higher education being considered as universally accessible in comparison to other countries, equitable access to all citizens has yet to be realized. A 1997 study reported that approximately 90 percent of American high school seniors expect to attend some type of postsecondary institution after high

school (Hurtado, 1997). Quantitative historical research supports the notion that standardized exams including the ACT and SAT are major tools for selectivity to colleges and universities despite being culturally biased. The exam score requirements set by higher education institutions often automatically eliminate or deter students who do not meet the prescribed benchmark for admissions. Also, a general practice of many institutions of higher learning is to use SAT and ACT testing which are Scholastic Aptitude Testing and American College Testing. They serve as preliminary college entrance exams to recruit and solicit students (Gumport, 2007). Many institutions use standardized test scores as prescribed benchmarks to screen and gauge prospective students' aptitude and capacity for academic success on their campus. In the *APA Encyclopedia of Psychology* a scholar reports:

In contemporary, industrialized societies, intelligence is strongly associated with individual excellence on literate, mathematical, or scientific tasks emphasized by academic curricula. However, in a community without schools, those indicators have no indigenous meaning. Several studies in subsistence, agrarian societies of Africa have found that indigenous conceptualization of intelligence focuses on social productivity, and cognitive alacrity is only valued as a mental trait when it is responsibly applied to benefit society (Serpell, 2000, p. 493).

There is cultural bias embedded in this practice stemming from the cultural capital earned and cultural norms established based on the status quo. From this way of thinking, hypothetical questions and ultimately standardized exams are created to determine whether or not a student will be selected for admission into a college or university. Unfortunately, underrepresented and low-income groups who are often first-generation college attendees are often negatively impacted.

For this study, I focused on some of the challenges and implications of African American students and their propensity for access into higher education. The social inequalities surrounding education which exist contribute to maintaining the barriers, which continue to persist as obstacles or deterrence for many African American students. The University of Oslo's Department of Sociology and Human Geography describes social inequality as:

An area within sociology that focuses on the distribution of goods and burdens in society. A good can be, for example, income, education, employment or parental leave, while examples of burdens are substance abuse, criminality, unemployment and [marginalization]. One approach is the study of the actual distribution of a good. For example, whether incomes are reasonably evenly distributed throughout a community or whether there are sizable differences between those that relatively little and those that earn relatively much. Another approach is to investigate what opportunities people from different backgrounds have to achieve more or less of a good or a burden. (University of Oslo website, 2016).

Inequality has been an underlying concern in the field of sociology of education since the 1930s and 1940s (Johnson, 2015). Within the field, inequality seeks to understand and explain the differential rates of access, achievement, and attainment by race, class, and gender (Gumport, 2007). A sociological study (Allen, 1988, 1992) found that more African American students enroll at predominantly white institutions (PWI) than Historically Black Colleges and Institutions (HBCU).

It is important to consider that after students successfully navigate the admissions process and are enrolled in college and on campus the issue of *persistence* emerges. Literature based on studies conducted found that institutional size is important when evaluating student persistence in higher education. Empirical research suggests that

college students who are enrolled at larger institutions are less likely to have frequent interaction with university faculty, student government, athletics or honors programs and participation. (Blau, 1973, Gumpert, 2007). Institutional size is an important factor to consider when taking into account a school's culture, attributes, and personality, which can further help determine the appropriate fit for a potential student. For example, many students may do better and feel more comfortable in a smaller environment where they can receive more personal attention or support. For a pre-college admission expert, this would be valuable information and data to be aware of in the process of student placement.

Societal factors and realities that impact African Americans

The College Board is a not-for-profit membership association whose mission is to connect students to college success and opportunity. The College Board Advocacy & Policy Center tells about two Americas which are those who have opportunity to partake and attain the American Dream and afterwards introduces and describes a *Third America*:

This is an America that is almost totally ignored by mainstream society. This America is often captured in popular television documentaries and newspaper stories and includes frightening statistics about unemployment, poverty and high rates of incarceration. The citizens of this Third America are primarily men, and mostly men of color. These men now live *outside* the margins of our economic, social and cultural systems. They are the byproduct of many societal failures — including the failure of our nation's schools. (p. 2)

Kozol shares his observation and assessment of the state of public education and the far too common reality of African American male students underachieving in comparison to others. There has always been a connection between the lack of

educational attainment, poverty, and prison. Of all races, groups, and genders, African American males have significantly lower rates for high school graduation and matriculation into post-secondary education. (Kozol, 2005).

A report (2008) by the Schott Foundation for Public Education discusses contributing factors and circumstances that affect many students of color stating that the difference between the top schools and the bottom schools in a given state is:

Good schools are fully resourced with talented, caring teachers, well-trained and numerous support staff, and protective and supportive administrators –and poorly performing schools are not. Good schools have challenging curricula, high expectations for all students, and an expectation of success. Poor schools do not. Good schools have libraries, an adequate supply of textbooks and computers, art and music programs, and science labs. Most schools with majority Black enrollments do not. (p.6)

West (2001) proclaimed “that the presence and predicaments of black people are neither additions to nor defections from American life, but rather *constitutive elements of that life.*” (p. 6). West expressed recognition that race does factor and matter in America. Years earlier, the first African American Ph.D. recipient from Harvard scholar and NAACP founder, DuBois (1903) published *The Talented Tenth*, and asserted that, “human education is not simply a matter of schools; it is much more a matter of family and group life—the training of one's home, of one's daily companions, of one's social class” and regarding life for African-Americans around the turn of the 20th century, asked the question, “ What under the present circumstance, must a system of education do in order to raise the Negro [African American] as quickly as possible in the scale of civilization?” (pp. 3-4).

The Importance of Mentorship for African Americans

Mentorship for college bound African American students can make a significant difference in their capacity, probability, and reality for success in getting to and succeeding in college. According to an academic advising journal, *The Mentor*,

For African-American students, mentoring can be particularly vital to their persistence to degree, especially at PWIs (Freeman, 1999). The extant literature has shown that African American students have experiences quite different from their majority counterparts. African American undergraduates may have feelings of disengagement, withdrawal, isolation, and less campus involvement than their classmates. For students of color transitioning to a college setting, these emotions may prevent them from seeking the support necessary to persist to degree.

(Booker and Brevard, 2017)

Mentorship is advantageous for anyone who desires to pursue a particular goal or profession, however, in particular for marginalized and underrepresented groups these relationships and support is even more critical. As students enter college and graduate they are still in need of guidance, support and opportunities for growth as they progress into the job market and respective career endeavors. Having a mentor and others to help navigate their journey ahead can be quite helpful if done in a proper manner. According to the *Journal of Extension*,

Mentoring is an effective method of helping inexperienced individuals develop and progress in their profession. The keys to establishing a successful mentoring relationship include creating a relationship of trust, clearly defining roles and responsibilities, establishing short- and long-term goals, using open and supportive communication, and collaboratively solving problems (Bryington, 2010, p.1)

In my Masters research thesis project I conducted a focus group of African American high school young men in California and many of them who were college bound attributed some of their preparation to the mentor figures who had impacted them. (Benson, 2010). For various reasons, including a limited number of identifiable mentors, African American college students are at a greater disadvantage to receiving support. Thus, having multiple avenues to resources and individuals to operate in varying roles can further contribute to their overall success.

Cultural Competency and Understanding

As Purnell built relationships and continually visited numerous institutions he also understood the culture of the times also the attitudes, practices and climate of the campuses he worked with. During Rosalind Purnell's interview, she explained that her father, Mr. Purnell had his first experience and exposure with the college application and admissions process during her senior year in high school as she aspired to matriculate to college. (R. Purnell, personal communication, February 22, 2016). From this point and beyond, Silas Purnell began his journey into becoming an expert in colleges and universities, the admissions process, and honed his skills learning and navigating through various campus cultures. The better one understands collegiate environments, the better they can advise and increase the success of college bound students. There are particular factors that one must investigate and be aware of in order to properly counsel a potential first year student. According to *The Mentor*,

In understanding the role played by the collegiate environment in the successful or unsuccessful transition of the incoming student, several questions must be addressed. These questions reflect the university's goals, mission statement, and its future direction. Furthermore, they provide an understanding of the college's

views and vision about student learning. The development of students both academically and socially while they are members of the campus community is tantamount to the university's success. Therefore, these questions [What does the institution value? What is the institution's mission statement? What are the interactions between students and university officials?] must be investigated along with garnering a thorough understanding of the university's physical surroundings so as to best comprehend the impact a university has on its students, especially those making the transition to college. Thus, the campus environment and its effects on the student population can be addressed in three settings: peer interactions, classroom environment, and physical environment. (Fleming, W., Howard, K., Perkins, E., & Pesta, M., 2005, pp. 5-6)

To effectively serve particular populations one must be connected to or at least familiar with that respective community or communities in some form and exemplify cultural competence. According to a definition conveyed in *Social Work Practice with African Americans in Urban Environments*:

Cultural competence is defined as the ability to transform knowledge and cultural awareness into health and/or psychosocial interventions that support and sustain healthy client system functioning within the appropriate cultural context (McPhatter, 1997). Green (1995) indicates that the culturally competent practitioner conducts professional work in a way that is congruent with the behavior and expectations that members of a distinctive culture recognize as appropriate among themselves. (R. Wells-Wilbon, A. McPhatter and H. Vakalahi, 2016, p. 7)

It is necessary for one to be culturally competent when advising and counseling particular groups. A person that works with specific groups, must be conscious and sensitive to the makeup and uniqueness of that group. According to the *Open Journal of Social Science*:

In the 21st century, multicultural competence is now a given expectation on the part of all helpers, and rightly so, as multicultural competence is necessary for respecting and understanding the differences that exist in our diverse social structure, society, and worldview. As well, the definition and scope of multicultural counseling competence continue to evolve. No longer limited to issues of nationality or country of origin, multiculturalism now includes ethnicity, race, gender, age, sexual orientation, religion, socioeconomic status, physical ability, mental ability, geographic region, historical experience, and shared experiences that bind people together. Every minority group must deal with cultural issues inherently unique to that group. As challenging as it may be, helping professionals must possess cultural awareness and knowledge specific to the uniqueness of each group to provide a level of treatment that meets ethical standards. (Conner, G. and Walker, W., 2017, p. 114)

Some ideas and cultural norms of ‘community’ may look, sound, and manifest differently for different groups and people. I reflected on insight gained from my father, Perry L. Benson, Sr. during a 2011 interview about his educational journey growing up as a boy in the South. He discussed how many teachers and school staff who worked with him and other students in his hometown of Clarksdale, Mississippi genuinely cared about the students and their needs; and worked with them outside of school hours. He recounted how some teachers were often neighbors who knew the parents and extended family members of the students they worked with. (Y. Pak, L. Nesbitt, & S. Reilly, 2016). In this and similar situations because of close knit ties and shared community understandings, needs and values, these environments perpetuated and were recipients of practitioners who held natural levels of cultural competency.

To be successful working with and meeting the needs of African American communities, just knowing of the obstacles and afflictions impacting this population is often not enough. It is one thing to be aware of the challenges African Americans face as a community, however it is another thing to be cognizant of the embedded resources and strengths of the community as well. One must understand the background and history of African Americans, which can provide important insight and context to better serve these populations. According to *Social Work Practice with African Americans in Urban Environments*:

African-centered social work includes knowledge, values, and skills that evolve from a foundation of historical and cultural aspects of West Africa from which slavery predominantly emanated and survived over time, but these life experiences of African descendants most often are used as strengths in contemporary African American communities. This approach is indeed rooted in the values of ancient African experiences that survived in the DNA of people of African descent and are easily identified by social workers when they are knowledgeable about these experiences. (R. Wells-Wilbon, A. McPhatter and H. Vakalahi, 2016, p. 5)

Matching Underrepresented Students to Programs

The more prepared a student is prior to going to college the better their chances are for successfully matriculating and completing their college education. Unfortunately, many African American and low-income students are not prepared to go to college and often are first-generational college students (FGCS). Therefore, college readiness programs are of great importance in contributing to African American students overall success in preparing for college. According to Innovation Showcase,

College readiness is defined as the academic and practical knowledge needed to be successful in higher education (Pitre & Pitre, 2009). High percentages of FGCS are from low-income families and attend low-performing PreK-12 schools (Hudley et al., 2009). Many low-performing schools do not have enough highly qualified teachers and are often underfunded; this, in turn, affects the quality of education many FGCS receive. Research indicates that first-generation SAT and ACT test-takers tend to have less core academic preparation and score lower than later-generation test-takers (Balemian & Feng, 2013). SAT/ACT scores, along with high school GPA, serve as predictors of college persistence and academic success in college. There is a lack of familiarity with the importance of high school curriculum and how it relates to college preparation and readiness among FGCS parents (Gamez-Vargas & Oliva, 2013). FGCS parents are less likely to demand that their child do well in school or take advanced placement courses. A combination of these factors affects FGCS college readiness. Many FGCS do not know how the college system works or how to apply to college, receive financial aid, or choose a major. Further, this population is less likely to know the difference between various higher education institutions, and may select one that does not suit specific educational needs and goals. (Arnold, Lu, & Armstrong, 2012)

Often unfamiliar with the rigor, challenges and expectations of the college curriculum and culture, parents of FGCS may be unable, and sometimes unwilling to help their children adequately prepare for college. The FGCS must, therefore, rely on high school personnel and peers for guidance and information about college (Hudley et al., 2009). This may be problematic since statistically FGCS spend less time talking with high school personnel about their college aspirations than do students with college-educated parents. It is rare for high school staff to discourage college aspirations or limit access among students of color and low-income students (Hudley et al., 2009), but when they do, FGCS are forced to rely on themselves for academic success (Falcon, L., 2015).

If school, community and college preparatory programs empirically recognize and acknowledge such factors affecting FGCS barriers to college preparedness, more students would possibly have opportunities to a college education and success therein, especially if these students are identified well before they are ready to apply for post-secondary education. According to *Innovation Showcase*,

Despite the obstacles that FGCS face, 23 percent obtain an associate's or certificate and 24 percent achieve a bachelor's or higher (Chen, 2005). Multiple elements contribute to the success of these students and are the subject of discussion in much of the literature (Bers & Schuetz, 2014; Boden, 2011; Hudley et al., 2009; Pitre & Pitre, 2009; PrAlspero, Russell, & Vohra-Gupta, 2012; Sandoval-Lucero, Maes, & Klingsmith, 2014; Sommerfeld & Bowen, 2013; Stephens, Hamedani, & Destin, 2014; Wilkins, 2014). Contributing factors include levels of participation in high school and college readiness programs, as well as academic and social integration, personal characteristics, and family support. Most successful FGCS report that a combination of these factors helps them finish college and obtain a degree. (Falcon, L., 2015).

Participation in college-readiness programs also helps FGCS pursue a college education. "Fifty years ago, the Federal Higher Education Act was passed, and the U.S. Department of Education instituted the first federally supported education programs designed to increase the college enrollment and completion rates of economically disadvantaged and underrepresented ethnic background students" (Pitre & Pitre, 2009, p. 96). The federally funded TRiO Programs and nonprofit Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) are examples of programs that provide FGCS college preparation, support during the application process, and tutoring to ease the transition between high school and college (Pitre & Pitre, 2009). Involvement with these types of programs

increase opportunities for FGCS to learn of financial aid information, college entrance requirements, and the development of other social and academic skills necessary for college. (Falcon, L., 2015).

Additionally, some colleges offer programs that support minorities in their pursuit of education. "FGCS need psychological resources that support the belief that people who have backgrounds like theirs deserve to attend college and can thrive there" (Stephens, Hamedani, & Destin, 2014, p. 944). Intervention from culturally competent programs that focus on differences in achievement motivation among diverse racial minorities provide valuable educational support (Pralspero, Russell, & Vohra-Gupta, 2012). These programs are able to address barriers and tap into the motivations to go to college that are particular to a certain group. While not many programs exist, intervention has proven to have a positive effect on college success (Stephens, Hamedani, & Destin, 2014). (Falcon, L., 2015)

Purnell understood the disadvantages and impediments the population of students he worked with faced. Due to his constant interaction with the community and desire to stay abreast on resources available to assist the students' various needs, he remained a vital source of motivation and encouragement to students who were otherwise not sufficiently prepared to go to college, especially to those who traditionally would not have any lucrative opportunities to a post-secondary education. For example, Purnell shared a story captured on a documentary, now available on YouTube about a young lady with a suboptimal 4 out of 36 on her ACT score. She visited Purnell with a desire to go to the University of Illinois and even though traditionally, immediately such a potential applicant would have been rejected and not even considered, Purnell saw that despite her substandard scores she had a level of desperation that he could work with. She got involved in his college readiness program and he was able to help her gain admission

into the University of Illinois where she graduated in four years. Purnell had a gift to be able to identify students where they were and help them get to where they needed to be, to matriculate into a higher learning institution that would be a good fit for them.

Fortunately, he had cultivated meaningful relationships with many college administrators and was familiar with different campuses throughout the United States, which allowed him to know what programs would best support the various students he worked with.

According to *The Mentor*:

Institutions of higher education differ greatly when it comes to their size; the type of institution (for example, a public university—unlike a small, private liberal arts college—may have budgetary concerns that dictate number and skill level of incoming students); curriculum choices such as a science emphasis, a more liberal arts based education, or a technical school; and, lastly, funding sources available. Each of these factors helps in determining the university's characteristics, which, in turn, play an integral role in terms of the impact on the student with, and within, the surrounding environment. (Fleming, W., Howard, K., Perkins, E., & Pesta, M., 2005)

The relevance of explaining and contextualizing the characteristics of a university allow a better understanding of how its traits affect its student enrollees. The physical aspects of the college, which include the buildings, university grounds, the community feeling it evokes, along with the organizational setting, and demographics of its population of students who are enrolled in the college are important to consider.

The composition of the student body can be defined by gender, race, socioeconomic status, geographic origins, and demographics, all of which are easily understood as they are both significant and readily apparent to those investigating a college environment. By determining the values, makeup,

attitudes, and personality of the individuals within the student body, one can better attest to the institution's strengths and weaknesses. (Fleming, W., Howard, K., Perkins, E., & Pesta, M., 2005)

An institution's overall feel becomes extremely important in determining the relationship that develops between the college environment and its students.” This is generally considered the ‘campus climate’ and sometimes such feelings are “associated with access to university officials and the resources they provide: academic advising, career services, counseling, and faculty”. Important questions to ask include: “Is there a sense of community and pride shown by faculty, staff, and students? Is there a sense of security or safety for all cultural groups on campus?” Such questions such provide important context, implications and necessary information to show the relationship between the individual and their environment (Fleming, W., Howard, K., Perkins, E., and Pesta, M., 2005).

Other critical factors in this process are considering that Purnell worked with students with various need levels as it related to going to college. Some students may have had the scores and grades to get into college while others did not even know what college was and were not in a position to matriculate into college. Whatever the needs were, Purnell found a way to provide them, including food, clothes, health care and one-way plane tickets. Purnell was able to know what their needs were because of his interactions with his population. Additionally, he was able to direct students to institutions that were a good fit for them because of his interactions with school administrators and hundreds of campus visits that enabled him to get a good feel of each for campuses before he facilitated the relocation of many of the students he worked with.

Championing and Advocating for Poor Black Students

According to *The College Student Personnel Association of New York State Journal of Student Affairs*, one of the main reasons for college educators to get involved well before college begins is to counteract distracting messages African American male students may receive from their home environments. (2012) These strategies are best used in partnership with African American families, school principals, teachers, and counselors, as well as community leaders to present accurate information African American men can use in exploring college without distraction. Thus, in order for African American students to not only get into college, it is important for them to have people in their lives to encourage them prior to going to college. It is ideal to have different levels of support, however, if high school students, especially students coming from discouraging, disadvantaged, or distressed environments with little support, have at least one or two people encouraging them with words of affirmations they will be in a much better position for matriculation into higher education. Furthermore, because African Americans, in comparison to their white counterparts, tend to have a higher percentage of not attending or dropping out of college, African American college bound students having proper resources before and during college is even more important.

According to a 2006 article in the *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*,

High dropout rates appear to be primarily caused by inferior K-12 preparation and an absence of a family college tradition, conditions that apply to a very large percentage of today's college-bound African Americans. But equally important considerations are family income and the availability of financial aid. According to a study by Nellie Mae, the largest nonprofit provider of federal and private education loan funds in this country, 69 percent of African Americans who enrolled in college but did not finish said that they left college because of high

student loan debt as opposed to 43 percent of white students who cited the same reason. (2006)

Perhaps, a portion of these 69% of students may have completed their college education if a person adamantly advocated and championed for their success, providing them the necessary resources and connecting them with others that can be of a support to them. According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, an *advocate* is defined as “one who pleads the cause of another” (Merriam-Webster, 2017) and *champion* is defined as “a person who actively supports or favors a cause” (Merriam-Webster, 2017). When one advocates for others, many times they go above and beyond their call of duty. This person does not give up on their beliefs and does all that they can to see the manifestation of their investment. A champion is a person who has a mission, wins and reaches their goals or objective. Additionally, a champion bolsters a string of victories and although they often will accumulate losses, a true champion worthy of special recognition and celebration, similar to Jordan, will be known and remembered for the overwhelming greater number of wins in comparison to their losses.

Respect and Leadership through Influence among Colleagues

Often, if someone comes into a particular field and wants to be the best, they will look to whomever is considered *the* leader or most accomplished in that respective field; and proceed to use them as *the standard* by which to aspire. Whether it is Johnnie Carson as a tv talk show host, Dr. W.E.B. DuBois as an intellectual and scholar; Stephen Spielberg as creative movie producer and director, Oprah Winfrey as a multi-media mogul, Bill Gates as a tech genius and philanthropist; or Michael Jordan as the greatest professional athlete to ever suit up-- in every field of human endeavor, there is usually a person or group who holds the title and earns the respect as being the standard and leader. Especially within the African American community, certain levels of expressive respect

and deference has historically been an unspoken part of the cultural tradition. Respect is a quality that is earned based on one's deeds, accomplishments, and character. Many may desire to be respected, but may not gain much respect from others for various reasons. However, when people give or show respect to someone they admire, it's mostly because they have left them with a long-lasting impression and earned a place in their life that has meaning to them. According to the *Journal of General Internal Medicine*,

It is important to point out that in everyday life, it is common to hear one say 'In order to have my respect, you have to earn it.' In common vernacular, respect and admiration are synonyms. Respect is not unconditional regardless of one's personal characteristics, behaviors, or intentions. We see examples of this on TV and the Internet, in the grocery store, and even among our own family members. If you ask people on the street who they respect, they may name someone famous, someone whom they aspire to be like or who is accomplished in their field, or perhaps someone who is altruistic or who has 'done good.' Rarely will they tell you that they respect 'everyone'. (Spagnoletti, C. and Arnold, R., 2007)

The ability to influence people often has much to do with their capacity to listen and take heed to whatever the message or agenda that is shared. This is often true in homes, churches, schools, and communities throughout the globe. No matter the accuracy, power, or grand nature of the message or information to be conveyed, if the audience is unwilling to listen and receive, that message will never be effectively communicated, transmitted, or received. With this, for leaders to be effective and for the power that is in them to become manifest and able to touch other's lives whether through inspiration, motivation, or elevation they must be accepted, respected and regarded by their constituents or audience.

The Educational Pipeline

According to Trent et al. (2003), the ‘educational pipeline’ is one of the most prominent metaphors or terms used in the field of education. The notion of the educational pipeline is to illustrate the passage of students from school entry to school exit in a flow without hindrance. (Trent, 2003). Anderson et al. (2007) submits that “matriculation through the educational pipeline is contingent upon each of the areas of the pipe to be obscured and working in proper-order, which would allow for free- flowing exchange from point to point” (p. 18). Howard (2007) suggests that should the educational pipeline be “healthy” all students should have access to Advance Placement (AP) courses because they contribute significantly to preparation for higher education. Contrarily, African American students were less likely than White, Asian American, or Latino students to enroll in AP science, math, or foreign language (Howard, 2007).

Trent argues that a stream or a river as a symbol is more accurate as an “alternate imagery [that] would be fitting for many students of color because their participation in higher education is often fought with barriers that obstruct their educational progress” (Trent et al., 2003, pp. 29-29). Anderson et al. (2007) contend that the educational experiences of African American students are distinct in nature because of the history of injustices and racial inequalities that play out in their schooling. In Chapter 5, ‘Data Findings’ theme #3 is ‘Silas Purnell was closely connected to the Chicago community; understood the college institutional climate and was culturally competent in meeting the needs of the populations he served’. This literature suggests that because so many challenges and issues persist for students of color, especially African Americans, their process and experiences into higher education would be well served with individuals who

are aware, sensitive, and competent in responding to the issues and helping to support and prepare oncoming college students to be able to do the same.

Sharing the Counter-Narrative

Another important component of critical race theory is the recognition and acceptance of oral history as a legitimate form of evidentiary data and scholarship. Narratives or counter-stories contribute to the centrality of the experiences of people of color. “These stories challenge the story of white supremacy and continue to give a voice to those that have been silenced by white supremacy” according to (2015) the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA). This has been a vital method in preserving the history of marginalized groups whose experiences have never been legitimized within the master narrative. It challenges the notion of liberalism and meritocracy as colorblind or ‘value-neutral’ within society while also exposing racism as a main thread in the fabric of the American foundation (UCLA, 2015).

Being informed of the history of one’s culture is an intrinsic and immeasurable component to the self-awareness and self-actualization of an individual (Harung, 2009). As mentioned in the previous section, due to master scripting and other components of the ‘hidden curriculum’ there is a significant number and far too many adults and children who have little to no exposure or knowledge of the history of their ancestors, cultures, or native traditions. As one scholar juxtaposes, “the funny thing about stories is that everyone has one” (Delgado, 2000, p. 98). Akbar spoke of education as something which has always been “recognized as the means by which a people gain control over their own thinking” (Akbar, 1985, p.62) and in its highest form, a process of attaining self-knowledge. He “asks the question “what shall be the ideology of educating the

African American child?” (Akbar, 1985, p. 63) and reports that “educators almost unanimously agree to the need for a unique educational experience for African-American children” (Akbar, 1985, p. 62) and argues that there has been a continual growing inadequacy in addressing the needs of people across the board in both the American public and parochial school systems (Akbar, 1985).

Funding, Resources and Instructional Practices

In *Savage Inequalities*, the former teacher shared an analysis of funding inequities which provided insight into the impact of racism and [white] self-interest on school funding policies (Kozol, 1991). United States public schools’ funding is based on state funds and the local property taxes of individual schools. These factors significantly contribute to the resources and funding disparities among white schools and schools which serve predominantly students of color. Critical race theory supposes that:

Perhaps no area of schooling underscores inequity and racism better than school funding. [critical race theory] argues that inequality in school funding is a function of institutional and structural racism. The inability of African Americans to qualify for educational advancements, jobs, and mortgages creates a cycle of low educational achievement, under employment and unemployment, and standard housing. Without suffering a single act of personal racism, most African Americans suffer the consequence of systemic and structural racism. (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 20)

Critical race theory also recognizes that some current instructional strategies have adopted the presumption that many African American students are deficient and ‘at-risk’ (Ladson-Billings, 1998). With an implication of disposition towards failure or ‘bad behavior’ often many students of color, especially African American males, are treated as

intellectually deficient or labeled as a behavior problem and inadvertently slated towards a failing path. Many of these students are tracked and often misdiagnosed in a system which often does not consider the cultural context or have the cultural understandings to meet the needs of that population. (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Another author's research compiles data and personal perspectives from a group of 11 and 12-year-old African American boys who are identified by school personnel as 'bound for jail' and how they in turn, construct a sense of self based on their interactions. Considered by their teachers to be 'unsalvageable' and headed towards prison, there are many boys and young men of color who are subjected to these perspectives in their classrooms. (Ferguson, 2001). Another article discusses how Black and Latino youth are labeled "deviant" and how they are impacted by criminalization after encountering the juvenile justice system (Rios, 2006). The findings are based on an ethnography conducted in the San Francisco Bay Area with 40 Black and Latino youth between ages 14 and 18. The author uses the data results to argue that Black and Latino youth are further stigmatized and "hyper-criminalized" upon entering the juvenile justice system even for non-violent offenses. This study supports the notion showing a decline in actual violence and deviant behavior and the conflicting response from administrators.

Ferguson's work, (2001) was based on three years of participant observation research at an elementary school. She focused on interactions between teachers and students. Adding to understanding the problem of how public school systems constructs and imagines young Black males as troublemakers and how even well intentioned educators contribute and reinforce negative and racist stereotypes, Ferguson focuses on the perspectives of a group of 11 and 12-year-old boys identified by school personnel as

"bound for jail". Through interviews the author asked questions such as: How it feels to be labeled "unsalvageable" by your teacher? And; how does one endure school when the educators predict your future as connection to a jail cell? (Ferguson, 2001).

A publication (2005) by the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund shared information, insight, charts, and data on the connections and rampancy which exists between schools and prisons stating, “various policies, collectively referred to as the School-to-Prison Pipeline, push children out of school and hasten their entry into the juvenile and eventually the criminal justice system where prison is the end of the road” (p. 2). It goes on to mention “historical inequities such as segregated education, concentrated poverty, and racial disparities in law enforcement all feed the pipeline. The School-to-Prison Pipeline is one of the most urgent challenges in education today” (NAACP Legal Defense, 2005, p. 2). In the section, entitled, ‘*Punishment Without a Crime*’ the following claim is made:

Despite indicators showing that violence among youth is decreasing across the country, the perception persists among the public that school violence is a growing problem. In response to these sometimes irrational fears of school violence, school administrators have developed a variety of over-zealous discipline policies—including mandatory “zero tolerance” policies—that remove students deemed to be “problem children” from their schools (p. 3).

These data illustrate that African Americans have been socially stratified and positioned to not have the best outcomes in many areas in life including education. If this continues, African Americans will be duly disadvantaged in attaining higher levels of

education and ultimately hindered from obtaining much success in school and society as a whole. Emory University Sociologist Condron shared:

as social and economic stratification between black and white Americans persists at the dawn of the twenty-first century, disparities in educational outcomes remain an especially formidable barrier. Recent research on the black/white achievement gap points to a perplexing pattern in this regard. Schools appear to exacerbate black/white disparities in learning while simultaneously slowing the growth of social class gaps. (Condron, 2009, p. 685)

Aside from Hispanics, African Americans fare poorly in attaining higher education and continue to remain behind in positionality of success. According to Harvard Professor Hochschild:

Racial and ethnic disparities in schooling outcomes begin with the simplest and perhaps most important measure of success – years of schooling. In 2007, 91 percent of non-Hispanic Whites, compared with 83 percent of Blacks and only 60 percent of Hispanics over age 25 had at least a high school degree. The proportion of adult Americans with B.A. or higher degrees followed a similar pattern: 32 percent of non-Hispanic Whites, 19 percent of Blacks, and only 13 percent of Hispanics. Data for other groups come from the 2000 census so are not quite comparable; as of 2000, 80 percent of adult Asian/Pacific Islanders, and 71 percent of American Indians/Alaska Natives held a high school degree or more. The comparable figures for a B.A. or higher degree are 44 percent and 12 percent (Hochschild, 2014).

Policies and Practices in Education

A story is told about ‘two Americas’ which includes those who have the opportunity to partake and attain the ‘American Dream’. This report suggests that there is also a ‘Third America’ which is populated.

This is an America that is almost totally ignored by mainstream society. This America is often captured in popular television documentaries and newspaper stories and includes frightening statistics about unemployment, poverty and high rates of incarceration. The citizens of this Third America are primarily men, and mostly men of color. These men now live *outside* the margins of our economic, social and cultural systems. They are the byproduct of many societal failures — including the failure of our nation’s schools. (The College Board, 2010, p. 2)

A report entitled, *Given Half a Chance*, published by the Schott Foundation discusses contributing factors and circumstances which affect students and the ‘formula for success’ stating the difference between top and bottom schools in each state is:

Good schools are fully resourced with talented, caring teachers, well-trained and numerous support staff, and protective and supportive administrators –and poorly performing schools are not. Good schools have challenging curricula, high expectations for all students, and an expectation of success. Poor schools do not. Good schools have libraries, an adequate supply of textbooks and computers, art and music programs, and science labs. Most schools with majority Black enrollments do not (Schott Foundation, 2008, p. 6).

Conclusion

Despite historical efforts to improve educational opportunities and rates of educational attainment for African American students there have been various policy

changes and actions to remove affirmative action programs and other initiatives which factor race into admissions and decisions to allocate funding and resources. These adjustments have reversed the momentum and direction of leveling the playing field in education for all. Hence, the realities of inequity and historical inequalities remain and continue to present challenges and barriers of access for African American students in higher education.

One education reformer suggests that “there be a commitment to redesign school funding formula which would contribute to combatting and addressing the inequities of the current schooling system and its internal mechanism for reproduction of the status quo” (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 21). Continued research around access and equity for African American students and all citizens is imperative. In conclusion, education has always been a valuable commodity and resource for all human beings. Education at its best can shape, encourage, and inspire youth and adults; and will continue to have the capacity to be a place for transformation and mobilization. It has served as an arena not only for personal intellectual growth and development but also as a medium to improve the life courses of generations ahead. The educational system remains a prominent entity and means for progress and success for the African American community.

Chapter 3

Methods

Introduction

This chapter discusses the research design and methodology of this dissertation study. The primary source of data findings for this dissertation study was gathered through qualitative inquiry using interviews. The general purpose of using interviews was to gain insight and information from people who have firsthand knowledge of Silas Purnell and his career in higher education. Snowball sampling was the method used to identify participants for this project. This research explores aspects of Purnell's career and examines some of the strategies, practices, and methods used by Purnell to achieve his unprecedented success in supporting and ensuring college access to tens of thousands of students who otherwise may not have been afforded the opportunity. Interviews or oral history is the preferred method because it has been traditionally implemented as an empowerment tool for marginalized populations. In support of oral history, Paul Thompson stated, "oral history by contrast makes a much fairer trial possible- witnesses can now also be called from the under-classes, the unprivileged, and the defeated.... In so doing, oral history has radical implication for the social message of history as a whole" (Thompson, 2000, p. 6). Using interviews, this dissertation explores the work of Silas Purnell and his time with the TRIO Educational Talent Search Program connected to Ada S. McKinley Community Services, Inc. Educational Services Division (Nesbitt Dissertation, 2015).

Individual interviews were the primary source used as the data collection method for this project. Other means including, focus groups, surveys, and group interviews,

were considered but after careful reflection, individual interviews yielded the most comprehensive and useful data for analysis and reflection. The conceptual idea of ‘intrinsic value’ is defined as “the value that that thing has ‘in itself’ or ‘for its own sake’...” (Zimmerman, 2014, p. 120). There is clearly an intrinsic and qualitative value in the human connection and the process of walking with them as they recall stories and realities of the past and share them in the present for others to benefit. The oral history tradition is vitally important and socio-historically various cultures including the African and African American traditions have strongly embedded and intrinsically rooted practices for preserving and sharing their family and regional history through the retelling of stories. Griots have a popular and valuable historical role in the history of the world as they have provided much of the foundations for the documented histories and accounts that are now available through contemporary accessibility and public information.

Interviews

Interviews were conducted in person, face-to-face, with open-ended questions. When this was not possible, the secondary option was to interview subjects via Skype. The third option was to conduct interviews via telephone. The study used ‘informal interviews’ which are less structured and less rigid than other interviews and are usually conducted by qualitative researchers. They resemble more of a give and take casual conversation. With respect to the comfort levels of the interviewees, I inferred that they would have maximum privacy for free expression to share memories and perspectives in a one-on-one session. Secondly, due to methodological considerations I opted to *not* conduct focus groups or group interviews, which seemed befitting early in the research process. Due to potential time constraints it seemed more reasonable to converse with one

research participant at a time. Lastly, as a researcher I aspired to extend the utmost attention to details and information being shared, while listening and notetaking. To be best prepared and attuned to ask thoughtful ‘in the moment’ reflection questions for appropriate follow up without conflicting or colliding conversations, individual interviews seemed like the wisest choice. Overall, to enhance the likelihood of conducting maximum quality interviews and for data collection, individual interviews as the research data collection method was selected for this study.

Sampling and Participants

Snowball sampling was used to identify some participants for data collection. There were other options for selecting participants, which included: systematic sampling, stratified random sampling, and multi-stage cluster sampling, but after careful consideration snowball sampling was selected as seemed most appropriate for this project. I initially identified viable interviewee candidates through conversations and meetings with my academic advisor, dissertation director, and dissertation committee. The first group of names to emerge from those exchanges were: Participant #1 Michael Jeffries, Participant #2, Dean Clarence Shelley, and Participant #6, Dr. James Anderson-

Snowball Sampling

Snowball sampling is a technique for finding research subjects. One subject gives the researcher the name of another subject who in turn provides the name of a third, and so on (Vogt, 1999). Snowball sampling can be placed within a wider set of link-tracing methodologies (Spren, 1992) which seek to take advantage of the social networks of identified respondents to provide a researcher with an ever-expanding set of potential contacts (Thomson, 1997). This process assumes that a ‘bond’ or ‘link’ exists between

the initial sample and others in the same target population, allowing a series of referrals to be made within a circle of acquaintance (Berg, 1988).

Snowball sampling is usually applied for two primary purposes. First and most easily, as an ‘informal’ method to reach a target population. If the aim of a study is primarily explorative, qualitative and descriptive, then snowball sampling offers practical advantages (Hendricks, Blanken and Adrians, 1992). Snowball sampling is used most frequently to conduct qualitative research, primarily through interviews. Secondly, snowball sampling may be applied as a more formal methodology for making inferences about a population of individuals who have been difficult to enumerate using descending methods such as household surveys (Snyders, 1992; Faugier and Sergeant, 1997).

According to other scholars (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, p. 66; Brink & Wood, 1988, p. 128; Taylor & Bogdan, 1984, p. 83) snowball sampling also called ‘nominated sampling’ and is a common method of obtaining a qualitative sample. These samples “are obtained by eliciting the support and assistance of a single informant already in the study to assist with the selection of another participant” (Brink & Wood, p. 130). The researcher usually will contact a new potential participant in two ways: “either the researcher approaches the next informant, using the first informant as a reference, or the first informant approaches the new informant on the researcher’s behalf” (Brink & Wood, p. 130). Snowball sampling has historically been used as a research method technique to identify specific individuals and populations who may otherwise be challenging to identify or contact.

The advantages of snowball sampling include: 1) its ability to locate hidden populations of people that otherwise may not be known or identifiable; 2) it allows for people in specific populations and particular demographics that have no centralized or

public listings to be pinpointed and contacted, and 3) lower costs and less time and resources are expended in comparison to other sampling methods. Some disadvantages of snowball sampling include: 1) it does not employ the conventional notions of random selection; 2) there may be a community bias present in that the first participants may have a strong impact on the sample and the network of research subject candidates who are identified; and lastly 3) there is limited control in the sampling method for the researcher who may rely on the original and subsequent subjects for additional participants and data sources. Six of the 13 research participants were identified through snowball sampling.

Study Sample Yield

I had two preliminary interviews with the first subjects, Jeffries, Participant #1 and Shelley, Participant #2, prior to receiving notification of official IRB approval. The second interviews which occurred after IRB approval were conducted to allow additional time to share and recount what was conveyed during the first interview and also both subjects wanted to double check and confirm some facts and minor details for accuracy.

From the 13 participants, three of them, Jeffries, Participant #1, Shelley, Participant #2, and Anderson, Participant #4, were initially suggested from my advisors during early conversations about this research project as they are all local experts in the fields of Higher Education and Student Affairs. Six of the 13 research participants were identified through snowball sampling. A few weeks following our interview Dean Michael Jeffries (Participant #1) emailed a list of several contacts who either worked directly with Silas Purnell, in Student Affairs, or were his students. The list included contact information for several people including three research subjects, Bernard Clay (Participant #9), Allestine Radix (Participant #10), and Dr. Arnold Mitchem (Participant

#11). Radix was also referred by Venise Hardy (Participant #6) during our interview. Radix suggested Rosalind Purnell (Participant #12) and directly connected me with her.

Four of the participants were identified through word of mouth, personal relationships, and random social interactions. State Representative Ken Dunkin, Participant #5 randomly crossed paths near downtown Chicago and upon sharing my research topic he shared his familiarity with Purnell and willingness to lend his insight to this project (work) as well. John Hannah, Participant #3 is my home pastor in Chicago and was one of three voices of confirmation in selecting this project. During a sermon, as he discussed his life journey he referenced the memory of being taken to visit Purnell during high school and how that interaction was a critical stepping stone in his life. I later contacted him and scheduled a meeting for our interview. Through social conversations and sharing my research topic about Silas Purnell, unbeknown to me, Kidd, Participant #12 and West-Williams Participant #13, excitedly responded that they benefitted and received services from Purnell and expressed interest in participating in this study.

Interview Details

The 15 interviews with 13 research participants took place at various locations in the Champaign and Chicago metropolitan areas. Three interviews occurred in Champaign, one in Urbana, and nine occurred in different areas throughout Chicago. I conducted face-to-face interviews with 11 of the participants and phone interviews with two participants. The length of the interviews ranged from 15 minutes to 1 hour and 33 minutes. The specific information for each interview is displayed in Table 1.

Table 1. Interview Participants, Date, Location, Interview Type, and Duration

Name of Participant	Interview Date	Interview Location	Interview Type	Interview Duration
Mr. Michael Jeffries*	08/24/15	Champaign, IL	Face to Face	1 hour 27 min
Dean Clarence Shelley*	08/26/15	Champaign, IL	Face to Face	1 hour 13 min
Pastor John F. Hannah	10/28/15	Chicago, IL (Washington Park)	Face to Face	14 min
Mr. Michael Jeffries	11/03/15	Champaign, IL	Face to Face	1 hour 33 min
Dean Clarence Shelley	11/04/15	Champaign, IL	Face to Face	55 min
Dr. James Anderson	11/18/15	Champaign, IL	Face to Face	44 min
Mr. Kenneth Dunkin	12/14/15	Chicago, IL (South Shore)	Face to Face	15 min
Ms. Venise Hardy	12/15/15	Chicago, IL (Bronzeville)	Face to Face	49 min
Mr. Bernard Clay	02/08/16	Chicago, IL (Austin)	Face to Face	1 hour 3 min
Ms. Allestine Radix	02/08/16	Chicago, IL (Burnside)	Face to Face	1 hour 17 min
Dr. Arnold Mitchem	02/22/16	Chicago, IL Washington D.C.	Telephone	54 min
Ms. Rosalind Purnell	02/22/16	Chicago, IL (Auburn Gresham)	Face to Face	1 hour 4 min
Dr. William Sullivan	02/24/16	Urbana, IL Las Vegas, NV	Telephone	1 hour 5 min
Officer Thomas L. Kidd	03/12/16	Chicago, IL (Chatham)	Face to Face	41 min
Mrs. Cassiette West-Williams	03/26/16	Chicago, IL (Hyde Park)	Face to Face	34 min

*Interviewed twice

Interview Protocol

Several months leading up to the start of my interviews there were a series of revisions and updates to my original list of primary questions and subsidiary questions to guide my interviews. For each conversation, based on the subjects' responses it would further inform me to either ask, omit, or adjust some questions. The interview prompts and protocol were developed based on several factors including: 1) personal experiences as a graduate student working on past projects which involved conducting interviews; 2) drawing from insights gained during conversations with my dissertation director, advisor, committee members, and other colleagues about substantive questions to invoke quality data; 3) personal reflection about the questions to be asked in conjunction with consideration of the depth of data hoped to be yielded; and 4) Reviewing and consulting related literature and expert perspectives such as Terkel (2011) about the proper interviewing techniques and best practices to employ while conducting interviews.

Description of Participants

I utilized the search scope of the 'accessible population,' which is "the population the researcher can realistically select subjects for a sample, and to which the researcher is entitled to generalize findings" (Fraenkel and Wallen, 2011, p. 35). A critical and substantive component of this study is contingent on the participants and the integrity, accuracy, and validity of the information and insight they can recall and provide. Appropriately, each subject will be selected cautiously and carefully. Participants to be included in this study must be a referral or recommended to be contacted from my department instructors, advisors, or dissertation director; or have familiarity or extensive

knowledge about Mr. Silas Purnell and willing to share their experiences and memories of him. Some of the participants who will participate in this study may be considered *key informants* as they may be experts in their respective fields and professionally identified as “expert sources of information especially in qualitative research” (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2011, p. 31).

Interview participants in this study consisted of mostly college or university faculty, staff, or academic professionals in the Student Affairs fields who were directly or indirectly affiliated with Purnell. The pool of participants included: past co-workers or colleagues from Ada S. McKinley Community Services, Inc., TRIO Educational Talent Search Programs, immediate family members, students of Purnell, personnel from Student Affairs from varying institutions of higher learning. All participants were over the age of 35. The primary target population of interviewees were individuals whom Purnell worked with, including colleagues and contemporaries who would mostly be in the 60s to 80s age range. Research participants who were his students would now be in the 40s to 50s age range, and are most likely African American and middle-to-upper-class citizens.

Participant Pool

Participants for this study were recruited through direct references from my dissertation committee and recommendations from the initial expert subjects who were interviewed, primarily Dean Michael Jeffries (Participant #1) and Dean Clarence Shelley (Participant #2). I also considered having a local radio announcement in Chicago to announce this research study and extend the opportunity for former students and colleagues of Purnell to contribute to this study via their interview participation but after

an initial overwhelming response through initial inquiries, I deduced that a radio announcement would gain an excessive overwhelming response of possibly hundreds of candidates. Such a response may have been challenging for vetting through the responses and narrowing down the subject pool.

For future research, which is further discussed in Chapter 6, I will most likely revisit this idea to use a radio station to announce this expanded study. The initial radio station and show would be 106.3, a popular station which features soul music in Chicago hosted by A.C. Green, who has a significant following and audience of Chicago area residents who fit the demographic of students and colleagues that Purnell served and worked with. After gaining referrals or recommendations of individuals who might be good candidates for this study, I sent an initial email through my university account and corresponded via email or followed up via telephone after three days if I received no response. Then we proceeded with the initial preliminary conversation to determine eligibility to be quality participants for this project. After these individuals were identified as potential interview subjects who had valuable insight to share, an in-person interview was scheduled for 11 of the 13 candidates, and two of them who were both out of state [Washington D.C. and Las Vegas] we scheduled and later conducted telephone interviews. A biographical profile and an explanation of how the participant was identified are included in Chapter 4, 'Profiles of Research Participants' for each research subject.

Consent Form

The following section in italics is a copy of the language and description of this study included in the corresponding consent form for research participants. This consent

form and description was mandated and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) through the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Office for the Protection of Research Subjects. A copy of it and a copy of the approval letter from the IRB office is included in the Appendix section of this document.

***Purpose and Procedures:** This study, conducted by Perry L. Benson, Jr., a graduate student at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, is intended to explore the career and work of Mr. Silas Purnell, a former TRiO Educational Talent Search Program Director who is credited for contributing to access and admissions for thousands of urban high school students and young adults into 4-year colleges and universities. If you agree to take part in this research, you will be asked to participate in an in-person interview, phone interview or interview via Skype. The questions being asked will be related to the life and work of Mr. Silas Purnell and his history of working with urban students and placing them into 4-year colleges and universities.*

The questions asked are designed to discover and explore the strategies, practices, and operating procedures that Silas Purnell used in his work as he established and solidified a successful reputation and record of contributing to access and admissions to college for countless first-generation and low-income students. Your responses will be audio or video recorded at an agreed upon location. These video and audio recordings will be used to contribute to the data compiled and findings reported in the research dissertation of Ph.D. student, Perry L. Benson, Jr. You may be asked to participate in up to three follow up interviews and each interview will be approximately 1-2 hours.

During the first four interviews, two participants expressed interest and an intention to be identified in this study. As the investigator and to lend further credibility to the study I followed up and updated my Institutional Review Board (IRB) Consent Form for participant approval and added a second signature line to allow participants to choose to be identified in this work, which read “*furthermore, if you would like to be identified and for your name to be used in this study you may provide permission to the researcher by signing and providing the date below*”. Fortunately, after receiving permission to update my IRB consent authorization, all of the research participants in this

study agreed and accepted the option to be identified. Their biographies and profiles are included in Chapter 4.

Methods

This research project uses qualitative interviews as the primary method for data collection study using the grounded theory approach with a constructivist lens.

Qualitative research is “a form of research in which the researcher or a designated [co-researcher] collects and interprets data, making the researcher as much a part of the research process as the participants and the data they provide” (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, p. 4). Qualitative research uses an open and flexible design which contrasts to the approach in quantitative research. There are many variations of qualitative research with specific purposes and structures. The qualitative research method used in this study is referred to as *grounded theory* (Cresswell, 2013). Some scholars suggest that one of the purposes of “theory in sociology is a strategy for handling data in research, providing modes of conceptualization for describing and explaining” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 3). As a researcher with interest in the foundations of the sociology of education I embody some of the documented characteristics of researchers who employ qualitative research in their work. Some of which include: curiosity, a sense of logic, the ability to recognize variation as well as regularity, the ability to work through problems in the field, and an acceptance of self as a research instrument (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

The early foundations of grounded theory as a methodological framework were influenced by Symbolic Interactionism (Blumer, 1969) which explores how human beings act towards things based on the meaning things have for them. Then those

meanings are handled and modified through an interpretive process used by the individual in dealing with what they encounter (Blumer, 1969).

Rationale for Using Grounded Theory

Researchers across disciplines adopt grounded theory more frequently than any other method of analyzing qualitative data (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). “Interviewing for a grounded theory study both resembles and differs for interviewing for thematic qualitative inquiry” (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2012, p. 347). Grounded theory is a well-established scientific perspective and has an abundance of literature and research to support it as an effective tool to use for this study. Some of the scholars and social scientists who have published research on grounded theory include: Stauss, Corbin, and Glaser to name a few. Unlike other qualitative methods, grounded theory provides a structure to begin research through allowing the identification of areas of interest. It encourages the researcher to start collecting data and provides a framework for how to conduct data collection through analytical procedures and sampling (Dey, 1999).

Grounded theory also avoids theoretical preconceptions during research and employs theoretical sensitivity. Theoretical sensitivity refers to the humanness of a researcher as a complex and psychological being. Grounded theory allows the space for the investigator to be both a scientist and scholar while also being an individual who thoughtfully and carefully considers what the participants report and share as significant and important.

Data Collection Methods

For each interview, I used a Sony Stereo Digital Voice Recorder, model #ICD-BX140 digital audio and an Apple iPhone 6 to record the dialogue. For the duration of the interview to eliminate interruptions from phone calls or other mobile technology

communication i.e. receiving text messages, emails, or news notifications, I adjusted the phone settings to idle through the activation of the Airplane Mode feature.

For transcribing verbatim accounts of the interviews conducted, I hired three different transcription services at different times to complete the total amount of transcriptions. The first transcriber was only able to complete two transcriptions due to other work commitments. The second transcription service used was through an online business called Upwork where you can post your service needs and select a freelancer to complete your job. While making inquiries about reputable transcription services I was referred to this service by a graduate student in my program who had recently used their service. This service prepared 10 of the interview transcriptions. The third service I utilized which was GMR Transcription They transcribed three of the interviews. I corrected some minor transcription errors (e.g., ‘Cyrus Prenell’ instead of ‘Silas Purnell’ and ‘Ed S. McKinley’ instead of ‘Ada S. McKinley’). I reviewed all interview recordings and initial transcript submissions and appropriately updated the final transcript drafts as needed. This is further discussed later in the chapter.

Throughout this research project while interviewing participants for the study I remained cognizant that all findings could be quality data in that all information obtained through interviews, including minor details, thoughts, and comments despite seeming trivial or insignificant may be useful to the study and should be handled carefully. As aforementioned, data collected during the interviews were retrieved through a digital audio recording device and stored appropriately afterwards. The audio files were securely saved and kept on my personal Apple Mac laptop. More specifically, after each interview I used my personal Mac laptop to save the data collection and upload it to an external

flash drive to be saved and stored in a locked file cabinet. I also emailed these files to my university email for storage. Copies of audio files were stored on my laptop, an external drive, and an electronic copy was saved to my email account.

Data Analysis

Coding, categorization of data, and memo writing are critical and vital parts of the analysis. Memo writing, field jottings, and field notes were handwritten in a notebook or typed on a laptop computer throughout data collection and the coding process until the completion of the study. Writing and notetaking occurred continually in the research process to record hypotheses and ideas generated during data collection. In this study, notes were written after reviewing the audio recordings of the interviews, as the elapsed time allowed for additional reflective introspection about the data set. Finally, to substantiate a structure and provide parameters for the data collection and analysis, core categories were developed from the findings and data set was organized accordingly.

As data were collected, concurrent data analysis occurred. The ongoing analysis was based on the interviews and data set which informed the direction of the next interviews aimed at further developing theory, analysis, and making sense of the findings. The analysis process was open, axial, and used selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; 1998). Open coding refers to the process of generating initial concepts from the data. Axial coding allows structure to develop and link similar concepts in a 'coding paradigm'. Selective coding formalizes the relationships identified from the data set into theoretical frameworks (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; 1998).

Data Reliability and Validity

To determine the reliability of the data set during the collection and categorization process, the findings were cross-checked and verified by the researcher for validity.

During the review of data sets and information gathered, first, I would listen carefully and review the audio recordings and later review the corresponding transcriptions after their completion. Regarding many facts conveyed during the interviews from the participants, I would randomly spot check, and cross-reference them with other sources to research some of the details provided to confirm the data shared. For example, certain dates and professional organization names I would verify by doing web searches and checking databases. The researcher thereafter reviewed the audio recordings and transcripts of the data and used memo checking and peer checking to corroborate the findings for this study. Essentially, the exhaustive process of recording notes and jottings during each interview yielded a substantial amount of insight related to my research subject, Purnell, and his work with students. Based on some of the information, collectively stories and facts began to synthesize, overlap and in a sense-- corroborate. When appropriate, during the interviews I would sometimes use context and reference information shared among participants to lend further perspective.

Reliability concerns the replicability and consistency of findings (Kirk & Miller, 1986; Rafuls & Moon, 1996). Reliability refers to the degree that other researchers performing a similar observation in the field and analysis reading field notes transcribed from narrative data would generate similar interpretations and results. A consensus between at least two observers is necessary for establishing reliability in a scientific study. Confirmation checks by multiple observers are also important for establishing

reliability in qualitative studies. The cross-checking process is the reliability check of choice for many researchers (Brink, as cited in Newfield, Sells, Smith, Newfield & Newfield, 1996). Some qualitative researchers use outside observers to check their interpretations and help them question varying observations. The goal is to achieve a higher continuity and dependability of observations across different settings and time periods (Thyer, 2010).

In science, “validity is concerned with the accuracy of findings” (Rafuls & Moon, 1996, p.77). Reliability is a prerequisite and condition for validity (Guba, 1981). Validity in qualitative research addresses whether the researcher sees what they think they see (Kirk & Miller, 1986). Validity is synonymous with credibility, which involves the ‘truthfulness’ of a study’s findings (Guba, 1981). It is the role of the researcher to provide evidence and narrative accounts in the data set that are plausible and credible (Hammersley, 1992).

Qualitative researchers are concerned with testing the credibility of their findings and interpretations from the audiences or groups from which the data set was collected (Guba, 1981). According to Padgett (2008), most threats to validity fall within three areas: reactivity, researcher bias, and respondent biases. Reactivity is in regard to the potentially distorting effects of qualitative researchers and their presence during data collection. A researcher’s biases may distort or impact the findings. According to Schacter (1999), numerous studies demonstrate that bias is one of the major attributes of human cognition and memory.

The retrieval of memories is highly contingent on preexisting beliefs and knowledge and it can be easy for researchers to ignore information that does not support their conclusions. Humans also experience consistency bias, which is the tendency for people to recall and report past events from their present perspective and position instead of how they experienced them in the past. This type of bias makes it vitally important to use varying information sources instead of relying on the subjective accounts of participants alone (Thyer, 2010). Also, respondents may forget, block information, or feel inclined to present themselves or others in a more positive or negative light depending on their present state. Researchers should always be mindful of the threat and possibility of a participant lying, over-exaggerating, underplaying events, or giving a socially desirable response (Thyer, 2010).

Limitations

In this study, there are several limitations and methodological considerations. Some of the limitations include: limited availability of resources and funds, and limited access to potential viable subjects. With limited access to potential subjects due to the parameters of the sampling participant pool, the contact list generated from snowball sampling did not afford all viable participants, who may have valuable insight or information, to contribute to this study. Also, funding and extensive travel parameters limited the number of individuals interviewed.

Methodological Considerations

According to sociocultural scholars, there are specific discourse processes that are cultural practices that occur in educational settings. They suggest that there is an understanding that discourse processes and practices (oral, aural visual, and written) are

cultural tools members of a group use to construct knowledge (Bloome & Egan-Roberts, 1993; Gumperz, 1982; Hicks, 1995). Due to human error, other considerations are the potential missed opportunities to ask more insightful, probing, follow up questions to gain more information. As many researchers realize only after listening to and reviewing a recorded interview later, they may notice missed opportunities to have asked other questions to the interviewee in retrospect.

Some additional methodological considerations were the by-products of relying on human subjects. In addition to conducting interviews I also searched and reviewed other literature, both printed and electronic sources of information related to this subject to cross-check and corroborate the findings for accuracy. Newspapers, journals, newsletters, and archives were all referenced to gain quality data. With interviews, both the participant and the researcher are subject to human error during the interview process regarding what is being asked and what is recalled and how it is asked and recalled. Also, there is the possibility of misunderstandings or misinterpretations by the researcher in clearly hearing and accurately receiving the intended message. Finally, because of possible errors in the transcriptions conducted by outside sources it will be crucial for the researcher to review each interview recording at least five or six times and compare it to the corresponding transcript.

Chicago Politics, Cultural Context and Purnell

Cultural context and cultural understandings related to this study are also vital and important considerations. The era, specific communities involved, and the social climate during the time Purnell operated are important to consider as they may provide additional context for the setting of the environment at the time. Specific to African American

communities and tradition, there are many sub-cultural groups, norms, and understandings that may require an adjusted lens to collect and process some of the data findings. As discussed in Chapter 1, the political, social, racial and cultural structure of Chicago allowed and perhaps provoked situations and settings where there were a large number of youth and families to be in need of support. There were plenty of students of color prepared, eligible, and motivated to attend college but often lacking the financial means or simply the information and guidance to navigate the process.

Specific to the Chicago landscape, despite its huge population, is how the political scene is often dominated by designated ‘movers and shakers’. Power dynamics, relationships, and capital contributed to the challenges in Chicago but also it afforded a network of colleagues, peers, and other professionals who contributed to the cause of Purnell and his effort to send students to college campuses. Specifically, during the beginning of the Purnell’s work, Chicago was under the leadership of Mayor Richard J. Daley [from 1955 to 1976], and soon thereafter under the leadership of the first African American mayor of Chicago, Harold Washington [from 1983 to 1987]. Purnell concluded his time of service under the reign of Mayor Richard M. Daley [from 1989 to 2011]. Additionally, Purnell and his agency would have had to contend with other political leaders including congressmen, state representatives, and ward aldermen. Due to TRiO Educational Talent Search Program being a federally funded TRiO program, Purnell would have had to navigate through all of the bureaucratic nuances. During the interview process, multiple subjects commented about his familiarity, track record, and ability to navigate Chicago politics, form alliances, and build relationships to gain the necessary

resources and funding to continually provide service to his student population. (Retrieved from <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/1443.html>)

In considering the population of potential research participants who would be interviewed, being aware and responsive to the cultural context is critical to even in the preliminary stages of this research process, i.e. making initial contact to establish rapport and scheduling the interviews. With respect to these populations there are certain sub-cultural norms, standards, and expectations that need to be observed while conducting this research. For instance, having the ability to code switch or using African American Vernacular English (AAVE) vernacular during conversation was important and further increased the level of communication through listening and sharing (Labov, as cited in Bailey et al., 2013). Knowing that addressing elder members of this population by their first names was culturally unacceptable, would be received as disrespectful, and could possibly hinder the interview process, also aided me in establishing an important and respectful relationship with the interviewees. Also, there is an intrinsic value and cultural understanding among this population of respecting the formalities of sitting down with another person or people over coffee or a meal, establishing rapport, gaining trust, and extending a platform and opportunity to share, hear, and be heard about their perspective on aspects of the world as they knew it. Lastly, this concept supports another practice within this population that believes in extending respect and benevolence to individuals deemed 'special' or outstanding in the community for their work and accomplishments. Conversations about these types of individuals which include but is not limited to ministers, educators, community activists, and athletes often require an increased level of sensitivity and respect.

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to provide an overview of the methods and research design used in this project. It also aimed to express the rationale and purpose for selecting the methods and strategies used in this study and a corresponding explanation of how they were implemented.

Chapter 4

Profiles of Research Participants

I was fortunate to receive solid referrals for suggested participants to contact as everyone who I corresponded with were receptive to participation.

During the fourth interview, an interviewee expressed pride in being a part of this project and his desire to not be anonymous. We had a brief ensuing dialogue, and as I reflected on his comments it was clear as I considered that participant as well as the entire interview pool, due to their extensive expertise and success in their respective fields, their identities and names would certainly add increased credibility to my project. I initially followed up with my dissertation director and advisor and after receiving their support, I submitted the necessary request for a revision and addition to my Institutional Review Board (IRB) Consent Form Subject for participant and after a few weeks of being processed it was accepted to allow an addendum to my IRB form. I added a secondary *signature line to allow participants to choose to be identified in this work, which read: “furthermore, if you would like to be identified and for your name to be used in this study you may provide permission to the researcher by signing and providing the date below”*. [See Figure 4.7 in Appendix]. Overall, I had a total of 15 interviews and 13 participants as two of the subjects were interviewed twice. Before concluding each interview and following my final question to my research participants, I asked: *What other people or groups do you recommend I contact or connect with to gain additional insight or information about Silas Purnell and his work?* Each participant provided at least 2 or 3 names and some participants shared over a dozen names of people to contact. This

question yielded a total list of over 40 potential subjects. Many of them overlapped and had multiple referrals from different interviewees.

I contacted most of the people who were suggested as potential subjects if either received their contact information from the referral or I could research it. First, I emailed them with a standard greeting and introduction of my project and I telephoned a few others. In addition to my participants, I corresponded in great details with about four or five other people and only due to timing and scheduling conflicts and other barriers, we were not able to schedule an interview. Additionally, other considerations including: conducive timing, locational challenges, and practicality disallowed a lucrative opportunity to interview all of them. I will discuss this more in-depth in Chapter 6, 'Reflections and Suggestions for Future Research'. This section provides information regarding the interview logistics including the date, location, and length of interview and the length of pages and number of words in the transcription of the interview. Finally, to serve as a profile for the research participants in this study there is a corresponding biographical account for each participant. Eleven of the participants provided a written biography to review and 2 of them participants provided a verbal overview of their biography which I used to craft a biography to be included in this chapter. All biographies were reviewed and received minor revisions as necessary to increase readability.

Participant 1: Dean Michael Jeffries

Mr. Michael L. Jeffries served as Associate Dean of Students at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign for 25 years and retired in 2009 after providing leadership for TRiO programs and state support retention programs for 35 years. His department won the first Noel Levitz award for having an exemplary comprehensive retention model

in 1990. He was responsible for providing programmatic leadership and planning, financial management, and personnel administration for the Office of Minority Student Affairs (OMSA), which annually served more than 4,500 undergraduates enrolled in eight colleges and nearly 100 academic departments. Mr. Jeffries served as director of McNair Scholars Program for 19 years. He served as National Chair of McNair Scholars Programs from 1998 to 2000.

Mr. Jeffries was honored in 2006 by the COE Board of Directors at their 25th Anniversary Annual Conference in New York City by becoming the recipient of the prestigious Walter O. Mason Award. Jeffries was the founder of McNair Scholars Program National Conferences in 1992 at Delavan, Wisconsin, and chaired the nation's largest McNair Scholars Conference for seventeen years. Jeffries has served on several national and regional boards, including the GRE Board at Educational Testing Service, COE, MAEOPP, MASFAA, Vice-President of the Illinois Federation of Teachers, Vice-Chair of the Illinois Committee on Black Concerns in Higher Education, NASPA Regional Board, and others.

For more than 20 years, Mr. Jeffries has been a TRiO trainer for various universities and the U.S. Department of Education. He has served as an educational consultant for many universities and agencies, including College Board and the USDE. Jeffries has many other accomplishments and noteworthy roles he has held which include: being named an Honorary James Scholar from the University of Illinois College of Education; Faculty Member at the Leadership Center; Member of the University of Illinois President's Council and Executive Board of the Illinois Black Alumni Network (BAN); TRiO Faculty at the University of Nevada- Las Vegas Academic Enrichment

Center; and Member of the Illinois Committee on Black Concerns in Higher Education. Since retirement, he has joined the Council for Opportunity in Education as the Special Assistant to the President for McNair Scholars Programs and he has established an educational consultancy company.

Mr. Jeffries has a B.S. in Industrial Arts and Technology from Eastern Illinois University (EIU), a M.S. in Educational Administration and Supervision from EIU and completed advanced study in Program Evaluation from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He was introduced to Mr. Silas Purnell through Dr. Ernest Morris, who was at EIU, but later became the Director of the Education Opportunities Program (EOP) at the University of Illinois and eventually hired Mr. Jeffries as the Assistant Director. Mr. Purnell, at the time, was bringing busloads of students to EIU from Chicago Public Schools. Dr. Morris was doing what Mr. Jeffries desired to do and that was to help recruit students to EIU and achieve academic achievement. Mr. Jeffries and his wife, Gayle have children and grandchildren. He is also a proud member of Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Incorporated.

Participant 2: Dean Clarence Shelley

Clarence Shelley, an African American male from Detroit, Michigan, was hired and appointed as the Director of the Special Educational Opportunities Program in 1968. Clarence Shelley was a director of an economic opportunity program in Detroit before accepting the position at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He earned his Master's Degree from Wayne State University in Detroit. After graduating with his Master's, Mr. Shelley then taught English and Speech at Northeastern High School. Before arriving at the University of Illinois, Clarence Shelley taught and counseled at the

Cranbrook School in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, Dartmouth College and Wayne State University. Mr. Shelly was known for developing programs to facilitate the admission and retention of minority students in colleges and universities throughout the Midwest and East.

The Project 500 program initiative nearly tripled the African American student population on campus. On the Illinois campus in 1967, Blacks were only 1.1 percent of the student population (223 undergraduates and 107 graduate students, making a total of 330 Black students) (Wermers, 1967). In the fall semester of 1968, there were 565 students of color. In 1974 Clarence Shelley was named Dean of Students at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. Dean Shelley was recognized as a problem-solver who addressed the needs of Black students. Because the cause of helping underrepresented students would require an inclusive community and campus effort, he encouraged students to value their education and experiences. He further pushed for campus staff and faculty members to become accountable for the success and personal development of all students, including Black students. Dean Shelley was concerned with the behavior of people who had direct contact with students.

In his 33 years of exemplary service to the University of Illinois, Dean Shelley served under four presidents and seven chancellors. He held multiple roles on campus, including serving as dean of students for 11 years, assistant vice chancellor of student affairs for seven years and associate dean of students for nine years. Clarence Shelley was the first African American to hold all those positions on campus. Based on Dean Shelley's outstanding dedication and work on behalf of the campus, he has received numerous awards and citations for his service to higher education. In March of 2002 he

received the Chancellor's Medallion—only the third person at the University of Illinois to receive that distinction at that time. The award is given to exceptional people whose contributions to the campus go beyond expectation and precedent. Dean Shelley continues to have a special interest in advocating for those groups that remain underrepresented in colleges and universities. He serves as an advisor to faculty, showing them how the campus can be made more diverse. Dean Shelley works with minority student organizations to provide scholarships and help them recognize the full value of their education.

Participant 3: Pastor John F. Hannah

In Chapter 1, during the 'Introduction' of this paper I shared the story of two of three interactions in a short period, which gave me the final inspiration and conformation to select this topic for my dissertation project. While hosting services in the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) in 2013, I joined and became a member of New Life Covenant Southeast Church. During Sunday worship services, on several occasions often to share about his own life's journey or to illustrate the power of connections and randomness of knowing where opportunities or blessings may come from Pastor Hannah has referenced his exchange with Silas Purnell during his senior year in high school. He describes it as a vital moment and catalyst for his admission into college.

Pastor John Hannah made a career of changing lives early on. After receiving his Bachelor of Arts degree in criminal justice from Alabama State University, he served as a Juvenile Probation Officer in Chicago's Cook County where he impacted the lives of young adults. Concurrently, Hannah served as a youth pastor for a local church for many years. Evangelizing with a focus on urban youth year after year created opportunities for

Hannah to perfect the calling for his destiny as the shepherd of a remarkable organization that would become New Life. Today Hannah is the Senior Pastor of New Life Covenant Southeast with membership over 20,000. The unwavering passion for life transformation in the lives of urban youth is evident with over 70% of the church population between the ages of 18 and 35. In addition to his role as the Senior Pastor of New Life Covenant Church, Pastor Hannah shared his wide range humorous talent in the name of Jesus. He hosted a daily morning radio program on WGRB AM for 13 years. “The John Hannah Morning Show” aired on Inspiration 1390 AM and was the #1 rated gospel radio in Chicago and surrounding areas. He won a Stellar Award for 2013 Gospel Radio Announcer of the Year. In September 2015, Hannah released his second published book *Desperate for Jesus*. Within the first week it reached the #1 rating on Amazon’s new releases. It grasps the heart and soul through his transparent journey with Christ. *Desperate for Jesus* aids the believers in their obstacles in many areas: in difficult times, lack of family support, betrayal, unhealthy anger, spiritual immaturity and much more. According to his description on the church website, “He truly conveys to all that it's time to live desperate!” Pastor Hannah is sensitive to the ills and the needs of Chicago and at the request of Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel; he serves on the Human Resource Board for the City of Chicago and the Civic Consulting Alliance for the Chicago Public Schools. Pastor Hannah is married to Mrs. Anna Hannah, his wife of over 22 years who also serves alongside him.

Participant 4: Dr. James D. Anderson

Dr. James D. Anderson is a historian of American educational research and a tenured professor at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Dr. Anderson is one

of the founders of the Bridge and Transition program. James D. Anderson is the Edward William and Jane Marr Gutszell Professor of Education; the former Head of the Department of Education Policy, Organization and Leadership; affiliate Professor of History and Interim Dean for the College of Education and was named the Dean of the College of Education for the 2017-2018 academic year. His scholarship focuses broadly on the history of U.S. education, with specializations in the history of African American education in the South, the history of higher education desegregation, the history of public school desegregation, and the history of African American school achievement in the 20th century. His book, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935*, won the American Educational Research Association outstanding book award in 1990. Anderson has served as an expert witness in a series of federal desegregation and affirmative action cases, including *Jenkins v. Missouri*, *Knight v. Alabama*, *Ayers v. Mississippi*, *Gratz v. Bollinger*, and *Grutter v. Bollinger*. He served as an adviser for and participant in the PBS documentaries *School: The Story of American Public Education* (2001), *The Rise and Fall of Jim Crow* (2002) and *Forgotten Genius: The Percy Julian Story*. He was elected to the National Academy of Education in 2008. In 2012, he was selected as a Fellow for Outstanding Research by the American Educational Research Association and received the Lifetime Achievement Award from the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education. In 2013, he was selected Center for Advanced Study Professor of Education Policy, Organization and Leadership at the University of Illinois. For 2015-2016, he served as the University of Illinois Presidential Fellow examining how the University can address issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion across the University system.

Participant 5: Mr. Kenneth Dunkin

Mr. Kenneth Dunkin was a public servant in his role as the 5th District State Representative in the Illinois General Assembly between 2002 and 2016. Prior to his role as State Representative, Dunkin worked as a social worker for many years and helped families access needed resources. He was also a Director of the Robert Taylor Boys and Girls Club of Chicago. For five years, he managed over \$2.5 million in program services. He also worked as a consultant for Chicago's Department of Health and Chicago's Department on Aging. As a member of the Illinois House of Representatives, Dunkin served on the following committees: (Chairperson) Tourism and Conventions; (Chairperson) Appropriations-Higher Education; Appropriations-General Service; Insurance; Elementary & Secondary Education; Financial Institutions; and, State Government Administration. He focused on legislation to raise the quality of life for working families, children and seniors and was successful in boosting Illinois' economy by working to strengthen Illinois' tourism and film industry.

Dunkin was born and raised in Chicago's Cabrini Green Public Housing Development and is a product of the Chicago Public School System. He attended Jenner Academy of the Arts Elementary School and Lincoln Park High School. He continued his education at Harold Washington College and received an Associates of Arts degree before attending Morehouse College and graduating with a Bachelors of Arts degree in Political Science. Dunkin later returned to Chicago and attained a Masters of Arts degree in Social Service Administration from the University of Chicago. He became a community liaison for his mentor, Secretary of State Jesse White, and served as a consultant for the city of Chicago Department of Health and Department of Aging. He

interned with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Healthcare Financing Administration and U.S. Senator Paul Simon in Washington D.C.

He served on the Associate Board of the Chicago International Film Festival and was the chief sponsor of a bill that created legislation to extend tax credits to film producers to encourage them to bring more of film industry to Illinois. He is a member of the Cabrini Green Legal Aid Advisory Board, the Lawson YMCA and the City Club of Chicago. Dunkin is also a member of Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Incorporated. During his time in office, some of his priorities included: reducing domestic violence, sustaining and creating new businesses, preventing identity theft, rallying for reduced prescription drug prices for senior citizens, improving academic achievement among students and affordable childcare and healthcare. In 2004, Dunkin was selected by the American Council of Young Political Leaders (ACYPL) to be a delegate to South Africa for a ten-day political study program. Dunkin joined five other young leaders from across the United States to study South Africa's political system, engage dialogue on bilateral issues and forge professional relationships. ACYPL is a non-profit bipartisan international exchange organization funded in part through a grant from the U.S. Department of States Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. Dunkin and his wife Yolanda are the proud parents of a son and two daughters.

Participant 6: Mrs. Venise Hardy

Serving in various roles including: *Non-Profit Director, Education Program Manager, and Professional, Academic and Non-Profit Policy Consultant*, Venise Hardy currently serves as the Director of Ada S. McKinley Community Services, Inc. Educational Services Division Early Intervention and College Preparation and Placement

programs. Mrs. Hardy has worked for Ada S. McKinley's Educational Services Division since 1995. Her initial role was the Early Intervention Director for eleven years before becoming a Center Director in 2006 and then assuming her current position, Director of Education Programs in October 2011. She holds a master's degree in Public Administration with a concentration in non-profit administration. As the Director of Educational Services, Mrs. Hardy's primary responsibilities include coordinating internal evaluation of all programs to ensure that methodologies are appropriate and in compliance with state and federal funding guidelines. Additional responsibilities include: fiscal management and accountability; professional development of staff; implementation of daily operations; philanthropic research; and coordination of public and private partnerships.

Throughout her career, Director Hardy has remained committed to providing opportunities to empower others to transform and enhance their lives; and positively impact their communities. Her dedication to becoming a difference maker in her community and the communities served through her work at Ada S. McKinley has resulted in the following accomplishments; Recipient of the Marks of Excellence Award for Young Africa American Public Administrators; Featured Guest on the Clarice Masson Community Access Broadcast; Mid America Educational Opportunity and Program Personnel Identification of 18 best practices for TRIO programs; Guest Presenter on Community and School Engagement and collaboration for College Board Illinois Conference for High school Counselors; Chronicle of Higher Education program reference; Revie Sorey Trunk Scholarship event co-chair for 4 years ; and Council for Opportunities in Education Silas Purnell Alumni event and STEM fair committee

member. A lifelong passion to serve others is the guiding principal by which Mrs. Hardy continues to use her acquired skills and experience to inspire and motivate youth and their families to envision, prepare and achieve academic and social excellence.

Participant 7: Mr. Bernard Clay

If it is true that ‘a mind is a terrible thing to waste’; and it is most certainly true, then Chicago’s born and bred, Bernard M. Clay is one of the most frugal persons in Illinois. Mr. Clay has helped more than 40,000 ‘young minds’ realize their full potential by helping them pursue post-secondary educational and/or full time employment opportunities in meaningful career paths. He grew up in a loving, closely-knit family on Chicago’s Westside, which was headed by his hard working, caring, and firm mother, Ella Pauline Clay. After a stormy high school career in Chicago’s turbulent segregated schools, wherein he became aware of the system’s glaring inequities, he graduated and began to navigate the choppy waters of higher education, which were largely uncharted for a poor youth from Chicago’s Westside. It was from these experiences that Clay developed his life mission of service to youth in the pursuit of higher education goals.

Clay obtained his Bachelors degree in Political Science from DePaul University and that was quickly followed up with a Masters degree in Clinical Psychology from Roosevelt University. He then began his career of service with the Illinois Department of Mental Health as a therapist; then with the Illinois Department of Corrections as a probation officer. Clay volunteered in the Explorer and Scouting Programs within the Chicago Area Council of the Boy Scouts of America. He was a Scout Master; an Explorer and Chapter Advisor; and as a member of the Order of Arrow he obtained the Vigil Honor. His scouting experiences sparked an interest to establish a local community-

based youth services organization that would target primarily the young people from the Chicago's Westside neighborhoods of the Near Westside, East and West Garfield, Austin, and North Lawndale. These neighborhoods, which he explored, also had nurtured him as a youth so he was well aware that they were in-fact, communities teeming with talented but underserved young people.

Clay became a founding board member of Introspect Youth Services in 1975, and served as a volunteer staff member until 1977 when he was hired as a part-time coordinator. By 1979, Introspect Youth Services had serviced a number of contracts from the state of Illinois and Bernard was hired as its first Executive Director. Since that time, Introspect has provided youth counseling, emergency temporary housing, and supportive services to thousands of our troubled youth. Introspect also has assisted more than 40,000 mainly low-income youth in pursuing their dreams of obtaining college degrees or certificates by providing them with college placement services, financial aid advisement, college tours, college admission application, and admission test preparation assistance. Introspect, through various employment programs and, in conjunction with numerous major employers has provided more than 5,000 young adults with full-time employment opportunities into meaningful occupations.

Clay is an iconic figure in the Illinois youth services community. He was a founding member of the Illinois Collaboration on Youth and has served as Vice-Chair of the Youth Network Council, a coalition of more than 45 Cook County youth organizations. Clay was the co-chairperson of the Alternative School Network, a coalition of nearly 50 schools that provide educational services to thousands of high school dropouts and older youths. Additionally, he was a former Commissioner of the

City of Chicago-Health Planning Commission, and the State of Illinois African American Family Commission. Clay's leadership and Introspect Youth Services have been instrumental in the passage of legislation, which continue to benefit youth both within the state and throughout the nation.

Clay is active in an array of civic and community-based organizations, which seek to improve the quality of life for all of Chicago's and Westside residents, ranging from his block club and Friends of Columbus Park to the South Austin Madison Corporation (SAMCOR) and the Westside Business Improvement Association (WBIA). Clay is a founding member and the current Chair of the Westside Arts Council. In an effort to sustain and revitalize a venerable historic Westside community organization, Fifth City Chicago Reformulation Corporation, Clay has taken on the herculean task of righting its fiscal affairs and restoring its wonderful main building to its former glorious splendor. He is the chairperson of the Chicago Westside Branch of the NAACP Education Committee and Community Coordination Committee. As Education Committee Chair, he works with nearly all of the Westside local school council (LSC) and Chicago Public Schools (CPS) seeking to insure that all Westside students receive a quality education.

In addition to his work with community, youth, and social services, Mr. Clay is a noted breeder and importer of Rottweiler and German Shepherd dogs. Clay has trained, exhibited and competed with dogs throughout America, Canada, and Europe. He is a founding member and President of the Chicagoland Schutzhund Club, Inc., which was organized in 1982 and for a time was the largest African American working Dog Club in the country. He has worked with the American Rottweiler and American Kennel Club to

block anti-breeding legislation in the Chicago City Council and the Illinois General Assembly.

Participant 8: Mrs. Allestine Radix

Mrs. Allestine Radix was referred to me secondly by Venise Hardy (Participant #6) during our interview and initially from Michael Jeffries (Participant # 1) during our second interview. A few weeks following our interview Dean Jeffries sent me a list of several contacts who either worked directly with Silas Purnell, in Student Affairs, or was a student of his. The list he sent included emails and telephone contact information including for Allestine Radix. She forwarded the following narrative as her biography submission to be used.

Allestine (Barnes) Radix is currently an Assistant to the Library Dean at Chicago State University located in Chicago. She has worked there since February 2001. Over the last 46 years she had a variety of jobs including: Assistant Newspaper Editor, various Administrative Assistant positions, Coordinator of the Foodservice Sanitation Program and Interim Director of the Hospitality Programs for the City of Chicago, all of which enhanced my ability to be well-rounded. She graduated from Langston University in Langston, Oklahoma (1971) majoring in Business Education. She shared that “her dream was to become a high school teacher where I could help students reach their goals and endeavors”. I never dreamed of going to college because my academic background was a “B” average. She grew up in a one parent household with a very little money. She eventually “heard about a gentleman named Mr. Silas Purnell who was successful in placing kids in college and helping them realize their dreams. I became excited at the thought of possibly becoming a college student. So I went to see him and things began to

change. He had such a wealth of information on colleges and universities of which I had an opportunity to attend. I was afraid and did not have much support. Mr. Purnell made sure I had everything I needed from clothes to luggage to transportation to school (on the Amtrak Train) to financial aid and everything in between to meet my needs while attending college. He took my mom and I to the Amtrak station. He gathered my trunk from his station wagon and said to me, “let’s go”. So my mom got out of the station wagon and Mr. Purnell said to her “say your goodbyes at the curb and get back in the car”. Mr. Purnell knew if she had gone into the station—“I probably would not have made that 16 hour train ride to school and as a result of that, I now have a Bachelor’s Degree in Business Education. So she did as she was told and off I went to a new adventure of getting an education.”

After I was there for about a month, there was a page for me over the intercom that I had a guest in the lobby. I questioned who it could be because I was not seeing anyone at that time and I had not made many friends. So I went to the lobby and there bless my soul, stood Mr. Purnell, looking like new money. I was so excited that I could hardly speak. We chatted for about 30 minutes and he asked how my classes were going and I responded, “they were going well”. So he bid me goodbye and continued his journey to visit other students whom he had sent away to college to check on their progress; and told me to stay in school and keep my grades up-- and I did. During Mr. Purnell’s lifetime he placed more than 50,000 students in colleges, universities, undergraduate, graduate, Ph.D. and trade programs. What a tribute!

After graduating from Langston, the next phase of that journey was getting a job. Jobs were not easy to come by and after doing other work, of which I was overqualified, I

went to Mr. Purnell again, and asked for help. He said, “come and work for me” and that was where it began for 15 years. I even left and returned to Ada S. McKinley in 1998 for three more years until things changed and there was a new administration in charge. I did not fit well, because the new administration wanted to assist kids who were not from low income families, which was not Mr. Purnell’s agenda, he was for poor kids and made it known that was his purpose, so I resigned and began employment with Chicago State University.

One of the most memorable moments was obtaining the experience, which enabled me to help other students set and reach goals for their success. I was able to talk to students and share what processes they needed to follow to be successful, accomplish their goals, and reach back to help and assist others. Growing up poor taught me that hard work and thrift are sometimes the only things a person can afford, so grab at it and make your mark in the world!

Allestine Radix currently resides in Chicago, Illinois where she continues to assist students whenever and wherever she can. If you are a serious student seeking an education, keep climbing that precipice (*a steep cliff or incline*) until you realize your dream and purpose. *Remember God said, “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.” (Matthew 7:33).*

Participant 9: Dr. Arnold Mitchem

Dr. Arnold Mitchem was referred to me by Dean Michael Jeffries (Participant #1) during our second interview. A few weeks following our interview Dean Jeffries sent me a list of several contacts who either worked directly with Silas Purnell, in Student Affairs,

or was a student of his. The list he sent included emails and telephone contact information including for Dr. Arnold Mitchem.

Dr. Arnold Mitchem is the President Emeritus of the Council for Opportunity in Education and has been a voice for low-income, first-generation students and individuals with disabilities throughout his entire career. Thanks to his work, the federally funded TRiO Programs have expanded by nearly 400% and currently serve more than 872,000 students at 1,200 colleges and universities. He began his career on the History faculty at Marquette University in Milwaukee and was named the Director of the Educational Opportunity Program in 1969. He relocated to Washington, D.C. in 1986 to serve as President of the Council for Opportunity in Education until October 2013. He is married and has four children.

He was the first president of the Mid-America Association of Educational Opportunity Program Personnel (MAEOPP) in 1974 and he was the recipient of the Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP) Champions of Access and Success Award in 2013. Dr. Mitchem has been a featured guest speaker at various conferences and commencement programs and he has been awarded Honorary Doctorates from eleven universities: CUNY-Lehman College in New York; DePaul University; University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana; University of Liverpool, England, Marquette University; Marycrest College; University of Massachusetts at Boston; Lewis University; St. Joseph University in Philadelphia; St. Louis University; and SUNY Buffalo State.

Participant 10: Ms. Rosalind Purnell

I was referred to Rosalind Purnell from Mrs. Allestine Radix, (Participant #8). During our interview, she told me that she would contact her on my behalf and ask if it

was permissible for me to contact her directly. Mrs. Radix called me a few days later and gave me Mrs. Purnell's home telephone number and we proceeded from that point.

The first born of Mr. and Mrs. Silas Purnell and the eldest of four siblings in a family who moved into the Dearborn Homes in the early 1950s, Mrs. Rosalind Purnell attended Ambrose E. Burnside Elementary school and later graduated from John Marshall Harlan High School. In 1965, she matriculated into college attended Illinois Wesleyan University and studied nursing. Later she began working for the airlines including: Northwest Orient, Detroit Metro, Delta, Chicago O'Hare and Chicago Midway and retired in 2007 after 40 years of service.

Ms. Purnell enjoys reading and travel visiting several places throughout the world including: Africa, Asia, Caribbean, Europe, and Mexico. She began attending Trinity United Church of Christ year ago under the leadership of Pastor Jeremiah A. Wright, Jr. and currently still attends under the leadership of Pastor Otis Moss III. She describes the church ministry and agenda as community minded as their outreach and service extends far beyond the four walls of the physical church.

Participant 11: Dr. William W. Sullivan

Dr. William Sullivan was referred to me by Dean Michael Jeffries (Participant # 1) during our second interview. A few weeks following our interview Dean Jeffries sent me a list of several contacts who either worked directly with Silas Purnell, in Student Affairs, or was a student of his. The list he sent included emails and telephone contact information including for Dr. Sullivan.

Dr. William W. Sullivan was born and raised on the west side of Chicago and was a high school football player at Farragut High School. Afterwards he attended Wilson

College [which is now named Kennedy- King College] a city college located in Chicago's Englewood community. He pursued his education beyond Chicago and later earned his Ph.D. in Education, Curriculum and Instruction from the University of Utah. An alumnus of a Talent Search project in Chicago, Illinois, he has been a TRiO professional since the early 1970s and has directed the TRiO, GEAR UP and equity programs at University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV) since 1978. Dr. Sullivan has extensive curriculum and program development experience as well as faculty teaching experience. He currently serves as the Associate Vice President for Retention and Outreach and the Executive Director for the Center for Academic Enrichment and Outreach (CAEO) at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV). Dr. Sullivan is responsible for the administrative leadership and is the chief spokesperson for the Center. He is responsible for ensuring an academic culture that is amenable to members of disadvantaged or high-risk populations, as well as overseeing approximately nineteen Federal TRiO and GEAR UP programs.

Participant 12: Officer Thomas L. Kidd

Thomas Kidd currently serves as a Police Officer for the Chicago Police Department (CPD). He has worked in various units and areas in the city of Chicago for approximately 18 years. Prior to working with the CPD, he worked as a Mental Health Counselor at Rush Presbyterian Hospital and as a Crisis Intervention Manager where amongst many duties, he instructed staff on techniques to reduce the potential outbreaks of aggressive behaviors. These roles prepared Kidd to be very successful as a Police Officer, in which he has led data based trainings and obtained training in terrorism, counseling and problem solving.

Kidd grew up with both parents in the home where his father pastored for 37 years. His parents were career oriented and family focused. Although he grew up in a very grounded home, he started working at age 14, learned to be independent at 17 and focused on his family's overall success where he worked two or three jobs to support himself and his siblings. He attended Tennessee State University, but returned home to help his sister through school. He later went to South Suburban Community College and obtained an Associates Degree in Mental Health. Shortly after, he attended Governor's State and while there he met Silas Purnell who advised him of how to find financial resources and best navigate through school. Kidd graduated from South Suburban with a Bachelors in Psychology in 1992 and later graduated magna cum laude with a Bachelors Degree in Computer Information Systems in 2012 from DeVry University. His academic success encouraged his wife and her siblings to go back to school, in which she obtained a Bachelors Degree and later a Masters Degree.

Kidd has received many honorable distinctions that include, but not limited to honorable mention awards for his services rendered in the line of duty; letters of recognition from past and present CPD Superintendents; and honor awards from the Chicago Board of Education. He is actively involved in Freemasonry and a member of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc. Above all of his successes, he continues to maintain his family focused upbringing and is a very proud husband and father. He is married to his wife, Cecilia, and they have a daughter, Maiya, and a son, Cameron.

Participant 13: Mrs. Cassiette West-Williams

Mrs. Cassiette West-Williams will enter her 26th year as a secondary school educator, thanks to the guidance and assistance of Silas Purnell. Mr. Purnell worked with

her mother, Madeline Boney West, who was a single parent of three children, to ensure that her entire household would earn college degrees. All three children did march across several college stages and went on to educate other inner city youth. Cassiette is a native born Chicagoan who graduated from Concordia College (Moorhead, MN), the University of Missouri-Columbia's School of Journalism with a Master's Degree in print journalism and a second Master's degree from The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in secondary education. Cassiette's parents were Chicago Public School teachers and lovers of art, culture, music and African American history. Cassiette grew up on the south side of Chicago, often listening to the stories that her mother shared about marching with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. It was implied that Cassiette would inherit the family's responsibility for carrying on public service and working for civil rights. She is a Golden Apple Award recipient as a teacher, a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated, and a member of the Faith Community of Saint Sabina church. She currently still instructs students and serves daily as a foot soldier in the public school setting. One day, she plans to see her grandson, Jordan-Amman, graduate from the University of Illinois and carry on the educational and public service legacy of his family.

Conclusion

This concludes the profiles of the participants in this dissertation study. The purpose of the content was to introduce the participants in this study to the readers and to share information about them, how they were connected to the subject of this research, and how as a researcher I could connect with them. Chapter 5 is the next section of this paper and it contains the data finding and themes that emerged from this research project.

Chapter 5

Findings

This chapter presents the findings and data collected from 13 participants during 15 interviews conducted for this research study. These data lend insight to the participants' experiences, knowledge, and perspectives regarding Silas Purnell and his work in contributing to access to higher education and supporting the matriculation of African American students into college. Between August of 2015 and March of 2016, 13 participants who all opted to be identified were interviewed and the information gained through the data collected during those interviews is reported in this chapter.

Interview Data

One of the primary objectives of this study was to explore and discover the practices and protocols employed by Silas Purnell, which contributed to his levels of success in contributing to the matriculation of African American students into higher education. The primary research questions and corresponding guiding questions which were included in Chapter 1 and utilized during the interviews to gain further understanding of the work of Silas Purnell. The findings shared in this chapter are comprised of data received during the conducting of in- person and telephone interviews in addition to email correspondence with individuals who were directly or indirectly connected to or familiar with Silas Purnell and his work with Ada S. McKinley Community Services, Inc. TRiO Educational Talent Search Program. Specific details for each interview including the date, location, type, and length of the interview are listed below.

Organization of Themes and Findings

After interviews were conducted and recorded, the data collected were transcribed via three different transcription services. The following steps were the theme coding and analysis of the data. There was a wealth of information and insights shared during the interviews and data collection process. Organizing and narrowing data into themes was the most significant challenge for this project. After extensive reflection and review, I identified and organized the information findings into six main themes with corresponding sub-categories that include further insights gained from the research participants via interview and supplementary literature about my research subject. This study will present the bulk of the findings through the following six primary recurring themes that emerged from the data set. They are:

Silas Purnell...

1. was a trusted soul and regarded in his community as a liaison and expert resource for college
2. established and maximized mentoring relationships with his students and professional relationships with college and university staff, administrators, and other resources
3. was closely connected to Chicago; understood the college institutional climate and was culturally competent
4. identified students' potential for success and appropriately matched students to programs; and facilitated access into higher education to many
5. was a staunch advocate and champion for African American students from Chicago; and committed to placing them into new environments.
6. was respected by his colleagues and held them to high standards in their service to students.

Theme 1:

Silas Purnell was a trusted soul, regarded in his community as a liaison and expert resource for college application and admission

I like to work with students nobody else wants. I don't believe in making them jump through hoops to get into college but in making a path for them." –Silas Purnell

Historically and culturally marginalized communities throughout the world and in particular, people of color within America have had to adapt and create their own cultural positions and roles within the structure of their communities (Dillard, 2000). These needs emerged for various reasons including safety and security and for collective progression and community (Boykin, 2004) development. The African proverb referenced under this heading refers to the recognition and understanding that for the development of children and families and greater good of everyone in the village or society, then all citizens therein have a role to play. Each role or duty in relation to the larger group is important and necessary for the others to be complete similar to individual pieces in a puzzle or single equipment parts of an automobile. For a complete picture and full assembly, each role or part is critical for the full functioning of that entity. Similarly is the role of the ‘trusted soul’ within communities of color (Hilliard, 2001; King, 1995).

Theme 1 in Context

At some point in his career with Ada S. McKinley Community Services, Inc. and its TRIO Educational Talent Search Program, Silas Purnell eventually became a household name within the African American community in Chicago. Operating in the South Side’s Bronzeville community situated in the basement of the Dearborn Homes housing project, Purnell became the contact person and the ‘go-to guy’ if you had a child

or a student who was African American and had the determination and desire to attend college. Many included families with little to no money for college.

The ‘trusted’ aspect in this role was also critical because not only are you dealing with and working with individuals’ children, but also there was extensive sensitive and personal information including financial documentation and history that should not be trusted with simply anyone. In most situations, especially when a student and their families could not afford the tuition, it was a necessity to share income and personal family information. I am well aware from various life experiences and interactions especially when you work with people who rely on governmental programs and financial assistance they tend to be very careful and protective about disclosing their personal information. Purnell and his Ada S. McKinley TRiO Educational Talent Search team became recognized and identified as ‘trusted souls’ who could be relied on for integrity in dealings with people, their personal information, and reaching the goal of placing students into college.

Familiar with Purnell’s work, Professor Trent emphasized that there had to be a lot of trust flowing in different directions. Indeed, parents, families, and students had to be able to trust Purnell and submit to his guidance and advisement to leave their familiar surroundings. On the other hand, universities, institutions, and administrators also had to confidently trust Purnell’s word and assessment of the students he suggested. In turn, Purnell who was implicit about his ‘kids’ being cared for had to trust that those schools would take care of his students and provide the necessary resources and support for them to be successful. “Both of those pieces were essential to have the kinds of accomplishments that he had” (W. Trent, personal communication, February 19, 2018).

Findings

Reflections from Allestine Radix

Research participant, Allestine Radix shared her early interaction as an aspiring college freshman with Purnell who placed her into one of the Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) in Oklahoma. “I had never been out of Chicago before in my life..... and he said ‘go home to pack... and I [will] be back to pick you up to take you to the train station.” And she also added, “my mother was a single Mom on welfare”. She shared the account of how Purnell came upstairs to retrieve her and her trunk with her items for transport and told her mother to “say [her] goodbyes at the curb” and despite her mother being “thoroughly upset”, “she did as has been requested of her.

She said goodbyes, closed the door and he took me [to the train station]”. Radix, later elaborated on Purnell’s directive and urging to many parents to not escort their children who were placed in colleges outside of Chicago too close to where they will be attending school because it would make the departure more challenging and increase the chances of the student and parent in changing their mind. Purnell’s parting words at the train station to her was “I’ll see you in a couple of weeks” to which he obliged.

Reflections from Dr. William Sullivan

Another research participant, Dr. William Sullivan was a student and mentee to Purnell who he credits as the person who directed him into the path of higher education that eventually led to him becoming a scholar, doctoral recipient, and practitioner in the field of Student Affairs. During our interview, I inquired about his experience with Purnell working with his family and the following dialogue emerged:

Interviewer: You said before he sent you to Wilson College [which is now Kennedy-King College] he talked to you and... your mom about your potential. Can you recall what was that conversation like with your mom? ...[Why was] your mother... willing to work with him?... I also [want to] figure out how he was able to work with families. If you're working with students, obviously you [have to] work with their parents to get their buy-in to send them around the United States to go to school. So can you give me a little insight about that?

Dr. Sullivan: My mother had gone to college and my father did not finish high school. My father was a boxer and that's the life he made. My mother knew there was a better life for her children and so in our family, we were always torn into two different families in one. And so my mother understood Mr. Purnell more than I ever did. And finally, she had to convince me to do what he [said].

Interviewer: Okay. Alright. So now, you said something else. You said two hard things were one, to get parents to reveal their income and then two, to get the students to leave Chicago. Why was it so challenging to get the parents to reveal that income for their FAFSA?

Dr. Sullivan: Because most parents don't trust anything. They don't trust the system. They don't trust anything... It's a level of trust that they [must] have. (W. Sullivan, personal communication, February 24, 2016).

Reflections from Rosalind Purnell

Research participant, Rosalind Purnell, the eldest daughter of Purnell was asked about his connection with the parents of the youth he worked with and "how was he able to navigate those relationships?" Her response was:

Many of them didn't have the money to send these kids to school. So they were happy that their child was going to get a chance to go to college you know... Very few of them fought in sending them away and in fact I think

many of the kids were hoping they would fight. (R. Purnell, personal communication, February 22, 2016)

Ms. Purnell shared comments about the overwhelmingly small percentages of Black faces at many of these institutions: “you would have to consider that some of these places... in the beginning had 1400 students and 14 of them are Black” and added that her school only had seven Black students while she attended. She proceeded to comment about the level of culture shock many students endured at certain institutions and how Purnell and his staff were consistent in their efforts to “always [follow] up on the kids just to make sure they were doing ok.” (R. Purnell, personal communication, February 22, 2016).

Reflections from Thomas Kidd

The final research participant, Kidd provided additional insight as a young person who did not grow up in the city of Chicago and would not have been categorized or identified as a traditional low-income or at-risk student. He shared that despite many assumptions it was not true for his situation that “because you come from a middle-class background you have all the resources available to you to be able to succeed”. He explained some of his family dynamics and that he was not provided with sufficient resources or preparation to attend a 4-year college or university after graduating from high school, sharing:

I had to deal with [many things] on my own and ... I grew up with my grandparents... and even though I came out of high school in the top 10% but I missed out on scholarships because I had nobody at a young age [or] parent involvement to go see what was necessary to be done to get these scholarships so I ended up in a community college and ... [there] a guy

mentioned... Silas [Purnell]. (T. Kidd, personal communication, March 12, 2016).

He proceeded to share his story of how he ‘took it upon himself’ at age 17 or 18 to drive from his home in Markham, a south suburb about 30 minutes away to see Purnell in the Dearborns and “parked probably about 15 blocks away and walked over there” for safety reasons. He provided details about his first trip to meet with Purnell:

I'm only about 17 to 18 years old [and went] to go talk to him about options and scholarships [because] I didn't have any money for school, so I [went] there and [sat] in the office, I [filled] out the paperwork, I [went to] talk to him and... I swear it was probably the best information I ever got in the world. He told me ... you live in a household where both parents work and they make good money but they are not contributing to [your education] and you're working on your own. He said [the] main thing they need to do at this point for you, so that you can continue growing, is to stop claiming you [on their taxes].... From there he talked to me from that point on [about] the paperwork and grants that would be available for me based on [my] GPA... I sat there with a pad and took notes on everything and I left from him with an abundance of information. (T. Kidd, personal communication, March 12, 2016).

Kidd shared additional details of the resource and mentor Purnell proved to be in contributing to his understanding of how to navigate the college system through maximizing and cultivating professional relationships on campus and learning how to access resources. His testimony is further supports the notion that Purnell’s reputation as someone who could help spread beyond the limits of Chicago.

Reflections from Michael Jeffries

Participant Jeffries spoke about some of the early challenges he faced in Student Affairs as a young professional working to attract students and Chicago Public School staff to the institution he worked with. They reportedly did not have a positive reputation among the Chicago urban community. He shared the effort to make “the connections at the high schools and [for] the first group of Principal [Award] Scholars” to be identified and successfully recruited, they first had to “gain the confidence of the high school counselors”. He explained that Purnell became the bridge and voice of support between his institution and school staff and gatekeepers in Chicago because “they trusted Si” and knew he had the best interests of their students in mind. (M. Jeffries, personal communication, November 3, 2015). He shared some details of the efforts that Purnell made as a liaison to provide the necessary resources and strategy to some of the local high school administrations for increased college preparation so more students of color would be better positioned and eligible to meet the established admissions criteria.

Purnell cared for the people he served and those that knew him knew he cared because of his dedication and commitment to help transform lives, which became evident over the years. Consequently, affirmation about Purnell being trustworthy and highly regarded for integrity-were common. On the other hand, many other leaders, politicians, administrators, and people in power were guilty of not being true to their word and fulfilling promises made to the community. A good mentor and friend once told me “integrity is what you do when no one is looking” (J. Mosley, personal communication, August 17, 2006). Unfortunately, many suffer from a lack of integrity and its display. As a result, understandably, many concerned citizens including: parents and teachers become

leery and suspicious of the motives and intentions of some. Situations, societies and communities are fortunate to have individuals who are identified, embraced, and accepted as ‘trusted souls’ to those around them. To the city of Chicago, from its South Side and beyond, Purnell was the soul that others could trust and depend on.

Reflections from Shelley, Sullivan, and Hannah

Shelley highlighted the fact that for Purnell “his primary focus was in Chicago. He loved that city.” (C. Shelley, personal communication, November 4, 2015). During his interview, Sullivan added, he was “a strong advocate for access to education and he cared about low income kids. He truly cared. He didn’t treat none of us dirty or like a disease or something. He truly cared.” (W. Sullivan, personal communication, February 24, 2016).

While discussing Purnell personality, approach and reputation with helping families from the community and ushering young people into unfamiliar, yet often promising environments onto the path of higher education, Hannah emphatically elaborated further:

So he's the type, "I'm [going to] grab you, I'm [going to] help you, and then I'm [going to] release you. I'm [going to] a grab you, I'm [going to] help you, and then I'm [going to] release you. And I'm [going to] trust that I released you into the good...into the right hands... I know for a fact that it was like a tunnel or the avenue that everyone used that needed help. If it came [to] filling out your financial aid papers, for those whose grades were awesome he was the connection for getting you scholarships. He was the man! (J. Hannah, personal communication, October 28, 2015).

Reflections from Cassiette West-Williams

The following dialogue taken from one of the interviews (C. West-Williams, personal communication, March 26, 2016) conveys the sentiments of Purnell’s

reputation, stature, and the expectations of others about him and his work in the community:

Interviewer: What you know of him from back then... how would you describe [him]? What was his reputation in the field? How was he known?

West-Williams: Someone who you could turn to in the community who would assist you. If you – if you came correct to him... and even if you came with a 1.1 [GPA], but you had the zeal and the desire-- If you believed in education and you knew that you needed a degree, he would help you... I haven't heard of anyone in my generation who was turned away. I don't know of anyone that he could not find any money for. It might not be a University of Illinois or a Harvard but, you know, he knew about – like I said, he could pick up the phone, and the people on the other end of the phone... a little college in the middle of Nevada... middle of Utah. If they were willing to pay for you to come...you could come, you could get some bus fare and go. If you really believed in your education, you could go. I haven't met anyone who did not – who went there to him, from my generation, and he turned down or turned away.

Theme 2

Silas Purnell established and maximized mentoring relationships with his students and professional relationships with college and university staff, administrators, and other resources to support student admission and transition into higher education

“The most important part of our business is advocacy, trying to speak for kids in the community. I work with anybody in schools; admissions, financial aid, board members, sometimes security guards, anybody who can help get a kid in school.”-- Silas Purnell

Theme in Context

Purnell was conscious of the importance of college bound African American students, especially low-income and first-generation students having the necessary support and people in their corner to believe in them; guide them through the steps to college. In a world and age of more advanced technology we seem to have significantly more methods and options of enhanced communication. However, we communicate socially and connect on a much less intimate and more surface level basis.

During the 1960's and 1970's, options such as text messaging, electronic mail (e-mail), Skype, social media and other forms of communication were not an option. Instead, good old fashion conversation, sit down talks, and phone calls were the norm. Purnell was gifted and natural in his tenacity to reach out to key people in strategic positions. Reportedly he connected with and worked with countless numbers of university and college presidents, chancellors, admission officers, counselors, and administrators. In my early pre-research stages, before conducting my official interviews and speaking with faculty advisors, other administrators, and people who have worked in student affairs or higher education for over 20 years, I was continually reminded about Purnell and the 'legend' he had become. One of the more outstanding and recurring

comments was that he was able to literally pick up the phone and call an administrator or admissions personnel regarding students' matriculation. He was effective in getting students he worked with and advocated for immediate acceptance and funding resources as well. Prior to those phone calls, many of those students' and their families had a limited trajectory of resources, however after Purnell communicated with college institutional staff and faculty members, many students' lives potentially forever changed. Indeed, there was work, time, and efforts invested in establishing, building, and maintaining these relationships with key people on campuses across the globe. This network allowed pipelines to be emerge which would in turn, become the conduit to allow thousands of Chicago students to transition into university and college campuses.

Findings

Reflections from Allestine Radix

Participant, Allestine Radix recalled the conversation with her mother and Purnell when he picked her up from home in Chicago to take her to the train station to leave for college in Oklahoma. His final words to her at the train station were, "I'll see you in a couple of weeks." She joked about the seemingly far-fetched notion of seeing him as soon as she had no plans of returning home that soon. She proceeded to share that indeed only a few weeks later a residence hall staff member in her dorm knocked on her door and announced "you have a have a visitor" and went downstairs to find seated in the lounge—Mr. Silas Purnell, proclaiming *in—fact* "that's how he was-- he checked on his students." Ms. Radix who evolved from being a student placed into college by Purnell into eventually a trusted, long-time administrative assistant and colleague who proudly

proclaimed “*I am one of his success stories*....and “that’s how I came to do what I do --- helping students --- students have to have a sense of direction....and instructions as to how to go about doing it” (A. Radix, personal communication, February 8, 2016).

Lending further insight to how Purnell followed up and cared for many students he sent away to college he may have been initially ‘skittish’ when they left for college because:

A lot of them have never been away before in their life. So this experience may not [have] sit well with them [initially]. Purnell, freshman year would get on the road and would drive to all schools in the south [in that] beat up station wagon ... And visit the schools, visit the instructors, [and] visit the administrators. They knew him and he knew them... He could dial [and]... get on the phone [and say] ‘here I got a kid ... what can you do for him?’ (A. Radix, personal communication, February 8, 2016).

Specifically referencing conversations where Purnell advocated for students who did not meet the optimally prescribed academic qualifications of the institution or program, but based on Purnell’s recommendation for the student.

By the time he finished talking to the administrator, this kid had been accepted over the phone with no records, only on Purnell’s word. They would accept them and they [would] work with the kid and monitor their progress while they were on campus. He dealt with many people and he built fantastic relationships. (A. Radix, personal communication, February 8, 2016).

Reflections from Rosalind Purnell

Research participant, Ms. Rosalind Purnell commented about the continually expanding network of students who were placed in institutions that were often situated in environments unfamiliar to the students sent there by Purnell. Those students were

prompted and expected in turn to support new incoming students and their transition onto the campus. Ms. Purnell shared:

If he had a student that was already there in that particular school he would get in touch with that student and [say], ‘ok, so and so is coming on such and such flight on this day, look out for them’. She continued with a specific example, “I remember my sister being in school and they called her to go find two students who hadn’t checked in with their parents. They had been there and now their parents couldn’t reach them.... [but] she and her buddy went out, [and] they found them. (R. Purnell, personal communication, February 22, 2016).

Regarding Purnell and his team from Ada S. McKinley, “they always followed up on the kids just to make sure that they were doing ok”. She went on to explain the buddy system that was created for Purnell’s students who had already arrived on campus to help incoming new students explaining, “if he had a student that was already there in that particular school, he would get in touch with that student” and said, “ok, so and so is coming on such and such flight on this day, look out for them”. She remembered and reported when her own sister was away and college and “they called her to go find 2 students who hadn’t checked in with their parents. They had been there and now their parents couldn’t reach them. She and her buddy went out, they found them already arrived (R. Purnell, personal communication, February 22, 2016).

Reflections from Dr. William Sullivan

Dr. Sullivan referenced how he eventually became a recruiter for students of color for his alma mater, the University of Utah reporting that he became the main pipeline for Purnell, “he had one of me at different universities all over the country... he knew how to pick that phone up, make a phone call and [say] ‘hey, I got so and so here” (W. Sullivan,

personal communication, February 24, 2016). As a result of Purnell's continual mentorship and activeness in Dr. Sullivan's life, they developed and maintained a rich mentorship and professional working relationship. During the latter part of our interview as Sullivan discussed the relationship between his mentor, Purnell and the time span between him going away to school where he earned a Bachelors, Masters, and a Ph.D., eventually becoming a colleague of Purnell's. He recounted various memories including the emphasis that from the time they initially connected until his death,

I never ever lost connection with Mr. Purnell. I stayed connected to him. I talked to that man. Even when I was at Wilson, or Kennedy-King, I [would] still [visit] back in his office over there in [the] Dearborns... down in the basement... [I] stayed in touch always. (W. Sullivan, personal communication, February 24, 2016).

Reflections from Dr. James Anderson

Purnell established, utilized, and maximized his professional and personal relationships. During the interview with Dr. Anderson after he listed some colleges that Purnell placed students, the follow up question of "within those schools [do] you think he worked with particular programs or just schools in general? Anderson replied, "I think Silas Purnell had contacts in the admissions [office] ... That's where his primary contacts were, when he picked up a phone and called someone he was calling someone in the admissions that could help get his kids in" (J. Anderson, personal communication, November 18, 2016).

Reflections from Kenneth Dunkin

Participant, Dunkin was asked, "based on your understanding and perspective what was [Purnell's] strategy and his techniques [and how was he so] effective in placing students into schools?" He responded,

All I know is that he was the guy that would literally pick up the telephone to a director of admissions. He had that rapport. That's probably what his real influence was. He pretty much knew any and every director. So if you were a Black director, or worked in that admissions department... he just picked up the phone and it was done. (K. Dunkin, personal communication, December 14, 2015).

He mentioned his alma mater, the prestigious Morehouse College, as one of the institutions Purnell could contact to work with his students. "He had been doing that stuff since the 60's so... he knew who was new.... that was just what he did, and he was excellent!" (K. Dunkin, personal communication, December 14, 2015).

Reflections from Allestine Radix

Radix shared an account of conversations from the beginning of his career in student services that Purnell had with random youth on the street. As he inquired them about future plans and interest to attend college, "some of them took an advantage of the opportunity to do it", we "got them in school" and paid for [their] transportation to school". She discussed the monetary resources for services yielded by Purnell for the purposes of supporting youth to college.

We had a fund set up ... [where]... he had people that gave him money specifically for this fund... We had a travel agency that we dealt with who would get the tickets. We had our health center that gave them their medical exams free of charge. This was the kind of person Si was. He would go in and say 'I want to talk to the head person and they said 'oh yes, but who are you?' 'Well, I am Silas Purnell; I want to talk to the head person' and by the time he had finished speaking with the head person he had everything that he went in there to get... services for his students... [including] dental [services] because you know during the days when we went to school you had to have all [of] that before you went to

campus. He did all that. He just was a kind of person who when he set his mind to something-- he did it. (A. Radix, personal communication, February 8, 2016).

Reflections from John F. Hannah

During Pastor Hannah's interview as he recounted his meetings with Purnell and his understanding of the vast work with students seeking college, he commented about how Purnell worked with all manners of students from the city to suburbs and anyone who came to visit him and how "he had connections to get those [students] whose grades were amazing.... scholarships" recounting how "this man had corporate connections". He mentioned how resources and advisement from Purnell led to him receiving a scholarship during his junior year at Alabama State University. "Everywhere, from Yale to Harvard. He didn't just deal with HBC's. That man had connections everywhere around the world!" (J. Hannah, personal communication, October 28, 2015).

Reflections from Cassette West-Williams

Veteran educator, West-Williams recounted some of her memories both as a high school student and recent college graduate working with Purnell. She shared stories of her early meetings with Purnell and her mother who worked in Chicago Public Schools system and was familiar with Purnell's work. She described her initial meetings where she shared her status, an honor student at Hyde Park High School and preferred top choices for college. Her first choice was the University of Wisconsin-Madison and despite being admitted there and other schools including Howard University and Xavier she was not offered near enough scholarship or grant funds to attend. During the consultation with Purnell she received encouragement and re-direction to attend Concordia College in Moorhead, Minnesota where she would receive a full-ride at his bequest. After successfully completing her undergraduate studies she returned to visit

Purnell to discuss her applying to attend graduate school. West-Williams reflected on the layout and operations in Purnell's basement office location as she recalled:

He was proud of me for graduating in four years. And it just seemed like he picked up the phone – that's another thing. You know, I mean, there were no cell phones and all of that, but... he could pick up a phone and call somebody or yell over to the next cubicle, [and say] hey, call Alabama State. What's going on at the University of Mississippi? Or – he could pick up the phone, and these people were really on the phone. It wasn't like, you know, where teleprompters and that kind of thing going on. He could pick up the phone and call whoever he needed to call about whatever school you were trying to get into. And it wasn't – you know, none of this was fake. It was very clear. He knew what he was doing and who he was calling, and the people knew him on the other end of the phone. (C. West-Williams, personal communication, March 26, 2017).

Reflections from Arnold Mitchem

Educational leader and pioneer, Dr. Mitchem shared a memory with some humorous moments from 1975 of a time spent with Purnell while they attended a conference near Snowmass Village, Colorado. Mitchem, Purnell and another colleague “took a ride around the mountains one day. We went over a pass called Independence Pass, 11,000 miles way up” (A. Mitchem, personal communication, February 22, 2016). While driving, they saw a sign for a nearby school, which was most likely the institution now called Colorado Mountain College.

Si said, “Mitch, Mitch. Stop.” So I stopped. He got out of the car. Walked about two blocks up a road to this small college in an admissions office, went in and just was unannounced. [Purnell] met with the admissions director and asked him was he interested in any black students. And the man looked at him and said, “Well, yeah.” He said, “If they can adapt to this, terrain” (A. Mitchem, personal communication, February 22, 2016).

He recalled the exchange and added that the admissions director stated clearly that “this is mountain boots and snow and skiing” weather and anyone interested in attending and relocating there should be well aware and up to the challenge of dealing with the extreme weather conditions, before extending a welcome for Purnell’s students to apply for admission, stating, “if they’re ready for Freddy, we’re ready for them” (A. Mitchem, personal communication, February 22, 2016).

So that’s how Si [Silas Purnell] would open doors and have contacts all over the United States. Wherever he was going he was trying to convince a college admissions officer to accept the Black student or a number of Black students; and every Black student he met, he was trying to convince them to go to college somewhere. And he also worked hard at these colleges to arrange for financial aid for these kids. (A. Mitchem, personal communication, February 22, 2016).

In addition to that school in Colorado that they visited together for the first time together, other schools that Mitchem recalled Purnell having connections to and working with included: Rocky Mountain College, Tuskegee University, Fisk University, University of Alabama, Alabama A&M, Rust College, Xavier University, Southern University, Florida A & M and the University of Minnesota. He also added Purnell “would take a busload of black kids up to the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh or Eau Claire or Stevens Point” and that he had relationships with “some of the state colleges in Wisconsin” (A. Mitchem, personal communication February 22, 2016).

Reflections from Bernard Clay

When asked about the strategy and techniques of Purnell and how he built and maximized relationships to increase college access for his constituents, Clay explained that similar to Purnell and the period between the 1960s and 1990s simply was a very

“different time” which had an extended roster of individuals who “were committed to helping people” and “honestly seeing students get to” and through college. Clay worked with Purnell as a contemporary and served students predominantly from the Chicago’s west side communities where his site was. He confirmed some of the institutions and areas Purnell worked with which included: several Liberal Arts Colleges, state schools, colleges in Missouri, North Dakota, South Dakota State, a school in Appleton, Wisconsin, and the University of Minnesota in Morris. He discussed how they shared resources and contact information to further build relationships with people, including corporate vice-presidents to bank managers who could further contribute to their goals of supporting and sponsoring students’ college placement. This network that Purnell maximized included many people who were friends of the programs that fostered and contributed to the mission of getting Black students into college (B. Clay, personal communication, February 8, 2016).

Reflections from Michael Jeffries

Michael Jeffries is a veteran Student Affairs administrator who has worked with thousands of college students and spent significant time serving populations of students of color who were often first-generation and low-income. He reported that between 1960s and 1980s, Purnell was known for “bringing busloads of students to Eastern [Illinois University]” and the first time he knew about was 1969. He explained how many of those students came from schools from Chicago’s South Side and through Purnell’s efforts the African American population of students eventually expanded greatly from predominantly only athletes to a significant number on campus comparatively. Another University of Illinois scholar, LaTasha Nesbitt, corroborated the insight from Jeffries and

included a portion about Purnell who she identified as an “Educational Advancer” and trained pioneer who “would assist many students in realizing their dreams to attend, not only at HBCUs but PWIs as well” and how he “served a major role in advancing and transforming the lives of everyday, mediocre students into stellar community activists, entrepreneurs, scholars and physicians” (L. Nesbitt, 2014, pp. 12-13).

Black student enrollment at Eastern Illinois University

In her 2014 dissertation, entitled *We Too Have a History: African American Student Experiences at Eastern Illinois University, 1967-1982* she shared:

The students he mentored have gone on to enroll in over 200 colleges and universities throughout the country, half of those students went on to obtain graduate and professional degrees. Aside from potential students, many of the relationships he fostered were with institutions in the state of Illinois. Many of his best contacts are at little-known, predominantly white institutions that otherwise would have had difficulties recruiting in Black high schools. Purnell was probably one of the most known people in terms of getting students in schools across the Midwest as well as those institutions across the nation. Purnell worked out of his basement in the infamous projects of Chicago. His rapport with key individuals at various colleges and universities allowed him to turn the dream of educational advancement into a reality. He would plead the cases of young people to the admissions offices and presidents and many Black students would be given a chance to advance their dream of a college life. (Nesbitt, 2014).

Nesbitt reported interview content from one of her “research participants, Elmer Pullen who came to Eastern in 1967 and later committed 32 years as a financial officer at Eastern” and his recollections on “the influence of Mr. Purnell: I went to a meeting down in Atlanta and Si was down there, and he talked and talked and his point was if we can educate, then we don’t need to incarcerate and it’s much, much cheaper to educate than

incarcerate”. Pullen continued “Si knew, once you got them in there, the university was going to figure out, some kind of way to get them some kind of money”. Pullen continued and shared:

I thought of lot of Si, he helped a lot of students. At one time, our Vice President of Student Affairs, his name was Glenn Williams at the time if we were in need of something, he would call Si. Whether it be in Springfield or whatever. He had an excellent relationship with Si Purnell. So, I think Si has probably touched more lives in state schools in Illinois... He sent kids to Iowa, Michigan, all over the country! He did a good job with very little resources. (Nesbitt, 2014).

It was reported that part of the conversation of Purnell’s conversation was, "we're looking for places [colleges and universities] that are willing to accommodate our kids, places that we can cut a deal with". According to Nesbitt’s study, a friend and colleague of Purnell, Johnetta Jones, Director of Minority Affairs at Eastern Illinois University, felt that in Purnell’s ability, consistency, and track record with sending young people capable of success in college to appropriate institutions indeed, “he [had] it right” and truly, he “impacted the live of students at Eastern [Illinois University] and beyond” (Nesbitt, 2014).

Reflections from Michael Jeffries

Jeffries spoke further and in greater detail about the work and influence of Purnell who he described as mentor, colleague, and friend that he initially met at a professional organizational meeting for Students Affairs staff. He expressed how Purnell had globally widespread connections and regarding his local student population “he was involved nationally in getting students in colleges and universities more than anybody in the nation that we knew of” (M. Jeffries, personal communication, November 3, 2015).

He continued to speak about Purnell's affinity to operate outside of standard protocol as "he dealt directly with a lot of presidents" from colleges and universities. Jeffries reflected on more contemporary times and the rarity for a Student Affairs personnel to have direct access to high-level university leaders and college administrators but to his credit, "that's what Si did, he made [it] simple and it was effective... the way he dealt with people. Everybody knew him". Responding to a follow up question about how Purnell was able to leverage relationships with college presidents, his response was that Purnell "was the pied piper in that way" and "his real base of support was Chicago Public Schools". He explained that Purnell worked in the city of Chicago and was a 'gate-keeper' in many ways to the local schools and students, and historically Chicago boasts one of the largest and consistent metropolitan populations of African American high school students who are prepared and eligible to attend college. For these reasons among many others, "a lot of political people wanted to connect with him" (M. Jeffries, personal communication, November 3, 2015).

Reflections from Venise Hardy

Research participant, Venise Hardy who currently serves in the role that Purnell held during his career with Ada S. McKinley shared some of the memories from her span of time learning from and working with Purnell, recounting:

I became a tutor and at the time Mr. Purnell had this idea about creating an early intervention component. He believed that if we intervened in the lives of 6th, 7th and 8th graders and introduced the idea of wanting to go to college very early, we could produce even greater results. And so he had this program; 6th – 8th grade but we thought the program was phenomenal. (V. Hardy, personal communication, December 15, 2015).

She continued and provided details including the facts that initially there were 30 students who participated and as it grew, they partnered with local institutions and they had classroom space free of charge during the summer “for these students to come and then we would have access to everything on the campus” including their computer labs (V. Hardy, personal communication, December 15, 2015).

Hardy pinpointed this time frame as the early to mid-90s and how after the first year of operation the program “went from having 30 students to 120 students”, followed by a waiting list of youth who sought to join the program. Around the same time as she initially only planned to be there for a few months while contemplating next steps and furthering her education and pursuing either graduate school or medical school during an exchange with her supervisor and mentor:

Mr. Purnell said to me, “why don't you give me a couple more months, I want you to be the coordinator of the early intervention program” that's the 6th-8th grade. Yea we already had a director but he said “I really need a coordinator” and then from there at 2 months' time he said “well, I think Venise its time”. The early intervention director was moving on and said “if you give me just another year, [12 more months of your time] I'm going to get you into graduate school. You won't have to pay. (V. Hardy, personal communication, December 15, 2015).

Moments later in the interview she confirmed, “true to his word I filled out a 1-page application, got into graduate school, got a scholarship; [the] National Lab Public Administrator's Award scholarship and after the 12 months [Purnell] said, ‘I think you should continue with this program.’” Hardy recalled Purnell telling her “you have built a relationship with students, you have built a relationship with these parents and it's impactful.” She proudly shared that the assignment, which was initially supposed to

occur for six months turned into a career of over 21 years because of the influence Purnell had. Hardy reflected about her educational and career path, “although we choose one thing for ourselves” at a certain point in life our direction shifts inadvertently towards our destiny and added that she believes the decision “to come into the office to be a part of Ada S. McKinley and this great work, was the step that I needed to take in terms of finding what my true purpose was”. Not long afterwards she was appointed as the Early Intervention Director of sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students. She recalled her time in this role and accomplishments which occurred in lieu of their departmental diligent work which would later include expanded partnerships with Chicago Public School sites which further contributed to a supplementary TRIO grant award of a second Talent Search program as their first program had limited funding and was already serving about 1,600 students. With the new TRIO grant award and program provisions, they received additional resources to serve more students and Hardy “became the director of that program once [they] were awarded by the [U.S.] Department of Education” (V. Hardy, personal communication, December 15, 2015).

In reply to questions about Purnell’s strategy and technique in supporting students’ admission into college, Hardy responded that in addition to his “care and the concern” for the young people he saw and chose to work with, to be able to effectively facilitate the notion into a reality, Purnell’s response to the ‘call of action’ he felt manifested through his efforts:

He started making phone calls and forging relationships on his own to these chancellors and vice chancellors and that was something that was unheard of in the ‘60s. You have this African American male approaching these, what was Caucasian presidents and vice presidents and after he got off the phone with them,

he had formed relationships such that they would say, “you know what-- we do need to be doing more to increase college access!” (V. Hardy, personal communication, December 15, 2015).

Hardy provided more in-depth insight about the content and caliber of Purnell’s conversational exchanges with school administrators in his aim to open doors to college for many poor Black students who had the potential to do well in college, and simply needed an opportunity.

He spoke to their level of education and wanted to see that others could participate in that process. He spoke to them and spoke to the core of those who chancellors and vice chancellors were, and it was beyond the boundaries of color, that genuine love of education and wanting everyone to, as many people as possible to participate in that process. So he formed those relationships. He would put those students in his car and he would drive them to those campuses, and it is why we have been so successful. It is forming those types of personal relationships with those key people, people in key positions at this colleges and universities. (V. Hardy, personal communication, December 15, 2015).

Theme 3

Silas Purnell was closely connected to Chicago; understood the college institutional climate and was culturally competent

“You don’t see too many Black people with degrees in jail. There must be a correlation between education and the ability to make an honest living.”-- Silas Purnell

Theme 3 in context

If one does not understand or is unaware of where certain students are from, their backgrounds and what they need to succeed, they can find themselves powerless in providing the necessary support and guidance to help them succeed. Purnell was far from that description as he was born, raised, and educated on the South Side of Chicago. Not only did he grow up there, he raised his family on the South Side, and for many years they lived in the same Chicago Housing Projects complex, the Dearborn Homes, where his Ada S. McKinley Community Services, Inc. TRIO Talent Search office was located. Although the South Side of Chicago is multi-dimensional in its demography and comprised of various ethnic groups from socio-economic statuses ranging from the upper echelon of affluence to the lowest depths of impoverishment; it seems that Purnell was drawn to serving low-income and first generation African American and Black youth. This matched the description of his own neighborhood and immediate community.

In my own collegiate journey, at times my fellow colleagues and I found ourselves in places of unfamiliarity, uncertainty and anxiety on our respective campuses and departments. I personally know many students of color, disadvantaged, and are underrepresented, especially those who attend Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) who arrive to new environments after being recruited and accepted, and during their first semester find themselves in need of resources, including financial and emotional support.

As a senior graduate student and staff member with the campus Office of Minority Student Affairs, I was assigned a caseload of students to which many were students of color, first-generation and low-income. I witnessed an alarming number of students across campus, noticeably many from the Chicagoland area, who were summarily dismissed from the university after only one semester due to unsatisfactory academic performance or voluntarily left school because of challenges adjusting to their new environment and some did not return. A commonality among these students and their lack of success was lost confidence or motivation stemming from not being connected to critical supplementary support services to help navigate the college campus and become competent in utilizing the available resources, including mentoring services.

After the 1980s and into the new millennium there were significantly more designated staff and programs launched and implemented, often housed with campus Student Affairs departments to provide student support to potential ‘at-risk students’ in need. It seems reasonable to assume that students accepted into well-established and premier institutions of higher learning, based on their test scores, overall student history, and past grades submitted are academically sound and intellectually solid and primed to succeed in college. However, if their psychological, social-emotional, and cultural state of being is not taken into consideration, there can easily be emerging issues which serve as barriers to their success, which otherwise may have been avoided.

This section focuses on Purnell as a practitioner and professional who was successful because in addition to understanding the varying institutional college and university climates; he was closely connected to the Chicago community and was culturally competent and aware of the needs of the populations of students and families

he served. Just after and possibly before leaving his job with Coca Cola, he first began volunteering and later helped to establish the Educational Services Division with Ada S. McKinley Community Services, Inc. Purnell was familiar with the communities he served and understood the needs of the people. He knew how to talk to his target population and their families and obtained their attention and respect. Due to his upbringing, strong community connections and determination to work with his community, he was very qualified to speak on behalf of the needs of his constituents. He knew that many of his students were from families residing in homes with parents, guardians, and/or close family members that were often unemployed, woefully uneducated, and on public assistance. Many of the students he served did not have someone tangible in their life to give them proper guidance to obtain a college education. Purnell inadvertently became that person.

Findings

During one interview, the response to the question of “how [were] you connected with Silas Purnell, what was your experience?” Dunkin responded:

In high school... and ultimately in city college, when I was a student at Harold Washington College he was...this was in the 80's...he was just the ‘go-to person’ for college, for opportunity to give people a sort of an exposure [to] non-traditional students. Too many of us were really falling through the cracks [and] not making a connection between our parents or people in our immediate family and school. So that was a needed resource for us. We’re talking about a person who built his reputation on trying to connect us with the outside world. So even though we hear about, read about, dreamed about... we really didn’t have the 123456 steps on making it a reality. (K. Dunkin, personal communication, December 14, 2015).

Reflections from James Anderson and Venise Hardy

Purnell understood Chicago and its geographical and demographical layout, which most likely further informed him in his ability to successfully work with his student population. In our interview, Anderson explained “that was part of what made him so successful-- he had a very, very realistic grasp of his environment and the kinds of families and kids he was working with” (Anderson, personal communication, November 18, 2015). Due to Purnell’s knowledge of the needs of his constituents, he understood the importance of planting seeds for obtaining a college education to students before entering high school. Current leader of Ada S. McKinley Community Services, Inc. Educational Services Division shared:

I became a tutor and at the time Mr. Purnell had this idea about creating an early intervention component. He believed that if we intervened in the lives of 6th, 7th and 8th graders and introduce the idea of wanting to go to college very early, then we could produce even greater results. And so he had this program; 6th through 8th grade but we thought the program was phenomenal. My friend and I and some of our colleagues [worked] there but we only had about 30 kids. It was absolutely free. (V. Hardy, personal communication, December 15, 2015).

She mentioned the working relationships they established with local schools including: Kennedy-King College and the Illinois Institute of Technology where they were given “free classroom space over the summer for these students to come and then we would have access to everything on the campus”. They were able to use their computer labs at no cost to the program or to the students involved. This program “went from having 30 students to 120 students” and in their advertisement to youth and the

community they went door to door recruiting from the neighborhood. (V. Hardy, personal communication, December 15, 2015).

Reflections from Cassiette West-Williams

Purnell helped African American students of different academic strengths and levels. Students ranged from youth who barely knew what college education entailed to those that had solid grades and some direction but still needed encouragement or additional financial support to achieve maximal success. One research participant who was the child of an art teacher with two younger twin brothers, who all later became college graduates, shared memories of her meeting with her mother and Purnell in preparation for her college journey. She met with Purnell in his office about four times and even as a young person with limited knowledge she remembered that “he listened to me – he listened to my mother of course, but he also listened to me, as if I had a voice.” She “was not a straight A student” (C. West-Williams, personal communication, March 26, 2016) at her high school but did well and was an academically solid student who recalled:

Hyde Park was competitive, and he didn't make me feel bad for not being in the top 10. I was in the top 10 percent, but I was not in the top 10. I was not a National Merit Scholar. There were three National Merit Scholars in my class. We had people who went to Harvard, Princeton, Yale...I was not an Ivy Leaguer. I was not accepted at those schools but he didn't make me feel bad because I *was* accepted at Howard [University], University of Illinois, University of Missouri. There were no put-downs because I was not ‘a Harvard, Yale, Princeton, William and Mary type of scholar’. And I feel like he was looking out for my mother because, you know, she was honest. She came in and told him she was a teacher with three kids and a dog. So, a teacher's salary then, nor today, is going to cover three people in college like that. It is not. So, I feel like he was looking out for her

in terms of what I would need financially for support for college. (C. West-Williams, personal communication, March 26, 2016).

West-Williams reported that after making campus visits and being accepted into several colleges of her choice she was awarded either very little funding or far from enough scholarship money to attend commenting that from some schools she was accepted to “*I couldn’t get a dollar*”. In addition to limited monetary resources, some admissions offers were simply not the appropriate situation or right fit. For example, she explained how her first school of choice “wanted to put me in a minority program but when I was with Silas Purnell... he specifically said I didn’t qualify for that.” Purnell through his own assessment said “I didn’t need to be in nobody’s minority program. I was a solid student going in” and his approach and words further “reinforced or validated to me that he was excellent and on his job.” As she and her family navigated their decision-making process, she recalled being give the explanation that with some campuses: “the university [is] trying to fill slots, trying to fill numbers.... trying to get that federal money in for your little program, and here’s Silas Purnell saying no, don’t accept that. You don’t need to go there.” (C. West-Williams, personal communication, March 26, 2016).

Reflections from Venise Hardy

In addition to being knowledgeable of the populations he served, Purnell was intentional about staying informed and open-minded about new ways to help African American students. As he worked on finding opportunities to best direct rising college students, he welcomed interested students that came to him in search of ways to achieve their dreams. During our interview, Hardy recalled poignant memories of working with

Purnell and some of the things that motivated and further inspired him in his work. She mentioned that “he was an avid reader” and pointed to a nearby bookshelf with several rows of books that she said were a part of Purnell’s personal library:

If you read some of those titles of those books, it would definitely give you some insight as to what type of things that intrigued him, that he kept abreast on and *I think that was also a key to his success*. He constantly was thinking about ways to effectively communicate and affect change in the minority communities.

Constantly thinking about things that affected young African American males and females and then what could we do as an agency to address those issues. Was there some new methodology? Some new study that had some outcomes or was able to achieve certain results and how could we then take what was in the context of that book and then apply it to our day-to-day work? (V. Hardy, personal communication, December 15, 2015).

Some of the reading selections which included: *Black College Student Survival Guide* (J. Kunjufu, 1997), *Contemporary Education Issues: A Reference Handbook for African American Education* (C.L. Jackson, 2001), *The Performance Edge: New Strategies to Maximize for Work Effectiveness and Competitive Advantage* (R.K. Cooper, 1991), and *Beyond Success: The 15 Secrets of a Winning Life!* (J. Wooden, 1995). With Purnell constantly reading, conversing with people, observing, and thinking of effective strategies to increase college admissions and access, it may have further enabled him to expand his capacity for work, advocacy, and building resources for his constituents. Regarding the time of Purnell’s leadership with Ada S. McKinley and his continuing legacy Hardy added, “we’ve had sustained success because it was the constant drive to constantly never become complacent. Just because we were doing things this particular way and it was successful, he was never complacent”. She remembered Purnell feeling

“it was always something else left to do. We could do more.” (V. Hardy, personal communication, December 15, 2015).

Theme 4

Silas Purnell identified students' potential for success and appropriately matched them to programs; and facilitated access into higher education to many

“People got to learn to take the kids the way they are, not the way they want then to be. Quit finding out what's wrong with them—find out what's right with them”—

Silas Purnell

Theme 4 in Context

Purnell worked with students with various need levels as it related to going to college. Some students may have had the scores and grades to get into college and lacked adequate funding, while others may not have known much about college and the necessary steps to get there. Purnell did not let their lack of college readiness, competitive entrance exam scores and grades deter him from believing in their success to finish college. As long as they had potential, he had enough to work with to get them to college. If he knew a student had the potential to enter a two-year or four-year institution, he would work with them accordingly.

Purnell understood the disadvantages and impediments that the population of students he worked with faced. Due to his constant community interaction and desire to stay abreast on resources available to assist the students' needs, he remained a vital source of motivation, encouragement, and direction to students who were not traditionally prepared or prepped to go to college. For example, a young lady with a suboptimal 4 out of 36 on her ACT score came to Purnell with a desire to attend the University of Illinois. Traditionally, this type of applicant would have been immediately rejected. However because Purnell saw that although she had substandard scores to obtain admission consideration, according to his own words, she had a level of desperation to achieve which was enough for him to work with. He helped her gain

admission and she later graduated in four years. (Retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3GeiJgaopN0>). Purnell had a gift to be able to identify students' potential from where they were and help them get to where they needed and wanted to be. He helped them matriculate into higher learning institutions that would be a good fit for them. He was familiar with different campuses and school administrations throughout the United States. This allowed him to know what programs would best support the various students he worked with before he facilitated their relocation to that respective campus.

Findings

Reflections from Dr. William Sullivan

The following includes portions of the dialogue exchange between research participant, Sullivan and I during our interview. He shared several details of his story and journey beginning from his time as a high school student growing up on Chicago's West Side and his first meeting with Purnell who later took him on his first airplane ride:

Interviewer: You said...earlier [that]... he sent you to Wilson College. He talked to you and he talked to your mom and he told your mom about your potential. Can you recall what was that conversation like with your mom?... [Why do you think] your mother was willing to work with him? Because I also want to figure out how he was able to work with families. If you working with students, obviously you [have to] work with their parents to get their buy-in to send them around the United States to go to school. So can you give me a little insight about that?

Dr. Sullivan: My mother had gone to college and my father did not finish high school. My father was a boxer and that's the life he made. My mother knew there was a better life for her children and so in our family, we were always torn into two different families in one. And so my mother understood Mr. Purnell more than I ever did. And finally, she had to convince me to do what he [said] because I was a different kind of kid. I think I had been to about seven different schools before I discovered football... Once I hit high school, I didn't get kicked out

again. But I got kicked out of so many places for violence and fighting and all sorts of trouble-- but football calmed me down because you can take your aggression out. And playing football, like I said, my motto [was] ... you got to be agile, mobile, and hostile... and my mother, she spent everyday trying to keep me out of trouble.

Dr. Sullivan: When I got to junior college, again, I'm trying to tell him where I [want to] go to college. [He's] telling me; "No, *you [are] going* to the University of Utah." I never heard of it. Where is this Salt Lake City? I had no idea. I wanted to go to Southern [Southern Illinois University in Carbondale]... He said, "No, unh unh. You got the grades. You can go there!"... When I got out of high school... all I cared about was playing football.... And back then, as long as you got a D to pass your class, you're eligible to play football. [Around] 1966... I had a 1 point something GPA.

Sullivan continued and discussed his heed to Purnell's advice to pursue a four-year college after attending a two-year community college, Wilson College that is now named Kennedy-King College. He recalled:

[When] I was at junior college, I made the Dean's list every semester and that's the reason why Mr. Purnell chose me as the example because he had talked to me, [and] talked to my mother. He said, "Your son has a lot of potential. He just chooses not to do it." And he was right and I told him, "Why should I work that hard and study and do all this stuff because... all I wanted to do is play football". (W. Sullivan, personal communication, February 24, 2016).

As Sullivan reflected on his early interaction with Purnell in high school as a student who earned unsatisfactory grades to his ascension to become an accomplished professional and scholar, he reiterated his capacity to do well academically coupled with the encouragement and guidance he received. Discussions about the possibilities available through education ensued and he shared an exchange with Purnell:

I made the Dean's list all four semesters... "This is why you're going to Salt Lake

City. You got the brains, you got the grades,” and he was right. I never dreamt of getting a Ph.D. I mean-- I never dreamt about me being a graduate of a college. I might have just played football and go to college and played ball... That was my dream to be a Chicago Bear. Boy, how things turned around! (W. Sullivan, personal communication, February 24, 2016).

Sullivan spoke about both fond and challenging memories during his undergraduate years with his alma mater where he played football and also served as the president of the Black Student Union. He later shifted from being a student who had been mentored and sent to college by Purnell to the role as an undergraduate admission recruiter himself and he recounted “I chose where I wanted to go” and on his short list was to journey back to the city of Chicago to seek qualified students. At this point he began working with Purnell as a colleague. He explained some of the perks in being able to travel for the job but some of the challenges were the recruitment efforts to Chicago students prior to his appointment. He recalled:

They had recruited the wrong Black kids before I got there. There was something called CAM Academy in Chicago, Christian Action Ministry and they took the hardest of the hard-- of the hardest kids in Chicago and was sending those kids to the University of Utah...So once I told Mr. Purnell what was going on, he was the adult voice. He understood. He said, “I had no idea that’s what they were doing. No wonder they wanted me to bring students in.” But when they got Mr. Purnell, he brought in the correct Black students, not the gangsters, not the guys who just got out of juvie... Mr. Purnell had to go and connect the correct students with the correct schools. (W. Sullivan, personal communication, February 24, 2016).

Reflections from John Hannah

Another participant shared early memories as a young man who did not have the grades to meet the traditionally standard criteria for college admission but possessed the potential for success. Hannah grew up in one of Chicago's West Side housing projects and visited Purnell during his senior year in high school. He eventually graduated from Alabama State University with a degree in Criminal Justice and recounted:

I got a scholarship to go to any private Catholic high school in the city of Chicago. ...In my senior year, one of the nuns who was over the scholarship part saw my grades. My grades weren't the best, but she says, "You just need a chance... I got someone I want [you to meet]." She picked me up from my home and drove me to Ada S. McKinley office where a gentleman by the name of Mr. Silas Purnell worked, and it was in the basement. And when I got there I had to fill out some paperwork and he talked to me for a minute. And he said, "Your grades aren't good, but I believe that all you need is a chance." So I filled out three college applications and he picked up the phone with me sitting there and said, "Call the admissions office!" These are the kind of connections that he had. He said, "I need you to do me a favor. Give this young man a chance." So they discussed my grades, and said "Ok finish your application, send everything and we'll give him a chance. But he'll have to come in on probation." So with that being said, he got me into Alabama State University in Montgomery, Alabama. But I was admitted with the understanding that I was coming in under probation. Which means that, we're going to give you a chance, but if you don't seize the moment, we're going to send you home. (J. Hannah, personal communication, October 28, 2015).

Reflections from Thomas Kidd

In comparison to the plight of a young person growing up in one of Chicago's most impoverished and at-risk communities such as Englewood or West Garfield during the late 20th century, according to popular belief a young man from an African American

middle class family in the suburbs would not need much help making it to college successfully. Consequently, this in many cases is far from truth. As mentioned above, Purnell helped students from various backgrounds with diverse needs. He was not merely exclusive to students from families with household incomes that fell below the poverty line, but also those that lacked the knowledge and tools to be successful in college. He understood that being successful in college was multifaceted and not only affected those that were economically disadvantaged. Purnell understood that students from middle class households still could be disadvantaged in lacking 'college knowledge' and tools for success. Research participant, Kidd, a first-generation college student who grew up in a Chicago south suburb recalled his interactions with Purnell between 1988 and 1991. He shared parts of his educational journey and how he was impacted by Purnell:

People assume that because you come from a middle class background you have all the resources available to you to be able to succeed. But then when you come from a family that you [have] career driven parents you really don't end up with resources because they are too busy striving for their own....So many things I've had to do on my own and deal with on my own... I grew up with my grandparents...[and] even though I came out of high school in top 10% but I missed out on scholarships because I had nobody at a young age and parent involvement to go see what was necessary to be done to get these scholarships. So I ended up in a community college and a guy mentioned to me about Silas...in the Dearborns....So I go over there and walk through the projects praying to God nothing happens and I'm only about 17 to 18 years old to go talk to him about options and scholarships [as] far as school because I didn't have any money for school, so I go there and, uh, I sit in the office, I fill out the paperwork, I go talk to him and he told me [who] he was and I swear it was probably the best information I ever got in the world. He told me... you live in a household where both parents work and they make good money but they not contributing to you

and you're working on your own. He said [the] main thing they need to do at this point for you, so that you can continue growing is to stop claiming you [on their taxes]. (T. Kidd, personal communication, March 12, 2016).

After receiving this vital information and direction from Purnell, the subject shared, “He talked to me from that point on” and after realizing how to best complete the financial aid paperwork, he was then eligible to receive grants and student aid based on his grades and academic transcripts. He recalled taking copious notes during his consultation and shared: “I left [the meeting with] him with abundant information” that he took home to share with his family to which “they were receptive to”. The following academic year, he re-applied and began to be awarded substantive funding to proceed in his journey in higher education. He continued to visit Purnell in his office “probably about three to four [more] times” (T. Kidd, personal communication, March 12, 2016) to receive his mentorship. Such is common to many first-generation college students or those in a novice situation is the unfamiliarity to navigate an uncharted territory. Kidd explained how he recognized the resource and lucrative guidance that he received through his meetings and interactions with Purnell and when he felt like, “I just needed to know... I'm here at this point [and] what should I do from here to move to the next point and then I would go do it myself.” Kidd further explained that as he sought to glean wise information that could strategically help him for the best long-term results when he was unsure of the next move, “a lot of times we talked about that type of stuff. On what needs to be done.” (T. Kidd, personal communication, March 12, 2016). Specifically, he appreciated the detailed steps and advisement he was given regarding, cultivating relationships with faculty and staff and how to “present yourself appropriately”. He

boldly acclaimed that the insight he received from Purnell “back in '88—that same knowledge I use in 2010... to move ahead.” (T. Kidd, personal communication, March 12, 2016).

Reflections from Sullivan, Mitchem, and Dunkin

Sullivan described Purnell as one who was a “real big, strong advocate for access to education and he cared about low income kids. He truly cared. He didn’t treat none of us dirty or like a disease or something.” (W. Sullivan, personal communication, February 24, 2016). Mitchem recalled when it came down to “financial aid policies... and the whole debate about who should be served and where should the resources go, Si Purnell was always on the side of the poor.” (A. Mitchem, personal communication, February 22, 2016).

Dunkin agreed that during his time as a young person who grew up in Chicago and aspired to attend college he eventually connected to Purnell because he:

Was just the go-to person for college, for opportunity to give people a sort of an exposure, [for] non-traditional students... We’re talking about a person who built his reputation on trying to connect us with the outside world...I grew up in the projects, Cabrini Green—and... [regarding] that black college protocol... you run across people like... Silas Purnell. (K. Dunkin, personal communication, December 14, 2015).

Reflections from Cassette West-Williams

Purnell became a master and expert of recognizing and assessing student’s potential for success. He intervened when necessary and used his network of contacts and

resources, especially scholarships and grant funds to support students' paths and admissions to college. West-Williams recalled:

He had vision. He could look at your situation, look at your transcripts, and he wasn't just going off of what's on the paper, what's in black and white. He looked at what kind of person you were, what you had to offer – what could you bring to the table? What kind of skills could you bring to the table? And he tried to fit you with what was best at the time. (C. West-Williams, personal communication, March 26, 2016).

She continued, “He definitely had the resources. If you had grades and you had something to offer, he had the resources.” She recalled the memories of being accepted into her number one choice school and the challenges that remained which informed her ultimate decision to attend a different college at the suggestion of Purnell:

I wanted to go to the University of Wisconsin, Madison... In fact, I'll never forget this. I received my acceptance letter on my birthday, on March 12th of 1980; I was accepted into the University of Wisconsin... (The) main campus. And there was no scholarship money... We did a campus visit. And I cried and cried, because it was a lot of hoops to jump through. And when we went there, then they wanted to put me in a minority program. [But] when I was with Silas Purnell, he said – he specifically said I didn't qualify for that. I didn't need to be in nobody's minority program. I was a solid student going in... And then I went back to him for grad school, for the University of Missouri, which I was able to get [in] ...University of Missouri grad was full scholarship. So, basically, he took care of me for undergrad and grad. (C. West-Williams, personal communication, March 26, 2016).

Reflections from Dr. James Anderson

Long-term administrator and college professor Anderson further elaborated on some of the realities and institutional norms and practices of the time. He highlighted

Purnell's unwavering efforts and commitment to identify and work with students who were Black, poor, disadvantaged, underrepresented, and under-resourced. He added: "Part of what made him so successful is that he had a very, very realistic grasp of his environment and the kinds of families and kids he was working with." In his strategic approach, Purnell would "get them in where he could get them in. Anderson added, "his intention was to get these students into college and for them to do well and then they could take it from there." (J. Anderson, personal communication, November 18, 2015). He spoke about the long-standing and continuing disconnect between a premier, top-rated state institution and the city of Chicago and its public school system. Regarding a specific institution he confirmed:

Historically they had never really reached out to Chicago-- and that's true then and it's true now... What they do is that they have their feeder schools. And they know them. It's about ten highly selective high schools... They have never reached out to another 80 and 90 public high schools in the CPS. (J. Anderson, personal communication, November 18, 2015).

Purnell was devoted to the business of placing Black students into college and his aim was clearly conveyed, reiterated and resonated among others around him. Purnell understood the plight and promise of many African American youth and was well-aware of the realities including their lack of acceptance and prioritization by the greater society and within mainstream institutional culture. For young people who possessed little to no economic, social, or cultural capital very seldom would they be at the top of the selection pool or pecking order for a typical university or college campus. Anderson further elaborated:

Purnell was gifted in not only knowing about what his students can do and achieve if given the opportunity, he also was gifted in knowing what the educational institutions of higher learning were looking for... We got a job to do and he understood the magnitude of it. It wasn't going to be easy to get these young people into these institutions and he understood probably as well as anyone and in part because of his constant interaction, that contrary to popular opinion that these institutions weren't out looking for people of color-- typically young African Americans... *This is a struggle, this is a fight, they don't want our kids, they are not reaching out to our kids.* And if I don't do in silence what I'm doing and you guys don't do anything to help me, our kids are not going to get in there... But Silas made it clear, "what I want is for our kids to have the same access, the same opportunities that all other kids that get into these institutions to be successful and to be in a position to give back to their communities". (J. Anderson, personal communication, November 18, 2015).

In response to the question, *What do you think was his passion or fuel to encourage him to go out and do what he did?*, yielded further insight:

[He] was so immersed in his community and around a lot of young people and seeing a lot of bright young people, who often did not get a chance to have access to higher education and to be able to prove themselves and be successful... "I know these young people. I know how bright they are, no one has to convince me... they're bright. You know I [have] to convince an institution that these kids are bright enough to be successful. But I know these kids and I don't have to second guess as to whether they are the quality to be successful. (J. Anderson, personal communication, November 18, 2015).

Reflections from Allestine Radix

Radix, who was Purnell's long-time Administrative Assistant and colleague, years after being a student and mentee that he at one point hand-delivered to college shared memories of his capacity for success and approach in placing students into college:

He didn't pull any punches. He spoke straight from the hip and he told them "I got students" he said "and I'm going to tell you" he said, "They are good students." We had a core of colleges and universities that we dealt with because some of our children needed that special attention. (A. Radix, personal communication, February 8, 2016).

She continued and named some of the schools and types of campus environments they worked with on a student-by-student basis in conjunction with their skill set and abilities:

We sent kids to places like Stillman College in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, [and other schools in Alabama and Florida]. Then we had those who were higher functioning academically and he would get them in schools like Yale, Harvard...But we had a core of schools we dealt with because we wanted to predict success for our kids...Okay. And the way, the only way we could do that was to put them in environment where they were going to be successful. (A. Radix, personal communication, February 8, 2016).

Theme 5

Silas Purnell was a staunch advocate and champion for African American students from Chicago; and committed to placing them into new environments

"The only way you're getting home is to graduate. I'll see you when you graduate. Don't worry about coming home. There's nothing for you to do here anyway!"-- Silas Purnell

Theme 5 in Context

According to Encyclopedia.com, during the course of three-and-a-half decades, Silas Purnell single-handedly enrolled more than 50,000 minority students in institutions of higher education. "No single college recruiter in the history of America has been as successful as Silas [Purnell] at giving students the chance for success and prosperity," Phillip Jackson, project manager for The Black Star Project, told the *Chicago Independent Bulletin* (2005).

The significant role that he played as a resource and catalyst for thousands of Black students from the Chicagoland area into college is unprecedented and this project sought to explore the realities of the time, and exactly how Purnell could yield such results. A common theme that emerged from both on the recorded interview data collected and limited context from some off the record commentary was Purnell's staunch, focused, and relentless, unwavering commitment to meeting the needs and providing service and advocacy, access to African American students and poor ones at that. According to Encyclopedia.com, Purnell, worked out of his office in the Dearborn Homes housing project because "the people I am trying to reach live down here," Purnell explained. And for those people, Purnell committed himself to providing an assortment of aid. If a person needed remedial training, he'd find it and get them started. If they needed eyeglasses or shoes, he'd find those too. He networked with more than 200 technical

schools, colleges, and universities so that he could match students with the school that best fit their needs. He also landed students thousands of dollars worth of grants and scholarships. Moreover, "he often offered his own money to help young college aspirants and their families," according to Robert R. Selles of the *World and I* (2005).

There were many other examples and rhetoric shared which captured those sentiments, which will be conveyed in the 'Findings' section.

Additionally, Mr. Purnell was cognizant of the importance of sending many of his constituents away from Chicago to school. Away from the dangers and distractions that surrounded them back home as many students he worked with were born, raised, and remained in often heavily crime infested communities. Purnell was dedicated to supporting African American students' matriculation into college and was committed to placing Chicago students into new environments. According to *Sociological Perspectives*, "first-generation students who attend colleges at a greater distance from home are more likely to graduate from college with a bachelor's degree" (Garza & Fullerton, 2017). Purnell knew that if he could get these students out of their immediate environment, they would have a chance at obtaining collegiate and professional degrees.

Findings

Research participant, Anderson raved on the commitment Purnell had for the students he served. He stated that, "nobody from the state of Illinois fought harder for our kids to get in college than Silas Purnell". He went on to describe him as "a great fighter for young people". He also mentioned that Purnell was a champion of African American students of low income and at risk communities.

Reflections from Ken Dunkin

Research participant, Ken Dunkin, former Illinois state representative who ran a Boys & Girls Club in the Robert Taylor Housing Projects to which Purnell served as a member of the Board of Directors remembered the determined attitude Purnell had to get African American students to college. He described Purnell to “have had a singular focus and that was giving us the legs to leave our community and go to school.” Mr. Purnell was adamant about getting youth from Chicago to college and culture beyond their communities. Mr. Duncan recalls, Mr. Purnell, who served as the Chair of the Education Committee, as being,

A bit cantankerous at times when he would argue with certain folk. We had some other prominent names there, and he just, he didn't play. He was pretty lucid and clear about who he was, and how it is that he went about giving voice to really the voiceless when it came to that school. So he was somebody when he came in the room you knew he was there. He spoke loud and proud, and he was just a conscious brother from the 50's and the 60's who made it real plain on how it is. He knew Black communities; he knew the value of after-school programs, facilitating some of that interaction between students who otherwise just wouldn't have a clue (K. Dunkin, personal communication, December 14, 2015).

Reflections from Allestine Radix

Similarly, Radix recalled how captivating and engaging Purnell was when he spoke stating, “When he spoke he had everybody listen. He had a commanding voice of the English language and when he got started, he mesmerized the whole audience.” She went on to elaborate on a personal encounter she had with him. “He came to my church one day to speak for a graduation program and he spoke so profoundly that people could

understand it and they knew exactly what they needed to do” (A. Radix, Personal communication, Allestine Radix, February 8, 2016).

Other research participants, including Radix, recounted how Mr. Purnell would deal with teenagers, some of which he noticed the potential for their success through a college education before they saw it in themselves. Radix described typical interactions Purnell had with youth and how he followed up with many people that others would have not given much attention to. In addition, she discussed how well connected he was with resources to help students prepare for school and his early days of noticing youth hanging outside and his interactions with them.

He worked many years, for Coca Cola Company and as he made deliveries.... he saw these children on the street that needed to be given education...and it puzzled him because he knew that his vision was in the future these young folks got to have an education. They've got to be educated. He would ask them “you want to go to school?” And they [would] break out and go to laughing [because] they thought that he was teasing. He said “no I am serious, wanna go to school?” ”Oh yeah man, if you gonna send me ok”. (A. Radix, personal communication, February 8, 2016).

She continued from her memory and shared “some of them took an advantage of the opportunity to do it, others just thought it was a joke. But he got a hold of those young men, got them in school, got them involved things of that nature.” She explained as a former student, employee, and colleague of Silas Purnell and Ada S. McKinley that they also

Paid for transportation to school [because] we had a fund set up at Ada S. McKinley whereby he had people that gave him money specifically for this fund. We had a travel agency that we dealt with. Who would get the tickets. We had our

health center that gave them their medical exams free of charge. This was the kind of person Si was. (A. Radix, personal communication, February 8, 2016).

Purnell made sure that the students he served basic needs were not a hindrance to them going to school. Even when he did not have access to a particular resource he did not let that stop him. He made sure he found a way to get what it was that he needed.

Radix explained that Purnell,

would make a phone call, and they said “oh yes, but who are you?” “Well, I am Silas Purnell, I want to talk to the head person”. By the time he had finished speaking with the head person he had everything that he went in there to get. Services for his students, okay, exempts, dental [because] you know during the days when we went to school you had to have all that before you went to campus so. He did all that. He was a kind of person who when he set his mind to something-- he did it (A. Radix, personal communication, February 8, 2016).

Reflections from Dr. William Sullivan

Participant Sullivan shared some of his memories of when he first met Purnell and how he facilitated and pioneered his own path to college:

Interviewer: In that time, when did you and Mr. Purnell first cross paths? When did you meet him and in what capacity did you ended up knowing him and working with him?

Dr. Sullivan: Mr. Purnell and I met in 1967 when I was a high school senior at Farragut High School on the Westside of Chicago because I’m originally from Chicago and so I see him one day, myself and a couple of friends, and he said some [thing] about going to school. And I had my mind made up I wanted to go to one certain school and he said, “No. We going to send you to junior college,” which was back then Wilson Junior College which is now [Kennedy-King College].

This was the beginning to a major success story. Sullivan shared details from starting out his college career at a Chicago City College to obtaining a Ph.D. from the University of Utah, a success that he greatly credits Purnell for.

Reflections from Dr. James Anderson

Research participant Anderson has been involved in academia since 1966 and was influenced by Purnell. He did not recall his exact first meeting, but remembered early interactions and observations of Purnell during a meeting which hosted a group that brought together black professionals and administrators in Illinois. He elaborated about how Purnell was perceived by others at these meetings. Anderson explained:

he would admonish everybody there as to what our mission was, and that was to get young black males and females into institutions of higher education and give them a chance to be successful. And everybody in the group knew that nobody carried that mission more than Silas Purnell. It's like a calling for him. (J. Anderson, personal communication, November 18, 2015).

Anderson recounted how “everybody respected him for what he was doing, and everybody did everything they could to help out...when he would recommend people to the different institutions.” Articulately stated and assessed, Anderson reflected on the impact Purnell had on his life and others, commenting that “for young black males and females coming out of high school *Silas Purnell was the Godfather.*” (J. Anderson, personal communication, November 18, 2015).

Reflections from Dr. William Sullivan

Purnell took his role of helping students above and beyond his position on paper as the founder of the Educational Services Division of Ada S. McKinley Community Services, Inc. He helped advocate and championed for students before he even talked to an academic institution or agency with resources to support his mission. He would first talk with the students to encourage, equip, and empower them to see the possibilities they could have with a college education. Sullivan described how this encouragement helped

him begin his path, how he provided the resources for him and how Purnell actively remained a part of his life throughout his time in college and beyond into his post-baccalaureate journey and eventual career into Student Affairs. He shared:

Once he got me interested in something other than football only, because at that time all I really cared about was playing football. Our high school, we had a championship football team. Wilson [now Kennedy-King College] had a championship football team and then I continued there and started working with Mr. Purnell part time off and on from '67 to about '70, about 1970. Yeah. I was coming home from and would help him out [and] talk to the students. So he and I were pretty close. We were extremely close. As a matter of fact, he took me on my first airplane ride...He had me speak about Chicago and represent in the kids getting out of Chicago. And even back then, I was so young, I didn't understand everything but I just talked about my life and where I was from, the Westside and my neighborhood which is normal to me. I found out how *not normal* it is to the rest of the world. But anyway, it was a conference. I remember it was conference we went to. And then, in fact one year I got in trouble when I went to Utah so Mr. Purnell flew out there and got us out of it. I [will] never forget that. (W. Sullivan, personal communication, February 24, 2016).

Sending Students Outside of Chicago

Regarding Purnell's affinity to identify youth, work with them, and send many of them to college outside of Chicago and the state of Illinois often as well. Participant Radix recounted Purnell's early efforts in his career, "He would just help these kids find out what monies they could get to go to school. That was about his line, finding out what monies you could get and also a lot of them would come in with the idea of where they were going" (A. Radix, personal communication, February 8, 2016). But Purnell "was about finding places that would not only accept you but give you funding... based on

what kind of student you were.” She shared he explained to students who were ineligible due to grades but wanted to go to certain schools that,

You don't have the grades to go to...but here's where we can take you. He was big on sending them away, so that was another thing that um, he wasn't limited to Chicago. There was some places in Minnesota or Mississippi or Iowa then they had money for you then that's where you would go and he was big on, once they came through with the money, he was big in calling you and saying “you've been accepted so you need to be ready. The flight is leaving on so and so”. He had a couple of people that would help out as far as giving them funds or maybe take them to shopping to get shoes, things like that. He had some volunteers that would help with that (A. Radix, personal communication, February 8, 2016).

Reflections from Rosalind Purnell

Radix described many of these contributors and fellow advocate who contributed to the necessary resources for Black students to go to college as “friends of the program.” Many people are philanthropically moved to a cause or need, however, people are dedicated to certain missions for various reasons. Rosalind Purnell, his daughter was able to shed light on what drove him to give so much of his time, energy, and finances to young people and families that he did not even know in her response to the questions, *What fueled him? What drove him to do what he did to this magnitude?*

The thing that drove him was the fact that the children needed to be educated. And the only way to do that was if there was funding for them to be educated. Sure there were plenty that were going to have the money to go but there were a whole lot that weren't going to have that money and they needed to be in the mix also. So the main thing was just to find the money for them to be able to go to a school where they could stay. Something that they could finish. It wasn't enough to say, “so and so University accepts X number of Black students”. How many [of those students] complete? That was the question that he looked at too, how many

completed the course? Not in the sense of transferring to another school in the University but just drop out. So what do they have available to help these students once they get there? (R. Purnell, personal communication, February 22, 2016).

Reflections from Dr. James Anderson

Anderson also elaborated on Purnell having a good understanding and sense of the needs of the students he served mainly because he too was from Chicago and he added thought about what motivated him to work rigorously on their behalf:

He knew that in many cases those kids' families couldn't do for them what he was trying to do for the other kids whose families didn't have that kind of capital, social capital. And so he never lost sight of what he was doing always kept his eye on the prize. And that don't mean he didn't put other students off but he understood this is the Chicago that I grew up in where the vast majority of kids, of kids that come out of families that can't afford to send them to college and [with] no means to do so. They do not have the background to negotiate that in many cases if they are trying to navigate, they [are] navigating out of inexperience because their kids are first-generation college students and he just understood Chicago (J. Anderson, personal communication, November 18, 2015).

Theme 6

Silas Purnell was respected by his colleagues and held them to high standards in their service to students

The true measure of a person is how much service you give. Your worth means service, advocacy and mentorship”—Silas Purnell

Theme 6 in Context

Purnell had a mass following and track record of being able to work with thousands of students, youth, and adults in various capacities and get results during his career. Much of this influence lied in people respecting him. Among university and college administrators, admissions personnel, and colleagues, even many who did not support or agree with his agenda at times, it seems that an unwavering, respect exuded. A part of the legacy and legend of Purnell was not only the person *he* was, but also the man, woman, and professional that he *inspired others to be*. Both gaining respect as he developed a no-nonsense reputation to the point that his very presence alone articulated the gravity of the standards he upheld.

Additionally, Purnell seemed to resonate a sense of urgency, call to action, and accountability to practitioners and others who worked in Student Affairs and in higher education, specifically in the capacity of admission of African American students into college. It was perhaps an unspoken understanding and realization that Purnell, or ‘Si’ as he was affectionately called by many, did not joke or play around when it came down to ‘his kids’. He fully expected staff people in the field, especially African Americans, to do all they could to contribute to the mission of increasing and supporting access to college for low-income, first-generation, urban African American students. Purnell had the voice you may cringe at hearing if you were not doing what you were supposed to as he would

take you to task on your responsibility not only professionally but personally and would challenge or question if you were fulfilling your moral obligations and social responsibilities. In short, Purnell seemed to be a man who admittedly did not ‘pull any punches’ and would screen you and engage you with questioning, if you were a part of the solution or the problem?

One of the initial inquiries in my list of research questions for participants in this study was: *What was [Silas Purnell's] professional reputation in the fields of Education, Student Affairs and the academy?* This question in addition to other lines of dialogue throughout the interviews yielded much insight and reflection about Purnell and his capacity for leadership. The data provided in-depth evidence and support of the notion that Purnell was highly respected by many colleagues and through his personality, actions, and consistency he inspired and held others to high standards regarding the quality of their service to underrepresented African American students.

Reflections from Dr. James Anderson and Michael Jeffries

Dr. Anderson recalled early meetings and initial observations of Purnell stemming from his participation in circles such as the Illinois Concerns for Black Higher Education group which provided a forum for Black professors and administrators throughout the state of Illinois. These meetings were settings that Anderson vividly recalled where Purnell:

Would admonish everybody there as to what our mission was, and that was to get... young black males and females into this institutions of higher education and give them a chance to be successful. And everybody in the group knew that nobody carried that mission more than Silas Purnell. I mean that was like, you know, it's like a calling for him and everybody respected him for what he was doing, and everybody did everything they could to help out. You know, when he

would recommend people to the different institutions, I think in this state everybody knew when it comes to access and opportunity. For young black males and females coming out of high school that Silas Purnell *was the Godfather*. (J. Anderson, personal communication, November 18, 2015).

During the interview with Jeffries he talked about his participation in large gatherings of Student Affairs and college admissions professionals-comprised of mostly African Americans. He agreed that Purnell would reprimand some in attendance because admittedly, “sometimes we did lose focus about what was really important”. Purnell would remind them of the barriers that remained for many, even if individually, things were going smoothly. “He would [be] straight up... he was unpretentious and he would challenge us sometimes” to make sure they were remaining aware, true and steadfast to the mission and challenge of increasing access and admissions for Black students to college. (M. Jeffries, personal communication, November 3, 2015).

Reflections from Allestine Radix and Michael Jeffries

Radix described Purnell and his presence among others, vividly recalling that his persona was “very authoritative, [and] when he spoke... everybody [would] listen. She continued: “He had a commanding voice of the English language and when [he] got started, he mesmerized the whole audience”. He was not a preacher or minister by vocation, but many “thought he was”. When he spoke he was “very profound.” (A. Radix, personal communication, February 8, 2016).

Jeffries also commented that even at a significantly elder age Purnell “was sharp as a tack... [and] he was not intimidated by anybody”. Regarding his level of articulation, confidence, and knowledge in his field he made it known: “he could speak extemporaneously off the top... on education you could not beat him.” He chuckled that

“I can still picture him and his voice, it was so loud.” (M. Jeffries, personal communication, November 3, 2015).

Reflections from Ken Dunkin

In addition to being a student who received direction and resources from Purnell to support his college journey, Dunkin later led a Boys & Girls Club, which operated in Chicago’s Robert Taylor housing project. Purnell, at around age 70 served on the Board of Directors and Dunkin shared memories from his time in service to the organization and his interactions with other board members:

He was a bit cantankerous at times when he would argue with certain folk. We had some other prominent names there, and he just, he didn’t play. He was like “Ok-- how does this program parlay their academic achievement towards college? And so, he kept us balanced with that. He chaired the Education Committee. He was pretty lucid and clear about who he was, and how it is that he went about giving voice to really the voiceless when it came to school. So he was somebody [that] when he came in the room you knew he was there. I guess... he spoke loud and proud; and he was just a conscious brother from the 50’s and 60’s who made it real plain on how it is. I mean he knew Black communities; he knew the value of after-school programs, [and facilitated] some of that interaction between students who otherwise just wouldn’t have a clue. (K. Dunkin, personal communication, December 14, 2015).

Reflections from Clarence Shelley

Early in our interview when asked about Purnell and his personality Shelley responded: “two things about him that impressed me personally, [first] if he didn’t like you, you’re in trouble and secondly, he had a very healthy suspicion of people like me who had... came from somewhere else.” He expressed that Purnell did not approve and support the approach and track record of the institution Shelley worked with

in relation to their admitting, educating, and graduating Black students. Shelley further explained that Purnell was apprehensive and unrelenting about people and school representatives who were not familiar with the city of Chicago, its multi-faceted environment, and the needs of the students. He recounted different meetings or 'college nights' that he and Purnell attended and for attendees who may have been unprepared or insincere in their efforts to provide lucrative opportunities to students Purnell served, "when they saw him coming they knew they had to tighten up." He shared that "20 years before the federal government realized" the actual needs and necessary approaches to prepare and recruit masses of Chicago students Purnell was already advocating for and supporting "a stronger connection between the universities and the city colleges and schools. He was an amazing guy, he had so much energy!" he added recalling Purnell had "the only voice I ever heard argue then in public" at some of those meetings. He admitted that for him and others, "we did not all appreciate [Purnell] until much later." Upon deeper reflection he realized how many things he was taught and learned from observing Purnell, "he'd always say that, it is very important that you always look at the right colleges and understand your job. But once he knew for sure that you understood what he was doing, he would talk to you." (C. Shelley, personal communication, November 4, 2015).

He joked that among colleagues they "used to say, you haven't lived until you've been called out at a meeting by Silas Purnell", agreeing that it was kind of like a baptism or rites of passage into the field. He shared that Purnell would correct or redirect foolish comments made and that "he was great with young people, [and] with young administrators". Within their field and extended circle of colleagues, Purnell's Ada S.

McKinley TRIO Talent Search Program office on the South Side of Chicago was “a place where you would send somebody new to learn, [and] spend a week with him”. He vividly remembered that many were apprehensive and afraid to go to Purnell’s office, which was located in the basement of a housing project building, “but we loved him-- we loved him.” Shelley listed reasons why he respected and admired Purnell including: “he was the first guy that I knew to ever do a kind of jail initiative”; and also the first person he knew to place a group of Native American students into college. He described how well “he knew the city of Chicago” and “the amount of work he put into it... and the hours he spent, his willingness... to spend time with people”. (C. Shelley, personal communication, November 4, 2015).

Speaking to Purnell’s capacity and ability to be successful and inspire others as such, “he had the skill, you know. In fact, if you wanted your administration to increase the support of your program, you could invite Silas down to talk to them.” He realized, “everybody trusted him” and while he and other colleagues were aspiring and working to climb the professional ladder, Purnell declined many promotions, job offers, and opportunities to relocate his office and work to different settings. He explained how Purnell remained steadfast in his service to the population in his community and as he continued to work to increase college access and admission, if you worked with him then “he actively expected you to take care of his students” and “he also urged us a lot to take seriously our responsibility to local black communities.” (C. Shelley, personal communication, November 4, 2015).

Reflections from Bernard Clay

Clay who referred to himself as a contemporary of Purnell in the type of work he did shared, “Silas was a visionary” that he met in 1972 and one of his modes of operation was that:

(He) went around to the schools he visited and made a point to visit the campuses [and] if an institution really did badly by a student and the students didn’t graduate he would rarely send the kids to [that] certain school. (B. Clay, personal communication, February 8, 2016).

He recalled that Purnell “looked at the fact that not many African Americans that went into the school graduated and the [rates] in which they get degrees was deplorable.” He added that Purnell was an expert and adamant about knowing the actual rates and probability for success for his students on different campuses and he operated accordingly. Regarding Purnell holding others to higher standards and expecting quality service and commitment to college access for students of color, “He also, pointed out African American professionals that worked in those schools that were not advocating for African American students.” Clay shared his thoughts on the lasting legacy of Purnell in his response to the interview’s final question, “*What do we need to know about Silas Purnell as far as his legacy, his life, what he did? ... What are your parting thoughts?*”:

Well you know, his presence is still being felt, but because you will run into people who are encouraging other people to go to college, because he was encouraged [by Silas Purnell], you know, they’ll reach [back]. Yeah as I said when you run into somebody, [they’ll say] “Yeah, he sent me to college” it gives some young folks the initiative to try to pursue college out of the main stream. (B. Clay, personal communication, February 8, 2016).

Reflections from Dr. William Sullivan

Sullivan, a student-mentee, and eventual close colleague of Purnell responded to these final questions of our interview, “*What was his reputation? What did his professional colleagues and his other folk around the globe, around the city of Chicago do throughout the state, throughout the country? What was his reputation? What did others think of him?*” He replied:

Mr. Purnell is a giant among men. That’s his reputation. That man was sincere at what he did, how he did it. Now you might have heard he had a loud voice and he did. When he walked into a meeting, he’d shake them up -- but that was his style. That was his style. You knew that Mr. Purnell was there. And I liked to hang with him in the later stages in his life and I loved it, every minute. (W. Sullivan, personal communication, February 24, 2016).

He expressed laughter at the memory as he recalled: “there was one time...his leg was about to give out, I said, ‘Mr. Purnell, you need a cane. I tell you what...I’m going to be your cane. You lean on my shoulder and you walk with me.’” He then joked, “I’m going to rent a wheelchair and put you in a wheelchair” and Purnell replied, “Oh, these legs got to give out first.” He continued and repeated the assertion: “Mr. Purnell was a giant. He was well respected-- well respected and what he said *was true*. If he told you something, you could take it to the bank because it was true”. He added, “education is the key to success and that’s what Mr. Purnell believed... I wish you could have met him.” (W. Sullivan, personal communication, February 24, 2016).

Opposition and Challenges to Silas Purnell and His Work

Reflections from William Sullivan

Dr. Sullivan shared additional insight about Purnell, stating, “He was one outspoken man” and he had no problem with challenging people and questioning them in their efforts or lack thereof: “Why [are] you not doing more to help these poor black kids?”, Purnell reportedly would ask practitioners, student affairs personnel, and administrators in the field. Sullivan also mentioned some challenges and opposition from local and national levels that Purnell faced at times, but proudly proclaimed that the number of advocates and protégés to which he was included, adamantly supported the continuation of the work and through a concerted effort, even though Purnell’s work was at times was threatened--it was never interrupted. Regarding his mentor Purnell who he knew had the mentality and focus of “I’m doing anything and everything I can to help these kids get out of poverty, get out of Chicago, and get into a college.” When that mission was threatened or attacked, he added, “when he needed me, you better believe I was there. You better believe it. Oh, yeah!” Sullivan remembered one woman in particular who assisted and helped provide support to Purnell to keep his program in operation. She reportedly expressed the sentiment: “Mr. Purnell, I’m going to help you because you helped me years ago.” Sullivan reflected on the futile efforts of all who intended to slow or stop Purnell’s work and mission, “they didn’t realize how many people out there that man actually helped.” (W. Sullivan, personal communication, February 24, 2016).

Reflections from Dr. Arnold Mitchem

Mitchem worked extensively with Purnell in various capacities over the years. He provided in-depth insight and divulged fond memories in addition to challenging times between he and Purnell. Before, during, and after the period of contention he expressed that he highly regarded and respected Purnell and supported him. He recalled his initial meeting with Purnell in downtown Chicago during the summer of 1970 not long after the premier TRIO Student Support Services grant was released. He recalled “sitting at the back of the room” and listening “very intently”:

That’s when I first met him. [I] was very impressed. He obviously was an older man than I was and...1970, I guess I was... about 30, 32 years old. He was probably 42 or 52 at the time and he was clearly a leader. He was charismatic. He had a great voice like Martin Luther King or a great Baptist minister. He was very outspoken and he had certainly more experience with TRIO and Talent Search than I had. (A. Mitchem, personal communication, February 22, 2016).

Mitchem continued in great detail about the presence and unmistakable character and personality of Purnell:

First of all, he was a Black man and he was a race man; and he had a nationalist orientation. My orientation is not as nationalist as his but he had a nationalist orientation. And I appreciated and respected that and I grew strength from that... He was a sincere man. He was a man of conviction and in my experience up until that point, many of the so called Black leaders that I had encountered, some of whom I had worked with as a student... or observed as a student with the exception of Martin Luther King and maybe Bayard Rustin-- were phony. (A. Mitchem, personal communication, February 22, 2016).

He elaborated further on what he meant and his observations about Purnell

especially in comparison to other leaders at the time:

They talked a lot of BS... but could never deliver anything for our people. Never put us on a course or a path where we could have real progress. They kept setting my folks up a tree so to speak and one defeat after another. They weren't strategic in their thinking I thought. And Si was a man who delivered the good. He was the first grown Black man that ever told me how people were 'pimping Blackness'. (A. Mitchem, personal communication, February 22, 2016).

This insight and realization further informed and enlightened Mitchem who described Purnell as Afrocentric and "a man of great integrity" who served his people in his community to the degree that even though his office was located in an area considered to be a very dangerous 'high-crime' area, people who went to visit his office, from students to non-Black professionals who in all respects noticeably stood out as visitors were safe and protected because of Purnell's reputation, stature, and status in the community. Specifically he recalled an occasion during the 1980s where a Caucasian woman was sent to visit Purnell's office for a few weeks to help him with organizing and updating his program records and files, in the midst of many people who were hanging around outside and actively engaged and apart of a criminal element and activity he colorfully commented:

Because she was going to help Mr. Purnell... if anybody had did anything [to her], *they would be dead* because he had helped thousands of people for long periods of time so everybody, mama, auntie, uncle, brother in jail, prison... in Joliet, loved Mr. Purnell... That's the power of Mr. Purnell with our people. (A. Mitchem, personal communication, February 22, 2016).

He continued:

I had [a] deep respect and affection for all of that. His work ethic-- he wasn't one of these just get over brothers. He wasn't jive. He travelled everywhere, spoke all the time and as I grew to know him in my political life I was with him on at least one occasion and saw how he worked and he was a legend. He got 2,000 Black kids at least a year in college and universities in the United States... So his example was his work ethic, his integrity, his loyalty, his conscientiousness, all the things that mark him a leader as opposed to someone just walking around bullshitting. (A. Mitchem, personal communication, February 22, 2016).

Reflections from Dr. Arnold Mitchem

Similar to Muhammed Ali and Joe Frazier in the 1970s, Mitchem and Purnell had an oppositional, yet respectful relationship for a period of time. Legendary boxer and revolutionary Ali battled with the American government over exercising his right not to participate in the Vietnam war due to religious and moral convictions. With this and as he purposed himself to be the champion, 'as *he* saw fit' he gained plenty of criticism and opposition. Even though Frazier was a fierce competitor and had been gravely insulted and berated by Ali, he seemed to still hold a regard and respect for Ali. This was illustrated by Frazier's public and financial support of Ali and his reinstatement during his litigation period. (Ozanian, 2016). Similarly, regarding visionary Purnell who clearly preferred to operate according to his own terms, and eventually gained opposition who plotted and worked to halt his efforts with his programming. Despite some political and ideological differences, educational pioneer, Mitchem respected Purnell and his efforts and supported him during his time of need.

Mitchem provided both on the record data and off the record insight about some of the actual people, motives, and entities who went after Purnell and worked to

dismantle and defund his programs. He shared stories about conversations he was privy to where people divulged their plans and intentions to “close Si Purnell’s shop in Chicago.” Similar to other-participants’ testaments to service and support of Purnell during his administrative times of need, Mitchem shared: “the role I played in defending Mr. Purnell was I got involved in the politics and helped him with his lawyer in Chicago.” The end result was that whatever issue in question was remedied and Purnell and his program continued to exist and persist. (A. Mitchem, personal communication, February 22, 2016).

As the annals and time and history report and suggest, many pioneers, visionaries, and great leaders who are selfless, driven, and unwavering in their mission, Purnell developed a collective contention of people and forces who opposed him and his work. Mitchem discussed some who were deliberately “trying to sabotage him” because they were “jealous of Si and saw... an opportunity to get rid of Si.” (A. Mitchem, personal communication, February 22, 2016). He recalled that some of the enemies of Purnell:

Resented Si because he wouldn’t bend over and kiss their butts and then he was an independent man and he operated his program the way he wanted to and so of course they accused him of violating... different federal [laws and] said he was using the money wrongly and so forth... They tried to get him on that kind of technical stuff. They even came with process things like, “well, we think his office is in the wrong place. It’s in the basement of a project and that could be a fire hazard and clients will get burned up,” and all kinds of silliness. (A. Mitchem, personal communication, February 22, 2016).

He explained how through strategic maneuvering and political manipulation, a particular administrator wanted to upend him but “couldn’t just fire Purnell because he’s too popular among black people”. So their plan and hope was that “the federal

government [was] going to come in there and knock him out.” He recalled their sentiment, “let them do the dirty work.” (A. Mitchem, personal communication, February 22, 2016). Fortunately, those mal-intentions were thwarted and did not prosper in its effort, and Purnell through his career and time with TRIO, stood the test of time and until his final retirement the doors of the program remained open. Mitchem shared more and added:

One of the things that Mr. Purnell [said], one of his most famous quotes... and I’ve used this a thousand times is, “Everybody is organized except poor people. Everybody is organized except poor people.” And that stuck with me and stuck with many others and I tried to do everything in my power and continue to do it until I die to try to represent the interests of poor people and create an organization that reflects the values and aspirations of poor folks. ... The success we’ve had is because we are organized and we’re disciplined and we incorporate our own strategies and tactics for success for advocacy... on the behalf of poor folks. (A. Mitchem, personal communication, February 22, 2016).

In the realms of politics and bureaucracy regarding governmental legislative decisions and in the midst of conversations and “debate about who should be served and where should the resources go, Si Purnell was always on the side of the poor and so that’s one thing about him”, and “the other thing is his impact on Black Chicago.” (A. Mitchem, personal communication, February 22, 2016).

Purnell’s Support, Influence and Expectations of Young Professionals

Reflections from Michael Jeffries

Jeffries worked with students of color and Student Affairs in the 1960s and 1970s and had a close working relationship with Purnell. He regarded him as a mentor that he

learned from and a pioneer in many of his endeavors within Illinois. During his time working at the flagship university in the state of Illinois, Jeffries recalled: “Si was still bringing people here” and “helped us establish our Principal Scholars Program” which still exists. He explained:

He helped our admissions office...because we did not have good ties with the Chicago Public Schools and-- they adored him... because he really championed [the efforts for] students could get in schools late in the summer... So...you know, it's like, at the time it seemed like our students were Black students and other students weren't taking the ACT or the SAT... He was kind of a power broker and the Chicago Public Schools trusted him to get the students working all during the summer so people that even applied later in the summer to colleges, were able to get in somewhere... [Because] it was almost like... [it] changed the culture of what the expectations, that was not just for U of I-- but for the city-wide students were able to get into college. Colleges would come when he was involved. (M. Jeffries, personal communication, November 3, 2015).

Regarding the additional push and accountability measures impressed by Purnell to fellow colleagues and practitioners in the field of Student Affairs, he shared:

The mentorship really came in with the Illinois chapter of our regional association... We met [with] the people from universities and colleges in the state of Illinois and he was getting on our case... he said “you younger, young people you need to really get involved. And at that time... he pushed me... [and] I ran for president of the Illinois chapter and I became the Illinois chapter [president] of MAEOPP. (M. Jeffries, personal communication, November 3, 2015).

He added that when he became president elect of the Mid-America Association of Educational Opportunities Program Personnel (MAEOPP) in 1981, “I learned... different strategies from him. I was encouraged... really highly motivated about the

commitment... to help students. He was saying “you guys can’t just come to the conference, sit around, drinking coffee and partying and whatever...” (M. Jeffries, personal communication, November 3, 2015).

Reflections from Venise Hardy

In response to the last opportunity during our interview to share ‘*any final thoughts, remarks or comments that you have*’ about Purnell, Hardy reflected on his life and first emphasized that, “he has a street named after him.” Referring to the street adjacent to Purnell’s former Ada S. McKinley TRIO Talent Search office in the Dearborn Homes, at 29th & Dearborn, between 29th and State and 29th and Federal streets. She continued and proclaimed:

There is no place to choose in the city of Chicago in a room of African American professionals and [when you] mention the name of Silas Purnell, there's always at least one, two, three people who... have benefited from his services. The fact that we are now servicing third and fourth generations of college students whose grandparents and parents came and received the same exact services; and now they are bringing their sons and their daughters back through the same process. So regardless of whatever walk of life that they are, social economic status; they still remember the personalized care, attention to detail that Mr. Purnell gave them by way of encouraging them and instilling a fundamental belief that college is not an option for [a] select few but it’s the viable option for anyone who chooses to go on the path of pursuing. (V. Hardy, personal communication, December 15, 2015).

Reflections from Dr. James Anderson

Anderson’s account and feedback further supports the notion that Purnell was highly regarded and respected; and that he held other professionals in the field to a high standard as well. Purnell would call others into account about their contributions, efforts,

or lack thereof in the endeavor to facilitate Black students' matriculation into college. He shared experiences as a young professional working in higher education:

From the first time I met him I understood that, and I comprehended... right away that underneath all this is just a deep and budding concern for these young people. And so if he didn't think you acted responsibly and he didn't think that you were helping out in the way that you should, you could get the fire and brimstone. And we had been meeting [and] I think [because] we were always the 'Big House' coming from the University of Illinois... he would let loose on us, you know, like "Hey, you know the Big House needs to be included too. Kids need to have access there as well." I wasn't put off by that because I knew from the inside out that his insights were accurate. He knew that places like this did not want his kids... And I could see that from the inside and so as long he's telling the truth he's not bothering me... It was clear to me that he understood the fight that he was up against that all of us were up against. (J. Anderson, personal communication, November 18, 2015).

Closing Thoughts and Reflections from Michael Jeffries

In the words of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., "No work is insignificant. All labor that uplifts humanity has dignity and importance and should be undertaken with painstaking excellence." When one operates in excellence, frequently the result of their work is reflective of their high standards and the impact is of a great multitude. If they are serving in the capacity of a leader, they will be able to influence the work ethic and expectations of those working around them. Regardless of the rudimentary nature of the task and its impact on others, as a leader is meticulous about all aspects of the work and holds others he or she works with to the same level of detail, the rewards can be great.

Jeffries reflected on the overwhelming number of people who attended the final celebration of Purnell's life at his funeral and memorial service at Trinity United Church

of Christ: “Si was influential in all of our lives, and that church was just running over”. He continued and recalled an earlier memory from about two years earlier at a retirement celebration at the Hyatt Regency in Chicago. He remembered:

There were people that came in and worked for the airlines & other people. Political people, people who were at high levels that he had influenced. But it wasn’t just the ones that were in his program. *It was us*-- individuals who were in the movement, the educational opportunities movement, that wanted to be like him, and do the best we could in our efforts. (M. Jeffries, personal communication, November 3, 2015).

During the final minutes of our interview he encouragingly shared, “I’m so glad you’re doing this [work]. Si is only the really true champion of our generation that I could think of in education!” (M. Jeffries, personal communication, November 3, 2015).

Chapter 6

Contributions, Reflections, and Conclusions

In this chapter, I will conclude this dissertation study and offer a final summation within three sections. The first section includes a summary of this work and discussion of its contribution to scholarship within the academy. The second section includes implications, limitations and suggestions for future research and finally, the third section presents conclusions, reflections, and my final thoughts regarding this project. This study also offered additional contextual and historical information about the work of Silas Purnell. This study discussed aspects of the trends and culture in college admissions and presented factors related to access to higher education for low-income, first-generation students from Chicago and surrounding areas during the time (1967-2001) of Purnell's work with TRIO as a leader and director of a Talent Search Program.

Section I: Summary and Contribution to Scholarship

Summary of this Study

This study is a part of a larger effort to describe and provide historical context about access for urban, first-generation, low-income students and the college going culture. This work also considers contributing efforts related to the matriculation of urban African American students during the last half-century through focusing on one man and his work. This document discusses some of the challenges, practices, and efforts of Purnell and his mission to send Black students to college. Through his story, we in turn hear other stories and get to learn about other individuals who worked directly with him,

supported his vision, and even offers remarks about some of the opposing efforts to halt Purnell's program and push. This study provides supplementary information about the TRIO Educational Talent Search Program and the Ada S. McKinley Community Services, Inc. agency that he worked with as a vehicle to help send thousands of students to college. Inadvertently, this study discusses inter-related entities including: the city of Chicago, the Chicago Public School system; and different college and university cultures and climates. A significant portion of this project highlights stories of specific individuals (Research Participants: Dunkin, Hannah, Hardy, Kidd, Radix, Sullivan, and West-Williams), who all worked with Purnell directly as teenagers or young adults in some capacity and benefitted from his services through receiving college education resources, direction, or mentorship.

This study realized that Ada S. McKinley Community Services, Inc. and its Educational Services Division, which was established in the 1960s, with the leadership of Purnell in their TRIO Talent Search Program continues to thrive. The organization continues to build a track record of providing support services to low-income and first-generation students from the Chicago-land area who seek the path or entrance into higher education. TRIO is a federally funded national program and has expanded from its inception to include multiple programs. It persists and sponsors multiple host sites and programs, which operate throughout the city of Chicago, state of Illinois, and the United States.

Contributions to Scholarship

This study offers a more comprehensive biographical account of the life of Silas Purnell and provides additional data about the quality and success of his work from a variety of perspectives. Unlike other work about Purnell, this project employed multiple open-ended interviews in a single study to yield valuable quality information that can provide insight about effective strategies and practices used to assist African American students matriculation into college. This study features individuals who were connected to Purnell as in some capacity including: a colleague, contemporary, student affairs professional, college or university professor, school administrator, student, mentee, program director, and/or immediate family member. Each research participant held distinctly different experiences and levels of interactions with Purnell and shared their memories in this project.

Currently, there is literature that includes articles, periodicals, and various publications about Silas Purnell and his work with Black students. However, there is no extensive and substantive work that definitively details the approximate number of students and families he actually worked with, assisted and facilitated into college. Reported figures range from 30,000 to 70,000 students; and some word of mouth accounts suggest numbers in excess of 100,000. This project offers additional contextualization and data to suggest a more accurate account and idea of the extent of Purnell's work.

Moreover, as an exploratory study, this dissertation aimed to discover and describe why and how Purnell was able to yield the great amount of success that he did.

Specifically, this project sought to address the following overarching research questions, which guided this study:

- 1) What strategies and practices did Purnell implement when working with the students and families he served?
- 2) In what ways were these strategies and practices effective for a) assisting students in gaining access to higher education and b) providing support to students?
- 3) How can current professionals and advocates for underrepresented, low-income students apply strategies Purnell used into their work to increase access to higher education?

This study also may help gain a better understanding and familiarity of the work practices and strategies used by Purnell which, in turn, can be used for reference and practical application by ensuing or aspiring scholars and practitioners in the field.

The data set collected from multiple interviews that was reviewed, analyzed, coded, and presented in Chapter 5 support the findings and further describe the intricacies of the six major themes identified in this study. Those themes include:

1. Purnell was a trusted soul, regarded in his community as a liaison and expert resource for college application and admission.
2. Purnell established and maximized mentoring relationships with students and professional relationships with college and university staff, administrators, and other resources
3. Purnell was closely connected to the Chicago community; understood the college institutional climate and was culturally competent
4. Purnell identified students' potential for success in college; appropriately matched students to programs; and facilitated access into higher education to students

5. Purnell was a staunch advocate and champion for African Americans students' matriculation into college and committed to placing Chicago students into new environments.
6. Purnell was respected by his colleagues and held others to high standards in their service to students.

Section II: Implications, Limitations, and Suggestions for Future Research

Implications

This dissertation study has several implications. The findings therein may contribute to scholarship in the fields of higher education, student affairs, the sociology of education, TRIO programs, and the history of Black Chicago and public schooling. As a former full-time employee, and recent graduate student in Student Affairs departments and TRiO programs on two different campuses, I have worked directly with the Ronald E. McNair Post-baccalaureate Achievement Program, Upward Bound Program and assisted with the Talent Search Program. I can attest to the quality of service to students and commitment that is necessary to maximize performance output. As a student and scholar I have yet to hear about a similar program or person close to the acclaim or lore of Purnell and his levels of success in getting students to college. Of all of the themes that emerged from this study I have seen each of them individually employed in varying capacities from practitioners, staff, and administrators in the field. However, I have not seen or heard of the combination of all six themes and attributes effectively, collectively conveyed or personified through another person or program.

For this particular project, the snowballing method was used and from 13 research subjects, on average each participant provided an average of four to five referrals. One

interviewee (Jeffries) offered over a dozen viable candidates to follow up and screen. From all of the participants, there were some names provided that were iterated by multiple participants. The ultimate yield of additional potential candidates as subjects was over 30 people. Those responses and the buzzing enthusiasm about my project indicated a tremendous interest because I had many people who expressed passion to share, participate, and contribute in this work. The last two research participants in this study emerged after my initial deadline to complete interviews, but were selected based on their zeal and vivid recollections of their interactions with Purnell.

Due to my intersecting roles as a citizen in the Black community, Chicago community, and scholar community my own lens and experiences, to some degree impacted my understanding, analysis, and approach in listening to the interview content and review of the findings. Even with the notion of having the added responsibility to write about a well-respected, beloved figure from my community, at times I grappled with deciding what should be highlighted, included, or dismissed in my narrative. Even deciding what themes would emerge were a reflection of my own biases and inclinations. It would be unnatural to not allow ones' personal experiences, perspective and identity to inform them of what is most meaningful, poignant and important.

While conducting this research and upon reflecting on the journey it is clear that there is a great need to do more of this type of work. In addition to archiving documentation about the life and career success of Silas Purnell, the world and academy is offered more concrete accounts of such stories, which also intersect with many notable peers, colleagues, and mentees, mostly ranging in ages between 45 to 85. For these

reasons, it is critical and valuable to continue this work for records and scholarship purposes sooner rather than later.

Limitations

All research has its limitations. There were some significant limitations that may have marginally impacted this study and some of the findings therein. One consideration and limitation was the unavailability and lack of access to records and organizational program data collected from the agency during Purnell's tenure as the TRiO Talent Search Program director. As discussed in the *Methodological Considerations* section in Chapter 3, another challenge was obtaining primary documents that may have further corroborated and better confirmed actual statistics. During my research I faced the challenge of gaining access to review data and records, which contained the Annual Performance Report (APR), which has been used as a yearly report and measurement tool for TRiO programs.

According to leaders in the administrative offices of Ada S. McKinley Community Services, Inc. in Chicago and TRiO Program staff in Washington, D.C., recorded data collected during Purnell's tenure was not fully available or archived for public access. More specifically, when I began seeking existing data to add to this research, in March 2016, I spoke with the CEO of Ada S. McKinley Community Services. He informed me that the agency did not have any records or data files from the work of Purnell "at all" to substantiate the total number of students and families he served. He further explained that their office did not have files on hand nor access to the APR data from during the time of Purnell's time was with the agency and they only have records for more recent years. He suggested following up with TRiO. Subsequently, I

corresponded with Dr. Linda Byrd-Johnson, the Senior Director of the Student Service who works with the TRiO office with the United States Department of Education in Washington, D.C. Her follow up correspondence via emailed read as such:

Good Morning Mr. Benson, I am sharing your request with Ms. Julie Laurel, Division Director, Program Development, who will be able to provide you with the availability of APR data on the Talent Search (TS) project under the directorship of Mr. Silas Purnell. I am also most certain that our data does not go back as far as 1967 and that we will not likely to be able provide the names of the institutions of higher education where project participants enrolled. Thanks.

Shortly afterwards I spoke with Julie Laurel, the Director of Student Program Development Division, via conference call (March 2016) about my interest and request for information and access to records of Purnell's work with TRiO. She responded by after looking into their files and databases and shared the following correspondence regarding her findings:

Hello Mr. Benson, Thank you for your inquiry regarding the Talent Search and Upward Bound grants for Ada S. McKinley Community Services, Inc. I have researched your inquiry regarding Ada S. McKinley Community Services, Inc. as it relates to the Project Director (PD), Mr. Silas Purnell. Our data goes only as far back as 1998 and so between 1998 and 2001 I can confirm that Mr. Purnell did serve as the Project Director (PD) for the Talent Search program at Ada S. McKinley Community Services, Inc. For each project/reporting year we have documentation (1998-99 through 2001-2002), Ada S. McKinley Community Services, Inc. served 1,600 TS participants. Regarding the Upward Bound program, I reviewed our databases and although Ada S. McKinley Community Services, Inc. did have an Upward Bound grant, Mr. Purnell was not the PD between 1999-00 through 2001-02. Our database did not have PD contact information for 1998-99, the earliest year for which we have data. I hope this information is helpful. Please do not hesitate to contact me should you need further assistance. Thanks again.

Both of these email correspondences, ascertain that not only was there not an accurate account of the number of student Purnell helped on file, but also that the records they do have only included students he assisted through the Talent Search Program in the last three years of his nearly 40 years of service to help African American students go to college. Without evidence and quantitative data in the form of records and statistics, the public is left with only qualitative data offerings from memories, speculation, and estimation from those who were present first-hand and either saw the work, supported the work, or were a part of the work from Purnell.

I employed the snowballing sampling method to identify a subject pool for this project. During each interview my final concluding question (#12) was, *'What other people or groups do you recommend I contact or connect with to gain additional insight or information about SP and his work?'* The ultimate yield of suggestions for additional potential candidates as subjects was over 30 people. I contacted many of them via email, but in the midst of engaging in my research and data collection process it became clear that due to limited time and resources the likelihood of being able to thoroughly correspond, pre-screen and interview all of the suggested participants in a quality manner could be problematic and potentially impact the quality of this study.

Lastly, since I relied heavily on interviews with others sharing memories of working with Purnell, at least two issues can arise. One, relying solely on a person's recollections.-One's memory may not always be as accurate when they have to recall information and details from many years ago. Considering that Purnell passed away in 2003, over a decade before the beginning of this project. Hence, all of the memories and stories shared about him and his work are referenced from a time span ranging between

15 and 50 years ago. To obtain the most accurate information for a study such as this, it is preferable to combine hard data with interviews when possible. Also, because Purnell was deceased at the time that I conducted my data collection, I was unable to interview him. This disallowed me to be the first-hand perspective and description of the work that was done, and I was not able to capture some information that only he would be able to recount. Perhaps I also may have been able to retrieve some data that only he may have kept in his own record keeping from the time he began his work and dedication to helping African American students into higher education. In conversing with him, he may have clarified, confirmed, and given more details about information that others may not have recalled.

Lessons Gained for Continuing Research

If I choose to revisit or continue this work about Silas Purnell and his strategies for success, this section offers suggestions to use based on reflections and lessons learned through conducting this research and formulating this dissertation study.

First, follow up to use the list of compiled suggested contacts accumulated during the interviews conducted for this project. This is discussed further in the *Limitations* section of this chapter. The participants in this study were identified as a core group able to provide quality data and a comprehensive perspective about Purnell and his work. Based on their experiences, recollections, and networks, they in turn offered a list of others to contact who could lend additional insight about the work and person of Purnell.

Secondly, I learned that conducting at least two interviews with each subject would be time consuming, but potentially yield more insightful details and perspective. Also, with the opportunity to follow up from an initial interview, a different level of

preparation is allowed. In addition to the prescribed questions for each participant, you are afforded content and context from the data set to review and prepare specific follow up inquiries. Also, for some information especially dates, names, and locations disclosed, the research subject has additional time to double check and confirm any facts they may not be completely certain about or unable to accurately recall for. Considering that Purnell passed away over a decade before (2003) the beginning of this project, all of the memories and stories shared about Purnell and his active work are referenced from a time span ranging between 15 and 50 years ago.

Third, I suggest video recording all interviews in addition to audio recording them. Audio recording was a viable medium and data collection method but as many of the interviews were conducted in public or shared office spaces, some audio tapings presented some technical challenges. From background noises from other people, including coffee shop patrons conversing, automobiles and trains passing, and ringing telephones, some portions of the recordings and its quality of sound and volume was compromised and impacted for the transcription process. There were at least several points during most of the interviews where the transcriber noted in the transcript specific moments and time spans, which were 'INAUDIBLE' for them to account for. In addition to allowing a fuller offering to an archived database, videotaping could capture and record non-verbal cues and communication including: personality, body language, mannerisms, and the emotions of participants. This may be contextually important in accenting the participants' interactions with Purnell from their descriptions, which sometimes cannot be comprehensively expressed through an audio recording.

Fourth, I would develop a more exhaustive list of questions to utilize during interviews. It may also be beneficial to have a running list of alternative, supplementary questions developed based on ongoing interviews and analysis. Fifth, consider developing a questionnaire (possibly a pre-interview document) with closed and open-ended questions for potential research subjects. This would allow additional measures to prescreen individuals about their level of familiarity and connection with Purnell and his work. One reference who was yielded through snowballing sampling was contacted and suggested other contacts to follow up with after expressing that she would not be able to provide an in-depth, meaningful quality interview because of her limited contact and insight about Purnell.

Sixth, in addition to snowball sampling, increase advertisement to inform and identify more prospective participants to expand the research participant pool. In my IRB proposal, I articulated my intention to use radio advertisement. Since the list of people and families Purnell worked with is massive, a public announcement on popular syndicated radio programs, such as *The AC Green Show* or *The Steve Harvey Morning Show*; or an advertisement on certain local Chicago radio stations such as 102.7 FM, 106.3 FM, or 1390 AM, whose predominant listening audience matches the demographics of those who Purnell focused on working with and would be well familiar with his work. Such an announcement through these mediums could easily yield hundreds if not thousands of responses for further inquiry and potential participation. After doing only a few interviews and gaining word of mouth references for new potential research participants, I thought it wise and expedient to limit the promotion and

announcement of this project-and avoid an overwhelming number of participant interest due to limited time.

Seventh, solicit and secure supplementary funding to support administrative and operational costs to conduct extended research. A costly, nonetheless much needed tool used in this project was the hiring of freelance and professional transcribers to document all 15 of the interviews incorporated in this study. Due to the length and extensive nature of my interviews, the transcription costs I incurred were over \$500. More funding resources could further support more interviews to be conducted, hence, increasing the opportunity for more data collection. In-town travel in the Champaign-Urbana area and travel to Chicago yielded significant expenses. Two of my interviews were conducted via telephone. One interviewee was in Las Vegas (Sullivan) and the other in Washington D.C. (Mitchem) during our interview exchange. It would have been a more viable option to travel to these participants or finance their transport to me for a face-to-face interview as there are intrinsic qualitative advantages to in-person interviews.

Eighth, consider identifying and assembling a team of research partners to explore this work. This could be a cross-disciplinary team compiled of researchers, practitioners, biographers, and student scholars. The purpose of this group could be to facilitate preliminary focus groups; contact and pre-screen potential research participants; conduct individual or group interviews; and transcribe, code, and analyze data. Collectively, a research team could yield more in-depth findings and ultimately more comprehensive data for publication. Multiple perspectives and observation lenses could present challenges regarding interpretation and analysis, but could also yield extensive quality

information and insight to be adopted and employed in fields related to Student Affairs, Higher Education, and matriculation efforts for African American students.

Sections III:

Researcher Reflections and Final Thoughts

Reflections

As my desire to pursue this subject was inspired by several people and interactions during my Ph.D. attainment journey. While a student in Professor William Trent's Education Policy Studies/Education, Organization & Leadership course subtitled, Access to Higher Education (EPS/EOL 579) in Fall of 2014, I solidified my topic and confirmed that my dissertation topic would be a project centered around the career work of Silas Purnell. Immediately after settling on my research topic and sharing it with others, I received meaningful and extensive encouragement from colleagues, professors, and others connected to the Chicago community who were familiar with Purnell's legacy. Many Black professionals in higher education with connections to Illinois seemed to have stories about Purnell. Upon finalizing my dissertation topic and intention to explore issues of access to higher education for urban African American students and the work strategies and practices of Purnell, many expressed excitement and commented about the need to highlight and further document his accomplishments and achievements. The more I mentioned the name, Silas Purnell, the caliber and level of responses I received allowed me to further realize that not only was he seemingly a cultural phenomenon of his time, but also supported the notion that this was a special project which was perhaps long overdue and deserved attention.

This journey was challenging yet rewarding. Even during countless moments and times I was unable to clearly focus and progress in my writing process, I never lost respect or passion for this assignment. Even though this was a conscious choice and decision to explore this topic at this level, in the early stages of this work, I felt both a sense of pride and pressure. Due to my roles as a Black man, minister and community leader, minister, Chicago native and educated African American scholar I felt an overwhelming sense of responsibility to explore, discover, and report the story of a revered legend, and to do it justice. I believed this assignment to be in part both my civic duty and cultural and responsibility.

Conclusions

George Washington Carver said, “No individual has any right to come in this world and go out of it without leaving behind him distinct and legitimate reasons for having passed through it.” This notion resonates with a message from a sermon for a college friend who tragically passed away in a car accident. The subject and title asked the question “What do you do with your dash?” referring to the hyphenated dash that is often between the years of birth and death on the cover of an obituary. That dash is the opportunity and time frame for the story of our lives to unfold and be written. This notion and the aforementioned quote by Carver are meaningful words to ingest and live by. With the understanding that all human beings whether they recognize, accept, or discover it all have a distinctive purpose in life, in my ponderings of the past, present, and future conditions of my fellow African American citizens, I often notice many who subscribe to the acceptance of a certain level of complacency and mediocrity. As an avid student of the history of Black people and African civilizations, I posit that this is an unacceptable

inclination and practice. Dr. King admonished others in a quote using the vocation of street sweeper to to be great and do well in whatever you purpose to do. Perhaps, fueled and perpetuated by both internal and external forces, clearly for a great people to continue in greatness and move forward as such, it will take those who are the willing to continually strive to do the impossible. Even though much has been accomplished, there remains plenty of work ahead and around us all.

Final Thoughts

I argue, submit, and contend that we owe it to those who strived, cried, and died before us to discover and walk in the pinnacle of the greatness within to contribute to the progression and betterment of our people. Fortunately, Purnell knew his purpose and was both willing and determined to walk in his gifts and “calling” to his work. As a result, he implanted and solidified an unprecedented and extraordinary legacy, which resonated and impacted an innumerable amount of lives. From the colleagues and people he worked with everyday; to the thousand of students who visited his office to receive resources, direction, and a one-way ticket to a college campus and often literally an opportunity of a lifetime; all the way to individuals such as I who have been inspired, motivated, and encouraged through the hearing and learning of his story. Despite never meeting him, because of the people he worked with and poured into, I have been indirectly touched by his work as many of them have in turn, poured into me.

Even now, over 50 years after Purnell began his formal work with Ada S. McKinley Community Services, Inc., there still exists a need to assist a new generation and population of students, who similar to many before them aspire to higher education but may not “have the 123456 steps on making it a reality” (Dunkin, personal

communication, December 14, 2015). In a time, society, educational structure, and city government that authorized the closing of over 50 Chicago elementary and high schools which primarily housed and educated students of color, just a few years ago we could use another Silas Purnell.

We are in the aftermath of a time where fluctuating but continual shifts of resource allocations earmarked specifically for African American students go to the interests of other populations in the name of diversity. Many young citizens who are raised in at-risk communities full of crime, poverty, and despair; and similar to my own situation, find and use education to be a hope, light, and vehicle to transport and transform their lives into better. For them, we need more Silas Purnells and even though it is impossible to duplicate him, we can look and learn from his example. We can reference components of his strategies that yielded great success and victories in his aims and endeavor to support the matriculation of African American students. For those who are passionate and adamant about maximum achievement in the highest capacity; and for those who are called to do this work why not study the standard and use the example of the ‘Michael Jordan of TRIO’, Mr. Silas Purnell?

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APPENDIX A: IRB Approval Form

Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research
Office for the Protection of Research Subjects 528
East Green Street, Suite 203
Champaign, IL 61820



09/28/2015
Christopher Span
EPOL 130A Education Building
1310 S. Sixth St.
M/C 708

RE: *Exploring educational resources and access for urban African American students into 4-year colleges and universities and the career success of Mr. Silas Purnell 'The Michael Jordan of TRIO'*
IRB Protocol Number: 16208

EXPIRATION DATE: 09/27/2018

Dear Dr. Span:

Thank you for submitting the completed IRB application form for your project entitled Exploring educational resources and access for urban African American students into 4-year colleges and universities and the career success of Mr. Silas Purnell 'The Michael Jordan of TRIO'. Your project was assigned Institutional Review Board (IRB) Protocol Number 16208 and reviewed. It has been determined that the research activities described in this application meet the criteria for exemption at 45CFR46.101(b)(2).

This determination of exemption only applies to the research study as submitted. Please note that additional modifications to your project need to be submitted to the IRB for review and exemption determination or approval before the modifications are initiated.

We appreciate your conscientious adherence to the requirements of human subjects research. If you have any questions about the IRB process, or if you need assistance at any time, please feel free to contact me at the OPRS office, or visit our website at <http://oprs.research.illinois.edu>.

Sincerely,

Rose St. Clair, BA

Assistant Human Subjects Research Specialist, Office for the Protection of Research Subjects

c: Denice Hood
Perry Benson

APPENDIX B: Participant Consent Form



Consent Form

Purpose and Procedures: This study, conducted by Perry L. Benson, Jr., a graduate student at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, is intended to explore the career and work of Mr. Silas Purnell, a former TRiO Educational Talent Search Program Director who is credited for contributing to access and admissions for thousands of urban high school students and young adults into 4-year colleges and universities. If you agree to take part in this research, you will be asked to participate in an in-person interview, phone interview or interview via Skype. The questions being asked will be related to the life and work of Mr. Silas Purnell and his history of working with urban students and placing them into 4-year colleges and universities.

The questions asked are designed to discover and explore the strategies, practices, and operating procedures that Silas Purnell used in his work as he established and solidified a successful reputation and record of contributing to access and admissions to college for countless first-generation and low-income students. Your responses will be audio taped or video taped at an agreed upon location. These video and audio recordings will be used to contribute to the data compiled and findings reported in the research dissertation of Ph.D. student, Perry L. Benson, Jr. You may be asked to participate in up to three follow up interviews and each interview will be approximately 1-2 hours.

Risks and Benefits: Your participation in this research is voluntary. You may experience some uncomfortable feelings in this interview but this research does not involve any risks beyond what you may have in everyday life. Some of the questions may invoke reflections about educational practices in the last half-century and some questions may invoke personal recollections of your professional and personal relationship, observations, and interactions with Silas Purnell. You will not receive any direct benefits from participating in this research.

At any point in the interview you have the option and right to discontinue the interview. However, your participation will help further explore the work and career accomplishments of Silas Purnell and his strategies for success in extending access and admissions to urban high school students and first-generation students to college. We hope this project will further contribute to the research and study of college access to underrepresented populations.

Confidentiality: There will be no personally identifying information such as name on the audio taped recordings. This research will not be published with personally identifying information. To make sure your participation is private, please do not provide any personally identifying information on the audiotapes. In general, we will not tell anyone any information about you. When this research is discussed or published, no one will know that you were in the study. However, laws and university rules might require us to tell certain people about you. For example, your records from this research may be seen or copied by the following:

Representatives of the university committee and office that reviews and approves research studies, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and Office for Protection of Research Subjects; other representatives of the state and university responsible for ethical, regulatory, or financial oversight of research; or federal government regulatory agencies such as the Office of Human Research Protections in the Department of Health and Human Services.

Who to Contact with Questions: If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study, any concerns or complaints, please contact the University of Illinois Institutional Review Board at 217-333-2670 or via email at irb@illinois.edu. For additional questions or concerns please contact the primary investigator and person in charge, Dr. Christopher M. Span, Associate Dean and Professor in the Education Policy, Organization & Leadership Department. He can be reached at 217-333-2800 or email at cspan@illinois.edu; or you may contact Perry L. Benson, Jr. at pbenson@illinois.edu or 559-720-3303. You will receive a copy of this consent form.

I certify that I am over 18, have read this form, and volunteer to participate in this research study.

Please print name: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Furthermore, if you would like to be identified and for your name to be used in this study you may provide permission to the researcher by signing and providing the date below:

Signature: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX C: Guiding Interview Questions

Interview Guiding Questions For Review

- 1.) What is your current professional role and what positions have you served in during your career working with students?
- 2.) How did you meet Silas Purnell? What capacity did you know him? How often did you work with him? Please share any specific details or dates you recall.
- 3.) What was his professional reputation in the fields of Education, Student Affairs and the academy?
- 4.) Based on your understanding and perspective what were his strategy and techniques? How was he effective in placing students into schools and providing access to higher education?
- 5.) How familiar were/are you with TRiO Programs overall and the TRiO Educational Talent Search Program (Ada S. McKinley) site which Silas Purnell served as Director?
- 6.) Were you his student or did you meet or work with any students that Silas Purnell worked with and placed into a college or university?
- 7.) Are you familiar with any special or outstanding (success) stories surrounding Silas Purnell and his work with students? Please share.
- 8.) What were the primary colleges, universities, and departmental programs Silas Purnell was affiliated with or worked with?
- 9.) Did he have a special pipeline or connection with certain individuals, (their title/roles) programs, colleges, universities, and/or departments?
- 10.) What other people or groups do you recommend I contact to gain additional insight or information about Silas Purnell and his work?