

**More Than Meets the Eye: Three African-American Women Activists in North
Carolina**

Tiffany N. White

A thesis submitted to the faculty of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the School of Journalism
and Mass Communication

Chapel Hill
2009

Approved By:
Adviser: Dr. Frank E. Fee Jr.
Reader: Dr. Jane Brown
Reader: Dr. Trevy McDonald

© 2009

Tiffany N. White

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

ABSTRACT

**TIFFANY N WHITE: More Than Meets the Eye: Three African-American Women Activists
in North Carolina**
(Under the direction of Dr. Frank Fee)

African American women have a rich history as community leaders and activists during slavery, the women's movement and the civil rights movement, but despite their centrality within the black community during these eras, they have received little regard from the mass media. In three articles, this master's thesis examines the activism of three black female activists who work within smaller communities than those typically associated with more well-known activists. These articles represent areas of work historically connected to black women's activism and significance in the black community. The first article looks at a woman's fight for quality housing and her efforts to help others do the same. The second story focuses on an activist's work to create awareness among local Carolinians about Africa. The final story follows the work of a woman who is a trainer in a program that confronts racism and oppression. The thesis aims to provide an in-depth look into the lives of North Carolina's black female activists while simultaneously connecting their activism with efforts of the past.

To my mother, Glenda:

Thank you for all your love. Your inner strength and perseverance were the true sources of inspiration for this research. I could not have asked for a better representation of what it means to be a strong black woman and I am so proud to call you mom.

Everything I've ever accomplished in life has been for you.

To my father, Arizona:

Thank you for being there when others opted not to be. I have more respect for you than you will ever know and I hope I have made you proud. Thanks, dad.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank my family for their never-ending support and encouragement during my time in this master's program. When I doubted my abilities and myself the most, it was your belief in me that kept me going. To my advisor, Dr. Fee, there are really no words to express how grateful I am for your guidance throughout this process. All the work that you have put into ensuring I turn in the best and most thorough thesis possible has not gone overlooked and I would like to think that I am a better writer because of you. As for my thesis committee members, Dr. Jane Brown and Dr. Trevy McDonald, thank you for your patience and thoughtful feedback. My thesis would not be complete without you. A special thank-you goes out to my friends, my second family, in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication. The laughs, the cries and even the arguments we shared were on many days just the medicine that I needed to get by. There is no way I would have made it through the past two years without you. Lastly, I would like to thank all the participants in my research who managed to smile through the numerous phone calls and e-mails that came their way. My thesis would not exist without you and I can only hope that in telling your stories you have received as much joy from the experience as I have in listening to them. For all those days when you were really too tired but too kind to say it, thank you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter

I.	Introduction.....	1
II.	Literature Review.....	7
III.	Methods.....	32
	Limitations.....	34
	Article Summaries.....	35
IV.	This House Is Not a Home	38
V.	Destination Africa.....	58
VI.	In the Name of Social Justice.....	81
VII.	Summary and Conclusion	97
	Reflection.....	101
	References	106

Chapter I: Introduction

In January 2007, the Oprah Winfrey Leadership Academy for Girls in Johannesburg, South Africa, officially opened. This \$40 million school was the tangible representation of a promise she made to her friend, the activist Nelson Mandela, in 2002 (Koinange, 2006). When asked about the size of her donation, Winfrey reportedly said, “The money means nothing to me. When I look at these girls, I see me. That’s why I want to give them everything I didn’t have growing up. These are the leaders of tomorrow’s Africa” (Koinange, 2006).

Since its opening, the media have clamored around the already world-renowned Winfrey, producing a multitude of articles about her generous and charitable nature. While there is no denying that the extent of such benevolence is exceptional, one has to ask: Is it such a rarity for black women to give back and help those in their community?

The idea of community-centered activism is nothing new for black women. In fact, their African heritage, status during slavery and participation in the women’s and civil rights movements paved the way for their people-centered efforts of today (Gilkes, 1994).

Before being brought to America during the slave trade, African women held significant positions within their communities. Their supportive duties within their extended-family networks – consisting of a hundred or more people – gave them a significant role in these “political, economic and religious unit[s]” called family (Ladner, 1972, p. 19).

During slavery, black women assumed even more community responsibility when

their husbands and other male figures were sold. For this reason, they became not only the heads of their households but also the centers of plantation communities. Even after the end of slavery, these women maintained their centrality within the black community and their power as leaders continued to grow (Gilkes, 1983a).

With their participation in the women's and civil rights movement, black women were confronted with a different idea of community. Before the Emancipation Proclamation, their identity was mainly in connection with the black community at large, fighting for the common goal of freedom. With that obtained and a new fight on the horizon, one question seemed to loom: were they part of a community of women or a community of blacks?

Overall, the purpose of this work is to provide an in-depth view of the lives of three black female activists and to do so in a way that reflects the history of black women during slavery, the women's movement and the civil rights movement. This was done through the examination of the community-based efforts of black women in North Carolina who contribute to their communities on a smaller, less conspicuous scale than their nationally recognized male and female counterparts. At the local or community level, black female community activists rarely receive much recognition. It is important to give voice to the many unheard stories of black women in North Carolina who have taken the "small pieces of community life" and used them to positively, often silently, change America (Gilkes, 1994, p. 241).

Furthermore, this work explores the nature of black female activism in Africa because of African Americans historical connection to the continent. The purpose of this work is carried out in the form of three narrative feature stories that are representative of black women's past community efforts. The narrative pieces are based on extensive, in-depth

interviews with three black women who live in North Carolina and are fighting what they consider a worthy cause in their local community.

Contemporary Activism and Community Work

Today's black female activists operate with the same community-oriented spirit as their ancestors, relying on pre-existing networks of family and friends for support (Collins, 1998). Cheryl Gilkes discovered this in her 1983 and 1994 research in which she conducted a series of open-ended interviews with 25 black female community workers. Through her qualitative research, Gilkes (1994) illustrated that women involved in this work are often connected to previous generations of community activists. One theme that characterizes their work is the idea that fighting for the success of the entire black community and fighting for one's own personal interests are one in the same, leading many to forget their own concerns (Gilkes, 1994).

Many black women become activists in the belief that they have a mission of sorts to complete within the black community, one that once finished allows them to move on to other needy areas (Gilkes, 1983b). Consequently, jobs lasting longer than a few months are a rarity. As a result, activist job stability is low and many of the women who choose these positions are well aware that they are not permanent for them (Gilkes, 1983b). Many leave their jobs of their own accord when they feel they have done all that they can and gotten all that they could get from the experience; it is the work that matters, not the job itself (Gilkes, 1983b).

This outlook is the learning process associated with community work; one works, one learns and then moves on to a position where one can better assist those in need. The sense of kinship felt between these workers and the communities they aid makes their job that much

more stressful and imperative because they are constantly aware of the oppression and suffering in the lives they have touched and those that they have yet to help (Gilkes, 1994).

Many contemporary female community workers are participating in a phenomenon that has been described as “going up for the oppressed.” Women move up the occupational ladder to become more educated and experienced and thus better adept at handling and addressing the issues of the communities in which they work (Gilkes, 1983b). This pattern is ultimately beneficial to both parties. Because many of the institutions created to help black communities – human services, educational agencies – include at least some black workers within their ranks, Gilkes (1983b, p. 120) believes that it is important for them to be “qualified,” meaning they are of the same racial makeup and social understanding as those they assist.

The people in these communities are typically supportive of activist’s work and turn to them as leaders in times of need, though most activists avoid the title of “leader” because of its elitist tones. Ella Baker, a North Carolina native with 50 years of experience in the freedom movement, believed that “leaders” were detrimental to movements and did her work outside of the limelight:

“I have always felt it was a handicap for oppressed peoples to depend so largely upon a leader, because unfortunately in our culture, the charismatic leader usually becomes a leader because he has found a spot in the public limelight. It usually means he has been touted through the public media, which mean that the media made him, and the media may undo him. ... I have always thought that what is needed is the development of people who are interested not in being leaders as much as in developing leadership among other people” (Baker, 1972, p. 350).

Nonetheless, women activists typically attempt to stay as visible as possible within their community because visibility aids them in staying connected and committed to their

community work. For example, the telephone numbers of many community workers are listed in the telephone book and they receive phone calls at all hours of the day and night (Gilkes, 1994). Visibility also makes it easier to enforce the “re-create and sustain” process – building the community and ensuring that it is maintained – that is key to community work (Gilkes, 1994, p. 230). Living in the black community allows activists to share in the struggles and successes of their work. In doing this, community workers limit their ideas of a reward to what is rewarding for the black community, avoiding the monetary and materialistic reward system of the dominant society (Gilkes, 1983b).

Despite the stress, religion, family and friends play a significant role in maintaining these activists as they did for their enslaved ancestors. Interacting with people and ensuring that they can better help themselves is the ultimate source of satisfaction (Gilkes, 1983b).

Such efforts are overshadowed, however, by the public and government fixation on stereotypical images of black women that undermine their power: welfare queen, black matriarch and the bad mother (Collins, 1998). Black women have fought hard to be recognized and protected in America. Fannie Barrier Williams, a black sociologist, recognized this struggle when she said, “The Negro woman in the United States has had a difficult task in her efforts to earn for herself a character in the social life of this country ... She is ... the only woman for whom nothing is done; the only woman without sufficient defenders when assailed” (Williams, 2002, p. 28-59).

Overview

Despite it all, the voice of the black woman has managed to be heard through her ability to combine her fight with the causes of others. Regardless of where the battles have taken them, today’s black female activists have made it clear that they can fight for both race

and sex. For instance, in responding to the 1991 court appearance of Anita Hill, who claimed sexual harassment by Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas, more than 1,600 women of “African descent” signed their names to this statement: “We pledge ourselves to continue to speak out in defense of one another, in defense of the African American community and against those who are hostile to social justice, no matter what color they are.” (Kimberly, 1999, p. 43).

This thesis is comprised of three articles about female black activist in the state of North Carolina. The first article is about Muna Mujahid, a resident of Durham, and her struggle to highlight problems with quality, low-income housing in the city. The second article is centered on Vanessa Hodges, a UNC-Chapel Hill professor who leads a study abroad trip to South Africa in hopes of increasing American awareness about the continent. The final article looks at Michelle Johnson, a resident of Carrboro, and her work against racism and oppression.

The next section of this text, Chapter 2, contains a literature review of scholarly material and an unscientific look at popular media – mainstream and black press – that are related to black women’s activism and status within the black community. This chapter will also consider black women’s role in the black church and journalism and provide a justification for the articles. In Chapter 3, the scope, method and limitations of this thesis are explained and a more detailed summary of the articles is included. Chapter 4, 5 and 6 are the three stories. Chapter 7, the summary and conclusion, gives a description of what has been learned from each profile and reflects upon my experience with the thesis.

Chapter II: Literature Review

This non-traditional thesis project explores different approaches of black women to community activism and how three women profiled in chapters 4, 5 and 6 represent different facets of activism shaped by the black female experience in America. The literature of African Americans in mainstream society, from their arrival in Virginia in 1619, is vast and beyond the scope of this project. The literature review in this chapter is, therefore, restricted to an examination of pertinent topics within the literature of black activism.

According to many scholars, much of black women's community work today has been influenced by their participation in the three major events of their past: slavery, the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, and the women's movement – first the fight for voting rights in the late 19th and early 20th centuries and then the equal rights battles of the period from the 1960s into the 1980s (Dicker, 2008).

Scholarly Work

In the community activism of black women, scholars have found that invisibility, stereotypes of power, and race and gender issues influenced black women's efforts and community status during slavery, the women's movement and the civil rights movement. These factors would culminate in black women's ability to flourish in activism that was achieved on a smaller, more community-based scale.

Slavery and Reconstruction

From slavery's beginning to its end in the middle of the 19th century, it is estimated that 40 million Africans were brought to America to work (Ladner, 1972). The title of slave

itself held no gender assignment until the 1820 census, so it is not surprising that many masters saw their slaves as mere property and sources of labor, titles that led to their ultimate objectification (Collins, 1998). Furthermore, lack of legal gender recognition left slaves with no sense of identity, denying them of even the most basic of human qualities. Men and women alike suffered as a result of being chattel, but none were dehumanized more than black women, upon whom Du Bois (1920) said “the crushing weight of slavery fell” (p. 169). Acting as reproductive centers for slavery, their bodies were objectified and used to maintain the bondage that held them captive, a maternal paradox that could not have been anything less than mental and physical torture (Du Bois, 1920).

Slave owners would encourage the formation of families among their slaves to increase their profits, but it did not stop them from breaking these families apart. Because there was no legal marriage, no legal family and no legal control of children, black wives and mothers were forced to become the heads of their households when their spouses died, escaped, were sold or killed (Dill, 2004). Consequently, these women became the main providers or authority figures in what was left of their family, a position that would also put them at the center of the slave communities in which they lived.

As families were splintered, women began to develop kinship networks, consisting of fictive or chosen family additions (Amott & Matthaei, 1991) – honorary non-blood related members – with other female slaves that allowed them to participate in “extended kin childrearing, child-birth and other domestic, social and economic activities” as a way of developing supportive foundations that would help them resist the toils of slavery (Dill, 2004, p. 272). Many slave women were cooks, midwives, and nurses, positions valued by both the white and slave community, but no matter how numerous their talents, they were

seen and treated as slaves (Nolen, 2001). When allowed, the women would come together to make clothing and prepare food for the entire plantation (Nolen, 2001).

The role of the slave woman was so multifaceted that it is only logical that she would become a community leader, an extension of her African heritage. Lineage was typically traced through the female in Africa, so women assumed high duties in their tribes (Ladner, 1972). “Providing food, clothing, shelter, recreation, religious instruction and education” were all tasks to be carried out (Ladner, 1972, p. 20). Tribes consisted of extended family members who could number in the hundreds, yet they were considered family because they believed they came from a common ancestor (Ladner, 1972). Today, “intergenerational households are more common among blacks,” a reflection of their historically large family networks and black women’s care for extended relatives (Kivett, 1993, p. 166).

Slave women were highly capable in the home and in the field. Not only did they work tirelessly to ensure their homes were places of comfort for their families, but they were often recognized as some of the best field workers (Gilkes, 1983a). Furthermore, they had a voice and took action with the issues that concerned them the most. For example, women such as Sojourner Truth and Harriet Tubman were an important part of abolitionists’ efforts to free slaves (Gilkes, 1983a). As powerful symbols of resilience and courage, these women became a threat to the entire system of slavery (Gilkes, 1983a). As a result, rape, murder and the threat of sale were used to keep them under control.

After the Thirteenth Amendment abolished slavery in 1865, black women continued to be strong community figures during a time when the black community, and their role in its shaping, became more visible (Collins, 1998). During the early 19th century, free black women had formed all-female “benevolent societies” in which women gathered their

resources to help themselves and others (Amott & Matthaei, 1991, p. 150). Each woman would pay a monthly sick fee that ensured black women and their children would be cared for during times of need. Many women had to take on additional jobs to supplement their husbands' incomes, placing them, once again, in the homes of middle-and upper-class whites, doing the same domestic work they had done as slaves (Nolen, 2001). The only difference was that they were paid for their services. Though some black husbands disapproved of their wives' work, they could barely afford to refuse the much-needed additional income (Harley, 1990).

This new way of working with whites gave black women an "outsider within" status in which they developed a more intimate relationship with whites than previously (Collins, 1991, p. 35). As domestic workers in white homes, black women were a living paradox; a part of the family that could never really be family. This unique insight into the world of whites outside the realm of slavery gave the women power in black communities, and this clout would later be used by activists in their attempts to distinguish their plight from that of their white female counterparts (Collins, 1998).

Historically, the impulse for community activism resulted in part from black women being marginalized from the two social movements in America in which they had natural interests, women's rights and black civil rights.

The Women's Rights Movement

Largely unable to address their concerns within the mainstream women's movement, black women in the 19th century formed their own associations. By the end of the 19th century, black women were well on their way to turning their small support groups into massive collaborative organizations of social change as illustrated in the formation of the

Colored Women's League and the National Federation of Afro-American Women, which would later combine to become the National Association of Colored Women (NACW) in 1896 (Gilkes, 1983a). Within the first 30 years of its efforts, the NACW reached close to 200,000 women across the United States (Williams, 2002).

During the Civil War, Southern blacks were able to create their own churches as they withdrew from the white congregations they had once been forced to attend (Brooks, 1984). These churches provided hope for those in a seemingly hopeless situation. Black women have a special relationship with the church. Possibly one of the most spiritual groups in the United States (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003), they used this institution as a refuge from the discrimination they encountered in the labor market and at home (Jones, 1985). It was here that they could watch over and care for the members of their community, an extension of their duties at home. Nurturing others through the providing of food, shelter and conversation was an important part of their community awareness (Shaw, 2008) and "collective survival" (Jones, 1985, p. 230).

In the same way that the church provided a sense of community for its attendees, the sisterhood created by the gathering of black women proved supportive for them and their community activism. Starting out as the understudies of the male-led congregations, black women would eventually develop their own church groups in which they dedicated their efforts to spreading the importance of religion and education (Brooks, 1984). For instance, the female members of the sprouting African Methodist Episcopal Church formed the Daughters of Conference in 1816, which became the essential fundraising, proselytizing and congregating power within the Church (Dodson, 2002).

Because few slave men ran the households in which they lived, the church became a

place where they could truly dominate and behave as leaders in the black community (Jones, 1985). Consequently, as black women gained a religious voice and a following, black men became uneasy and looked for ways to hinder their participation. Ministers perused the Bible for affirmations of their gender-bias, while at least one husband threatened to shoot his wife if she attended another women's missionary meeting (Brooks, 1984). Despite their multitasking and central position as cooks, fundraisers and organizers, black women would remain a part of the "second-class citizenship" that existed in the black church (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003, p. 260).

Eventually, black women made their spiritual presence known in an unlikely partnership with white women during the late 19th century. While black men were less than welcoming to the growing number of black women's religious conventions, white women evangelicals were receptive to black women's work, supporting and even attending their meetings (Brooks, 1984). Through their combined efforts, these two groups of women fought sexism through the promotion of education, causing "the number of missionary colleges and secondary schools for blacks [to triple] between 1880 and 1915" (Higginbotham, 1993, p. 90).

The underpinnings of virtually every organization and club that sprouted during this time "grew out of and reinforced intergenerational and localized black community networks of women who were leaders in the local and national public affairs" of African Americans (Gilkes, 1983a, p. 293). The motto of early 20th century community work was "Lifting as we climb," a frankness about their position at the bottom of the American hierarchy. As time went on, however, the base of the movement grew more diverse, comprised of free both blacks and ex-slaves (Amott & Matthaei, 1991). By the time of the Great Depression, the

motto became “Women United,” an indication of the bond within the group that now permeated beyond the boundaries of class, age and cultural lines (Gilkes, 1983a).

Fannie Barrier Williams, a sociologist, praised these community activists for their unselfish ability to develop clubs that were “purely a creation for local needs and had no other purpose than the betterment of their own communities,” claiming that the “colored race is learning for the first time the social value of the many smaller activities that [black] women everywhere are carrying on” (Williams, 2002, p. 45). Williams believed that these organizations’ efforts were giving the American world an inspirational glimpse of the black woman that it had never allowed or imagined existed. As Mae Henderson, a black feminist critic, states, “It is not that black women...have had nothing to say, but rather that they have had no say” (Collins, 1998, p. 44).

The mental tug-of-war between fighting for race equality and fighting for gender equality prevented black women from leadership positions in either the women’s movement or the civil rights movement. Black women were often forced to choose between seeking equal participation in these movements or the success of the movements themselves. Generally, they chose to subordinate their interests to those of white women and black men, setting aside issues specific to black women.

Even at the dawn of women’s suffrage, Du Bois believed that undertaking the fight against sexism and racism were important battles. He concluded that because these battles came together in the form of black women, addressing both issues was even more essential for the black community (Du Bois, 1920). Other scholars have since argued that race and gender had to be addressed for black women because not doing so meant settling for equality with black men who possessed few rights themselves (Amott & Matthaehi, 1991).

Encountering the discrimination targeted both at black people and at women, black women often found themselves a part of a Catch-22 during their activism. In fighting for race equality, sexism was overlooked and vice versa. Addressing problems of sexism and racism were priorities from the start, but it was complicated for black women to find the perfect balance for fighting for race and gender equality simultaneously. One reason is that black women activists steered away from so-called feminist thinking because of its connection to whiteness (Collins, 1998).

While scholars such as Amott & Matthaei argued that white women failed to reach out to black women out of fear that race would overshadow the fight for women's rights (1991), others believed that the ideal of white skin and white womanhood was unattainable for black women and that skin color created a divide between the two groups of women (Berry, 1988; Wade, 1996). Lander would take this theory further when he implied that it was not just skin color that wrought complications for black women during the women's movement but the ideal of white womanhood that constantly reminded black women they were not as esteemed as their female counterparts (Lander, 1972).

Throughout slavery, it was made clear that white women were prized possessions; black men were killed for touching them and black women were ranked beneath them because of the color of their skin. The result was colorism – the belief that lighter skin is better skin – and this value bitterly reared its head during the women's movement as black women examined their subordination to white women (Berry, 1988). Consequently, it was frustrating to fight for their rights as black women without the reminder that they could never live up to the white female standard.

Opinions about the significance of life in the home played no small role in the barrier

between black and white feminists (Dill, 2004). Giddings found in her research that aspects of class and affluence greatly influenced how each viewed the home. White women saw it as a constricting edifice of their creative talents outside the domestic sphere while black women viewed the home as a place where they were sheltered from the world and able to assert some control over their lives (Giddings, 1996).

White women had led very different lives from black women. While kept in a state of submissiveness by the patriarchy they were under, they were nonetheless protected by this sphere as a representation of the ultimate American woman. Black women, in contrast, were not valued under this white patriarchal system and were oppressed in a way with which few white women could relate (Collins, 1998). For this reason, black female activists were concerned with white women's ability to address the needs of the black community (Gilkes, 1983a).

Although they had qualms, black women did not completely rule out a joint movement with white women until they were met with clear opposition. In 1852, Sojourner Truth attended a women's rights convention that consisted mainly of white women (Amott & Matthaei, 1991). Her call for a collaborative movement escaped most of the women because white women feared their movement would become associated with "abolition and niggers" (Amott & Matthaei, 1991, p. 152). It was also discovered that some of the white women condoned lynching of blacks and black women could not tolerate the "Jane Crow" (Gilkes, 1983a, p. 293). Another century would pass and black and white women would still struggle to come together.

Not all organizations within the white women's movement rebuffed the participation of black women. Berkeley (1997) acknowledged that white women did encounter problems

with black women's race intruding upon feminist territory, but she also believed that most white feminists went back and forth between isolating themselves from black women and collaborating with them. According to Berkeley, white women recognized that they shared a bond with black women and that they both lacked "political, economic and social power and that the American legal system contrived to hold women to that subordinate status" (1997, p. 6-7).

During the 1960s, the National Organization for Women (NOW) made impressive efforts to include black women in their cause, but two things got in the way: (1) they had little practice with sensitivity to radical events within the black movement, such as the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., and (2) they thought sexism, not racism, was the pressing issue for women (Giddings, 1996). Some white women even went so far as to compare their misfortunes with those of black people by referring to themselves as niggers and minorities in their own right (Giddings, 1996). NOW would ultimately fail in its attempt to include black women, who just could not relate to their middle- and upper-class ways of thinking. Class and race were hindering factors that would keep these two groups at a distance (Berkeley, 1997).

Teaching became an outlet for black women's social activism. Having been denied education during slavery, many black women believed education was vital to the empowerment of the black community (Amott & Matthaei, 1991). Black women's battles against oppression and efforts to enlighten others labeled them as "deviants" by the American society, but Gilkes (1983a) believed that this was a natural progression because "to advocate change in the institutional arrangement of American society is to be dangerous and deviant indeed" (p. 297).

Civil Rights

It is important to note that white women were not the only deterring factor for black women's activist efforts. Black women encountered a similar problem with black men during the civil rights movement as black men's interests in defending black manhood swept the fight against sexism under the rug. Scholars have acknowledged that binding factors such as the need for "racial solidarity" (Collins, 1998, p. 25) led black women to merge their goals with those of black men during the civil rights movement (Amott & Matthaei, 1991; White, 1995). With this solidarity, however, came the privileging of race over gender. Black women's compromising of their fight against sexism left them filling supportive roles while the issues most important to black men gathered the most media attention. According to White, the feminist perspective of the civil rights movement was condemned to two fates: either it would be "lost" or it would be "marginalized" (1995, p. 538).

In fighting for the civil rights of African Americans, black people had to be "Minute Men," always ready to make a way. Black women, as active participants, could be found doing behind-the-scenes work within the community or out working as leaders in some of the large-scale activities (Collins, 1998). Unfortunately, the assignment of women to bigger roles was rare. Black women spent most of their time hidden from view even though many women, like Amy Jacques Garvey, activist and wife to Marcus Garvey, recognized women as "the backbone of [the] Black nationalist struggle" (Collins, 1998, p. 26).

The civil rights movement overflowed with black women who were the foundation of the movement through their roles as "leaders, organizers and strategists," yet their presence was diminished by their limited placement in visible leadership positions (White, 1995, p. 536). As a result, many of the women who ensured the success of the movement were never

acknowledged by their men or the media, which focused primarily on those black men who attracted the spotlight (Smooth & Tucker, 1999). In a 1996 publication of “Great African Americans,” women were featured in 24 of the 93 profiles (26 percent) and only two of them were described as having any connection with the civil rights movement (Smallwood, West & Keyes).

Lack of recognition was not the only problem black women encountered. Black women also had to deal with the sexist attitudes of black men focusing on manhood rather than feminism (White, 1995). Many women thought it plausible to fight for both the end of racist and sexist treatment toward black women while simultaneously tackling the inequality experienced by black men, but they were quickly told and shown otherwise. Elijah Muhammad spoke of black women as the property of their husbands in his *Message to the Black Man*, when he said, “To become good Muslims, black women must become chattel once again, with good and loving masters, to be sure, but chattel nevertheless” (White, 1995, p. 538).

As a result, black women were forced to make a difficult decision. They could fight sexism and risk tearing apart the movement, or they could pacify the male leaders by reducing their overall input and focusing solely on racism (White, 1995). In an element of sacrifice that is typical of the black woman’s community work, many of them chose the latter. Ella Baker, who volunteered with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, overlooked her gender and addressed what she thought was the more central issue: “From the standpoint of my work and my own self-concepts, I don’t think I have thought of myself as a woman. I thought of myself as an individual with a certain amount of sense of the need of the people to participate in the movement” (Baker, 1972, p. 352).

The image of the matriarch – “overly aggressive, unfeminine women [who] allegedly emasculated their lovers and husbands” – was another source of black women’s subordination during the civil rights movement (Collins, 2000, p. 75). In a study of the black family in 1965, Moynihan (1999), a white American politician and sociologist, argued that black women, as the heads of most black households, were linked to the downfall of the black family. Explaining that a lack of male leadership in the home resulted in instability and a weakening of the family structure, Moynihan urged black men to set things straight by obtaining their rightful place as the masters of their homes.

While black women have been expected to let black men take leadership roles within the black community, black women’s history as the central community figures has prevented men from doing so (Ladner, 1972). “Connected to this emphasis on Black women’s strength is the related argument that African American women play critical roles in keeping Black families together and in supporting Black men,” according to Collins (1998, p. 29). The very traits that were prized in black women during slavery – strength, community-centeredness, tenacity – were now being frowned upon.

Naturally, not all black men believed or accepted the idea that their racial counterparts were so domineering. The majority of the black population did not approve of Moynihan’s allegations because of the way in which it emasculated black men and misrepresented black women (Ginsberg, 1989). But, as black men convened, they would voice some concerns about the unnerving power being associated with black women (Ginsberg, 1989). Baynard Rustin, civil rights activist and aide to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., expressed his acceptance of Moynihan’s claims in a *New York Times Magazine* article entitled “The Way out of the Ghetto” (Ginsberg, 1989, p. xii).

This fear of the matriarch would reveal itself in the masculine motives behind the Black Power movement. As it grew in number and strength, the “statements and behaviors of different male activists exposed their preoccupation with shoring up black manhood by controlling the reins of power within the black community” (Williams, 2008, p. 23). After Huey Newton’s imprisonment, the movement was turned upside down when Elaine Brown took over the Black Panther Party. According to Brown, her time as its leader was plagued by black men who questioned her authority, viewing their position as black men as more deserving of the role:

“A woman in the Black Power movement was considered, at best, irrelevant. A woman asserting herself was a pariah. A woman attempting the role of leadership was, to my proud black Brothers, making an alliance with the ‘counter-revolutionary, man-hating, lesbian, feminist white bitches.’ It was a violation of some Black Power principle that was left undefined. If a black woman assumed a role of leadership, she was said to be eroding black manhood, to be hindering the progress of the black race. She was an enemy of black people” (Brown, 1992, p. 357).

It was only after abandoning her position and all contact with the party that Brown (1992, p. 449) claimed to have felt true “freedom.”

Giddings (1996) spotlighted a similar attitude toward black women in her recollection of Stokely Carmichael, regional director of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, who provided a less than complimentary position for black women in the movement. When asked about the subordinated roles of women in the SNCC, Carmichael retorted, “The only position for women in SNCC is prone” (Giddings, 1996, p. 302).

Combination of the fear of a “matriarchal coup d’état” and the need to use women’s power resulted in black women being involved mainly in the shadows of their black male counterparts, leading some scholars to believe that the stereotype was used as a way of limiting the influence of black women (White, 1995, p. 537). To avoid stereotypes of power,

black women often found themselves torn between giving a full effort for the cause and holding back to avoid being called “too strong” or “unfeminine” (Breines, 2006, p. 57). Riggs (2003) believed this adaptive behavior was a result of continuous oppression, oppression that had taught black women over time to do three things: ignore their feelings, remain silent about their abuse, and feign dignity despite it all. Consequently, the fight against sexism was placed on the back burner and black women remained behind the scenes.

Williams (2008) added that black men were not against women’s leadership altogether and that the masculine environment of the black power movement was not as “monolithic” as proposed by some scholars (p. 20); black women had positions of leadership within the movement and they wanted black men to be leaders, too. For Townes, the clash between black manhood and black womanhood boiled down to a battle for recognition: “African-American women and men are competing for life. This competition is a cruel wager on scarce resources ... [and] playing this wager means settling for an imposed hierarchy in which only one gender’s concern is addressed at a time” (1993, p. 141).

Visibility of black women’s activism today

Black people have been described as the “perpetual outsiders” of mainstream America (Gilkes, 1983a, p. 288) and black women, facing both racial and gender discrimination, fit that description even more so than black men. Collins believed that as victims of a “collective invisibility,” black women were being rejected and largely unrecognized by society (1998, p. 22), a statement supported by the limited images of black female activists in the media. Below is a look into the newspaper and magazine industries’ coverage of this topic.

Newspapers’ coverage of black female activists

In the past decade, coverage of black female activists has grown in mainstream newspapers such as *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post* and *The Boston Globe*. Since the 1980s, these papers touched on the role of black women in obituaries, book reviews and coverage of the 2008 election.

In 2006 six black female civil rights activists died, resulting in numerous newspaper articles about their lives. A number of the articles highlighted the subordinated position of black women. In a *Washington Post* article on February 6, 2006, for example, reporting the death of Coretta Scott King: “For all of her well-earned recognition, Coretta Scott King, who died in her sleep yesterday at the age of 78, was just one of many who had toiled and sacrificed through the years, standing beside men who were better known” (Haygood, 2006).

Book reviews were used similarly to highlight both the old and new work of black female activists. The *Boston Globe* published a review on June 11, 2008, of a book by Paula Giddings that focused on the history of Ida B. Wells, an anti-lynching activist. In introducing the book, the article said, “Ida is not a well-known name but it should be” (Miler, 2008).

Through coverage of the 2008 primaries, many newspapers addressed the issue of sexism and racism and the way in which the current choice of the black man (Barack Obama) or the white woman (Hillary Rodham Clinton) was similar to the decision black women had to make during the women’s and civil rights movement. On March 24, 2008, the *Washington Post* reported on the “politics of identity” that arose as white women encouraged black women to vote for gender over race in the election (Brown, 2008). According to the *Post*, such a suggestion “opens old wounds.”

In the newspaper articles that discussed black female activists, two things were missing. The first was that very few of the newspapers focused on women who participated

in community activism on a smaller scale. The majority of the articles that included black female activists spoke of Rosa Parks and Coretta Scott King, two women who were part of mainstream activism. Other women discussed were involved in mainstream/national organizations such as the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. None of the stories spoke of black female activists from North Carolina.

Black female activists in black magazines

Essence and *Ebony* magazines have done the bulk of their examinations of black women's activism in the past fifteen years. Like the mainstream newspapers, they, too, have acknowledged such activism through obituary coverage and book reviews, but they also have profiled those who are still alive, and have exhibited a wider perspective on black women's activism, including the use of the publication as forum for activism.

In the May 1996 issue of *Essence*, Kathleen Cleaver and Angela Davis were interviewed about their opinion of black women's involvement with the civil rights movement. Individually, they spoke about their own encounters with racism and sexism, but, together, they told a story that many black women have experienced: one of endurance. By the end, these two women, who had never met before, considered themselves "one person" (Weathers & Roberts, 1996). In bringing them together, *Essence* provided its readers a rare opportunity to view the sense of community that can exist between black women who use their skills to fight for others.

In addition to providing such interviews, *Essence* and *Ebony*'s coverage of activism shows that black women have made progress against sexism and racism, resulting in the extension of their community work into other spheres. In one or the other or both of the

magazines, black women have promoted awareness of domestic abuse, AIDS, politics, unattainable beauty standards, cancer and child rights. Furthermore, the magazines celebrated black women's progress by giving awards and titles to worthy recipients. In 1993, *Ebony* magazine's list of the "100 Most Fascinating Women of the 20th Century," included Rosa Parks, and Coretta Scott King as well as North Carolina activist Ella Baker.

In May 2005, the *Essence* editor said the magazine had the power to "nurture a community" and act as a "gift for Black women," noting the magazine's attempts to reach out to its black female readers and serve as a source of motivation and inspiration in their lives (Ebanks, 2005). Although *Essence* and *Ebony* have used their pages to empower and advance the position of black women in society, but they tend to overlook those who are not already famous or well known in some way. The majority of the women profiled in the magazines are not activists, but other singers and actors who are celebrated for their fame instead of their work with the black community.

Black women activists in newspapers in North Carolina

In their coverage of black women's activism, North Carolina newspapers such as the *News & Observer*, *Herald-Sun* and *Charlotte Observer* have linked historical events with local people, thus making a connection between the less recognized efforts of black women and their impact on the black community.

In writing about the 1997 Million Woman March in Philadelphia, the *News & Observer* interviewed three people from North Carolina about their reasons for going to the march. Recording their histories and writing of their hopes for the future, the *News & Observer* acknowledged the importance of the event for black women, stating that one of its goals was to "have black women recognized as the backbone of the African-American

community” (Willis & Lacy, 1997).

In examining both black men’s and black women’s history in the civil rights movement, the *Herald-Sun* published an article that highlighted the underappreciated supporting role of women in relation to black men. Speaking with a woman raised in Durham, the article reviewed her childhood encounters with racism and how she fought it by joining the NAACP. The article connected her experience with that of the city itself in its recollection of important dates in Durham’s history.

The *News & Observer*, *Herald-Sun* and *Charlotte Observer* have also published the writing of their black female journalists. During the 2008 election, many black women were confronted with having to decide whether voting for race or sex was more important. In choosing Barack Obama over Hillary Rodham Clinton, many of these women, including Oprah Winfrey, were accused of voting for a black man simply because he was black. As a black woman, Fannie Flono, reporter for the *Charlotte Observer*, used her column to inform the public that “Blacks aren’t monolithic, not locally and not nationally” (Flono, 2008).

As with many national publications, North Carolina newspapers often used obituaries as a way of addressing well-known black female activists. Unlike the national publications, they were able to obtain a balance between national news and local news by highlighting the history of black female activism in small North Carolina communities. North Carolina newspapers addressed activism by taking a deeper look at the individual, giving readers a more holistic portrayal of local activism and the way in which it related to more widespread efforts.

Furthermore, they were not afraid to let their black journalists use the newspaper as a venue for their opinions, a place where they could take a stand concerning the role that black

women have played as activists. Overall, North Carolina newspapers seemed to recognize that local activism is important to both journalists and their readers on the national and local level, but they appear to only do so when a historical event such as Martin Luther King, Jr. day calls for it.

Mainstream journalism plays a significant role in keeping people abreast of everything from the mundane to the tragic. Because of its ability to reach millions of people each year, journalism is a powerful venue for change and journalists have often intentionally or inadvertently behaved as catalysts of transformation and development through their writing. As a result of the subjugation of black people, one sector of journalism was literally forced to produce such catalysts: the black press. The black press has a record of using journalism to serve as a political and societal watchdog, highlighting the ills of a society that has a history of oppressing black people. Protesting discrimination and organizing members of the black community, the black press has served as a powerful tool for community organizing, spreading the message of activism and increasing the potential for change (Rooks, 2004).

A number of black women have been able to use the black press in their efforts to gather community support and express themselves. Some black women were journalists and were able to use their insider position to advocate for both black men and women (Streitmatter, 1994). Ida B. Wells, journalist and anti-lynching activist, epitomized such action in her published writings. Known primarily for her anti-lynching material, Wells also spoke out against the inequality between men and women. Like many activists, Wells' was a fighter and continued to denounce racism and sexism in her journalism despite her newspaper office being burned down and receiving various threats upon her life (Giddings,

2008; Leighton, 2007; Streitmatter, 1994). Other black women found their voices by writing within the militant pages of *The Black Panther*, a newspaper that would often praise the enduring strength of black women (Lumsden, 2008).

Black women activists in black newspapers in North Carolina

As a result of their proximity and racial identification with their readers, North Carolina's black newspapers historically have done more to broaden the voice of black people than more-mainstream newspapers. Black publications in North Carolina have been around since the mid-nineteenth century, and some, including the *Carolinian* (Raleigh-based since 1940), the *Charlotte Post* (Charlotte-based since 1890) and the *Carolina Times* (Durham-based since 1919) exist today. They have highlighted the activism of black women more holistically, though not necessarily less stereotypically, than other news publications.

Examination from 1940 to 2008 showed that the *Carolina Times* promoted the recognition of black women the most, assigning a "Women's News" section dedicated entirely to news about women in the community. The images found in this section were often of women in pageants or serving meals at church, however. But, such portrayals could also be seen as exemplary of black women's centrality within the black community. Gatherings at churches, schools and homes were common, and the discussions of successful fundraising parties were in almost every issue. Reaching out to the community to take care of children in hospitals, and gathering clothes for charitable purposes seemed a regular occurrence in these black women's lives. Their writings on how to plan a vacation and cook dinner were also frequent in "Women's News," seemingly reminiscent of old gender-biases.

The *Carolinian* and *Charlotte Post* appeared to have struck a balance in their portrayal of black women's community work as well. While stories and images of their

caretaking, Christmas workshop and fashion abilities were featured, these publications also included reports of black women's involvement with the National Council of Negro Women, their position as educators in college institutions and their involvement to increase voter registration. Photographs lacked gender bias, including images of both men and women at everything from protest rallies to food drives. The only downside to the *Carolinian* and *Charlotte Post* coverage was that in articles about discrimination, black women were not quoted as often as black men; their experience lacked a voice.

Overall, these local papers presented a more realistic portrayal of black women's activism in black communities than mainstream publications. Notwithstanding stereotypical images of them in the domestic sphere, black newspapers in North Carolina included portrayals of black women both in and outside the home. It is worth noting that not all illustrations of black women in a domestic setting were negative. Community activists, particularly those in the lower-and-middle classes, have a history of gathering in homes and churches where they are closest to the people they help. Upper-class women typically gathered in hotels and halls as a result of their higher standard of living and wealthier audiences, which resulted in different branch of activism among the classes of black women. That being said, the North Carolina black press' coverage of black female activism within the domestic sphere could show these women's link to the black community and their efforts to sustain the community with the most need.

Conclusion

Many scholars agreed that the unique history of black women in America gave them a special role as activists, but as black women faced discriminating racial and gender practices in the United States, they were plagued by the fight against their own invisibility during

slavery, the women's movement and the civil rights movement. This scholarship showed that black women have struggled with society's lack of recognition of them, but what it overlooked is how this invisibility manifests itself in the activism of black women. It also failed to address how limited visibility is overcome through the networks created by community activism. Both of these absent factors are areas of concentration in the stories in this thesis, particularly in the story of Muna Mujahid in Chapter 4.

Marginalized as citizens and activists, stereotypes associated with black women's power remained prominent in American society and detrimental to their image as activists, particularly, in their work with the civil rights movement. As pivotal figures in the black community, black women's influence led to harmful representations of them as overpowering and domineering, adjectives that have been used against them in their activism and forced them to take less-visible roles in which to serve their communities. In considering the various stereotypes associated with black women, researchers have focused on the causes of this image and the impact it has had on the bonds between black men and women in households, but little or no scholarship has focused on how this power can be used in the activism of black women to improve communities or how the power of black women is passed on and spread throughout activism. These will be addressed in the profiles of the three activists (especially that of Michelle Johnson in Chapter 6) in this thesis.

Race and gender have created a space of difficulty for black female activists in the past. Both factors were equally damaging for slave women who, because they were black, were in bondage, and, because they were women, were used to carry on slavery in the form of their children. When dealing with race during the civil rights movement, they had to be certain that their feminist perspectives did not interfere with or overshadow the fight for race

rights. On the other hand, the women's movement was not very inviting to issues of race and black women often caved to the pressure to drop their fight against racism. What is left out of these conclusions from the previous literature is the duality of being a black female activist. Black women have the option of choosing race or gender, but they also have the agency to pick just one without fear that they are letting their gender, or their race, down. This duality will be presented in each of the activists' profiles in chapters 4, 5 and 6.

As far as popular media are concerned, North Carolina community newspapers and black press publications have provided a space for the community activism of black female activists more than national publications. In general, many newspaper and magazine articles have focused on black women's participation in movements, but not nearly in the numbers representative of the amount of community work put in by black female activists. Furthermore, few mediums have addressed these women's work holistically, presenting a narrative that considers both the past, present and future of these women and the role that personality, upbringing and education play in what kind of activist they have become.

Overall, this scholarship lacks the idea that black female activists should be celebrated and recognized for their community-based activism and the vital roles they have played in the sustaining of communities, which is another goal within the three stories of chapters 4, 5 and 6 through the sheer recording of their stories.

Justification

Because black women's role in the black community building has been given inadequate coverage in a wide range of media, these thesis articles are intended to provide some of the missing pieces by addressing both the activist within and the human nature of black women in a historical context and narrative form.

The first article will track a black female activist working within a community to maintain the home as a place of networking and development in her fight against homelessness. Historically, this story will link the importance of home during slavery and the manifestation of that significance in an activist's life today. The second article will take a look at the work of an African activist as a representation of the tradition for African Americans to maintain their connection with their heritage – as they did during slavery – and communicate that heritage to other races – as they did during the civil rights movement. The third article will look at the work of a race activist and use that story as an illustration of black women's work with the civil rights movement and the way in which the fight against racism has gone beyond black vs. white. All of these stories will be written in narrative form to ensure detail and thoroughness that might otherwise be left out in shorter articles where a word count is necessary. In general, these articles are meant to show the versatility and vivacity of community black female activism in North Carolina.

The following chapter will discuss the methodology and limitations of this thesis and provide summaries of the three articles.

Chapter III: Methods

This is a project including three in-depth narrative articles. Before initiating interviews, the main source of information, extensive research was conducted on the topic of black women's history, activism and significance within the black community. This information was provided the foundation for interview questions, and the interviews always resulted in additional and unexpected inquiries. As I introduced myself and my proposed work, people were made aware of my status as a journalism student and the potential for each story to be published in a newspaper, magazine or other media outlet.

The majority of interviews were done face-to-face, a method that made it easier to observe the mannerisms of the people that I interviewed. Interviewing over the phone was the next best method mainly because participants, particularly the activists, were frequently difficult to reach as a result of their busy schedules. I used e-mail when participants didn't have time to meet in person or have a phone conversation. It should be noted, however, that first interviews were never done through e-mail, only follow-up questions were addressed in that manner.

When planning for interviews in person or over the phone, every effort was put into making sure the designated time and place fit into the respondent's schedule. I went to people's homes, coffee shops and libraries as a result of personal preferences. Interviews notes were taken on my laptop and by hand when necessary. Digital recorders were never used as a result of my personal preference. Information provided by participants about other

people resulted in contacting that person for verification.

Sources for interviews included local activists, UNC-Chapel Hill professors and alumni, housing and city management members, residents of Durham and Chapel Hill, residents of South Africa and more. Their knowledge and input was invaluable to this project. The Roy H. Park Fellowship funded the trip to Africa in which I was able to interview South Africans (within the center of Cape Town and shantytowns located on its outskirts) about their thoughts on American awareness of Africa.

The series revolves mainly around three black females in the Durham-Chapel Hill area. Two of the three activists live in Durham – one in the rural part of the city and the other in the suburbs – while the third activist lives in Carrboro. UNC professors were the main resource for locating activists. For example, Muna Mujahid was located through a friend of Dr. Trevy McDonald. Vanessa Hodges, a professor and activist in this series, recommended Michelle Johnson. Just asking around proved fortuitous in that doing so led me to Hodges, who was referred to me by a Ugandan professor I met at a conference in Durham. A number of other potential activists were found searching the *Daily Tar Heel* – it often highlights local efforts – and other local newspapers.

Within this series, various journals that emphasized the study of African Americans, activism, community work and women were used to provide the supportive and factual information in each article. Government statistics about the health and poverty status of Americans and North Carolinians were retrieved from Web sites such as the U.S. Census Bureau. Articles from newspapers and magazines provided a substantial amount of background information.

Limitations

Historically, the scope of this thesis involves the activism and community efforts of black females during slavery, the women's movement and the civil rights movement in the United States. In an attempt to fill a void left by mainstream coverage, or lack thereof, of black activism on the community level, the subjects of this thesis had to be residents of North Carolina and black females who were involved in some sort of activism. Only print sources – magazines and newspapers – were used in the examination of black community activists.

The biggest limitations in this research were time and resources. Few things actually went as planned and there were many delays. It was difficult to identify the kind of activist I was interested in. Many of the activists I came in contact with did not meet my requirement that their activism not be associated with any national organizations. Of the possibly thousands of potential black female activists in the state, the three women present in this thesis have stories that might be different in small or significant ways.

These women are not intended to represent all black female activists; nor are they intended to represent what activists should or should not be. Because this project is journalism, not social science, the findings are suggestive of a larger picture at best and not intended to be generalized to any larger population.

In telling these tales, my one hope was to allow women who have dedicated some part of their lives to helping others an opportunity to be heard and a chance to be appreciated for all that they have done.

Article Summaries

This thesis contains a series of three 5,000- to 9,000-word, narrative articles that feature three black women who live in North Carolina. As a result of their length, these stories will likely be published in a magazine – extensive editing and cutting is still required for publication in this media outlet.

The first article is about Muna Mujahid. Living in Durham, Muna, 50 years old, has been an activist for more than 10 years. In 2007, Muna's home was declared "unfit for human habitation" as a result of poor housekeeping by her landlord. The Neighborhood Improvement Services of Durham promised to help her find a new home, but now claims it cannot fulfill that promise. For this reason and her inability to afford a new place on her own, Muna continued to live in the "unfit" home for another eight months. In the meantime, Muna helped a neighbor find a new place to live and brought the city's attention to an elderly woman living in a rundown house, even though there was no aid for her own situation. In fact, much of her community work has been done free of charge. She is currently staying with a friend and working small jobs – substitute teaching, hairdressing, babysitting and sewing – to sustain a decent living. Because she lacks money, a dependable means of transportation and a steady job, she is in debt and unable to commit to as much community activism as she once did. Now, she is fighting to get her life back together so that she can go back to helping others in need. With this article, I hope to show how this activist, in dedicating her time to helping others, has found herself in need of fighting for herself the very issues of poverty and inaccessibility that she has fought for others the past 10 years. Furthermore, I hope to show how her pride and her inner-strength have gotten in the way of her ability to attain a home.

The second is about a woman named Vanessa Hodges. As a professor in the School of Social at UNC, Hodges has taken on a leadership position with the School's summer study abroad trip to South Africa. Having grown up with an adopted African brother and South African family members, Hodges has a strong and unique connection with Africa. She fed her curiosity to visit the continent a few years back and is now dedicated to spreading awareness about Africa's development over the past few decades, as well as making Americans cognizant of the plights that the continent still faces today. Because of her passion for Africa, Hodges frequently encounters disappointment in her work from students and other participants who fail to exhibit her passion for Africa. Consequently, this narrative follows the effort that Hodges puts into the planning, recruiting and overall undertaking of this trip and the ways in which it has and has not influenced the lives of the participants. As a part of this story, South Africans were interviewed to gather their opinion of American awareness about them and their country. Lastly, this article will consider the role of activism in Hodges' life as a professor and educated black woman.

The final narrative article follows the work of Michelle Johnson, a race activist who lives in Carrboro and works part-time as a trainer for Dismantling Racism Works (drWorks). drWorks holds training sessions where people of all ethnicities come together to discuss stereotypes and where such representations of racial groups are developed. The sessions, commonly referred to as the "Process," are long-term and can last from 18 to 24 months; short-term sessions are now being offered that last a few days. As a trainer for drWorks, Johnson confronts racism on a regular basis and even has to confront her own racist thoughts.

This job takes its toll on Johnson because of the delicate nature of the topic and the frequency with which she has to discuss it. On a brighter note, Johnson has managed to go

beyond the traditional image of a race activist. Instead of just getting white people to confront their discriminatory ways and thinking, Johnson reaches out to multiple ethnicities in their confrontation of racism because she believes it is important to work from all sides of the problem.

Johnson has a master's degree from UNC and currently works part-time with the Heirs Project that is collecting stories of local activists in an attempt to highlight the less-recognized community activities of people within the state.

Chapter IV: This House Is Not a Home

The lives of the tenants at 517 Holloway Street in Durham, North Carolina, began to unravel on December 13, 2007. The water and sewage pipes in the basement of the three-unit house burst, causing the basement to flood with human waste. As the basement reached its capacity, the putrid combination of feces and urine began to push back through the pipes, eventually making its way to the shower drain and toilet of apartment C. Outside the basement door, sewage oozed under the door and pooled in the yard.

Muna Mujahid, a tenant in apartment A and local activist, knew this day would come.

Having a place to call home meant everything to Mujahid. It was where she worked, where she raised her children, where she pondered her next move as the voice of the unheard and impoverished of Durham. Home was her life's headquarters. Now she stood, surrounded by the smell of decay, unsure how this situation would be rectified or if she would ever have a place to call home again.

Since 2005, Mujahid had filed complaints about her apartment building with Durham's Neighborhood Improvement Services (NIS), a city-funded organization that enforces North Carolina minimum housing codes. NIS sent inspectors who confirmed the building needed repairs, but little was done to ensure that Michele Draughon, the landlord, was in compliance. Despite the tenants' pleas for assistance, the house continued to deteriorate.

"I could have seen this coming a mile away," Mujahid said. "All the past problems

just came to a head when those pipes burst. The city couldn't help but notice then."

NIS called an emergency meeting of the Housing Appeals Board a few days before Christmas to discuss the state of the building on Holloway Street. Ultimately, the board members decided that the tenants would have to move and that NIS would assist them in finding new homes.

"Finally," thought Mujahid, "we're going to get the help that we need."

In the first days of January 2008, she was greeted by a bright yellow sign left by the Durham Department of Housing that read in bold-faced capital letters: "This building is unfit for human habitation. The use or occupation of this building for same is prohibited and unlawful."

According to Lynwood Best, NIS senior neighborhood research specialist, a house may be declared uninhabitable if it is discovered that "sufficient conditions exist which are dangerous or injurious to the health or safety of the occupants of such housing, the occupants of neighboring housing or other residents of the city." Such conditions may include defects that increase fire and accident hazards, lack of adequate ventilation, lack of sanitary facilities, dilapidation, disrepair, structural defects, and lack of cleanliness. On average, NIS deals with 12 to 15 cases of uninhabitable homes each year.

The time in which tenants are requested to move out of the property is relative to the severity of the problem. In Mujahid's case, the worst of the damage existed in the connecting apartment and did not call for her immediate removal. Lacking the money to relocate, she remained in the property for another eight months as she searched for a new place to stay.

When funding is available, NIS will assist clients living in condemned and

uninhabitable dwellings by paying the first month's rent or security and utility deposits. As a result of limited funding, assistance can not exceed \$1,000 and clients are required to complete an application process and undergo income verification.

“We must have documentation that deems them income worthy to afford the new property they are renting,” said Best.

NIS also works with any property-owning landlord in the city of Durham to assist with their client's relocation. NIS only asks that the property meet Durham's minimum housing code. The average number of NIS relocations each year varies in relation to the size of the dwelling and the number of people living within it (i.e. boarding house vs. one-bedroom apartment).

When funding is exhausted, clients are often referred to other organizations such as the Council for Senior Citizens for the elderly. NIS has even been known to create partnerships to ensure the relocation process is completed.

“In partnership with Social Services Adult Services, SSAS paid the rent and security deposit to the landlord at the new location,” said Best, “while NIS promised to reimburse SSAS for the rent once funding became available.”

Though NIS does what it can to help relocate citizens of Durham, this aid is not to be taken for granted.

“NIS relocates tenants as a courtesy, not a requirement by ordinances,” said Best.

August 2008, Mujahid moved in with a friend in Durham who was willing to let her stay until she got back on her feet. Unknown to Mujahid, the help she so desperately needed would not come in a timely fashion and getting back on her feet would become an indefinite

project. She would spend the next year or more fighting for a place to call home and struggling against financial breakdown.

Having spent the past decade working with and improving the lives of people in Durham, Mujahid knew how the city worked. She was accustomed to the ins and outs of state and city policy, and she was equipped with the knowledge to aid and enlighten others.

“I’m always helping people to understand that monitoring and taking care of themselves is the best method. Also, I let them know that they can do it on their own because me doing it for them does nothing in the end,” she said.

Now the tables had turned.

What does an activist do when the very city she has worked so hard to improve turns on her? What does she do when the methods that worked for others fail her? What happens when the issues of poverty and inaccessibility that she mitigated for friends and strangers alike become her biggest personal concern?

This became Mujahid’s struggle.

“As a community activist, I’ve always felt emotionally connected to the people that I work with, but now I’m truly connected with them because I am one of them. Now I have to fight to help myself,” she said.

Bootstrap Activism

Mujahid never planned to be a community activist, but the inclination to work with people has always existed within her as seen in the quote beneath her high school senior picture: “Go to the people, live among them, learn from them, love them, start from what they know and build upon that.”

In this case, the building material was cotton.

Years ago, she and her then-husband owned a T-shirt store in Brooklyn called Sticks & Stones, where she developed a sewing talent in the production of African wear, her standard uniform. This typically included a head wrap, a full-covering top and a floor-length skirt all in bright, patterned fabrics accompanied by vivid red lipstick.

“I started sewing because I was fat and I could never find things that I liked,” she said. “Back in the day, Lane Bryant clothes were not cute. Not when I was a chubby little thing.”

Mujahid and her family extended their business in 1989 when they moved to Durham. After visiting a friend in Winston-Salem and attending a Durham Mosque conference in 1986, Mujahid knew that North Carolina was where she wanted to raise her family.

“I wanted my children to grow up where there was grass and people were friendly. Durham reminded me of Tennessee, where I grew up, and I wanted that kind of environment for my children,” said Mujahid. “I felt at home in Durham.”

In the 1994, Mujahid and her husband divorced and sold their business; she went back into the clothing business only this time she worked from home. After selling an outfit to a friend in 1996, she was asked to consider attending a conference held by the Ms. Foundation for Women, an organization known for its support for the economic empowerment of women globally, where she could sell her clothing. With few options to pay her way to the conference in Santa Cruz, California, Mujahid applied and received a scholarship to cover the registration expenses.

“The scholarship paid for housing and food, so all I had to do was get there,” she said. “I was broke, unemployed and in the middle of a divorce. God made me go by faith.”

When she left for the conference, she had \$4 to her name but returned with close to

\$400 after selling most of her hand-made clothing to conference attendees, but Mujahid still needed a job.

That year, she was hired as a community organizer with the Durham Community Land Trustees (DCLT), a nonprofit community-based organization that provides housing for low- to moderate-income people and assists with neighborhood improvement. While there, her primary job was to assist DCLT in helping residents become homeowners and communicate concerns to and from the citizens of Durham.

Equipped with a high school education and limited financial stability, Mujahid was suited for this kind of grass-root activism, which called for door-to-door greetings, a strong sense of honesty and an acute sense of community awareness.

“I recruited people to DCLT’s meetings where we encouraged them to fight for issues that were affecting their lives such as crime and affordable housing,” said Mujahid.

After working with DCLT for six years, she lost her job to downsizing and was forced to move on. It would be the last position she worked with full benefits and the highest salary she ever received (\$25,000).

In June 2002, the Department of Social Services (DSS) welcomed her as the neighborhood coordinator of the Family to Family program, an initiative designed to restructure the foster care system through the placement of foster children with relatives and extended family members.

“I appreciated this program because it recognized that you can’t help children without helping their families,” she said.

Visiting churches and community centers, Mujahid informed people of the program’s existence, hoping that families in need would seek her out. In many cases, she was called

upon to conduct meetings between parents and potential foster children to secure placement options within their neighborhoods. For children already in foster care, she scheduled visitations outside of DSS.

But her help did not stop there.

“Whatever other needs the community had, I looked into those as well. For example, I would try to enroll kids in school, place them in mentoring programs and locate childcare agencies for their parents. I wanted people to access the system to take care of their needs,” she said.

Despite Mujahid’s contentment with the job, she lost it after bumping heads with some of DSS’s decisions concerning the removal of children. In one case, she fought on behalf of a family in court. DSS did not approve. Furthermore, her salary was only \$23,000 a year.

“They made my salary very small, but they dumped all these things into my job description so that they could pay a little to do a lot,” Mujahid said. “They eventually cut the funding for my job and I had to leave. Several key people within the Department of Social Services didn’t fully comprehend the concept or the importance of saving children and partnering with other community agencies to change the foster care system. They were out of touch.”

In July 2004, she began working as a part-time after school coordinator for the West End Teen Center (WETC), where she was paid \$10 an hour. The job proved challenging for her.

“I tried to provide the kids with skills they could use in the world because I don’t believe in babysitting in after-school programs,” said Mujahid. “Some of the people involved

in the program didn't understand that."

She informed WETC that she could not be a part of something that produced nothing positive for the community in which it operated. She was soon laid off. It would be her last steady job and the beginning of her financial woes.

You Got To Have Faith

"Live in such a way that those who know you and don't know God will come to know God through you." This is the voicemail message that greets callers on Mujahid's answering machine, exemplifying the very thing that gave her the strength to keep fighting: her faith in God.

Having regularly attended church with her mother as a youth, she was raised as a Christian. As she grew older, however, Mujahid began to notice inconsistencies in Christianity and felt it was time for something different. In 1978, at the age of 19, she became a Muslim.

"I have a strong affinity to so-called Eastern philosophy because they tend to be more broadminded than the Western stuff," said Mujahid.

Switching her religion would not be enough to represent the change that she was undergoing. Her name would have to change, too.

Born Rhonda Lynette Hopson, she became Muna Sabreen Hasan – one who wishes, desires and strives for patience and endurance to improve, beautify and make better – partly under the suggestion of a man she was dating.

"One night he turned to me and said, 'I think your name should be Muna. It means to be expressive.' I hated it at first," said Mujahid. "Then I thought about it and realized that maybe he saw something in me that I didn't see in myself.

After marriage and further enlightenment, she changed her name to Muna Sauti Mujahid – she who wishes, desires, strives and expresses the voice to fight for God. Today, I can't imagine being me without it," said Mujahid.

Though she does not currently consider herself a practicing Muslim, she does refer to herself as a spiritualist and credits this spirituality with her ability to reach out to her community. For Mujahid, God is in everyone, regardless of their religion, and it is this universal connection that allows her to fulfill her duty as an activist.

"When I think about all the major prophets that people say they follow, they all have one thing in common: they didn't have a church. Jesus didn't have a church. Buddha didn't have a church. They were all working one-on-one with people," she said.

Mujahid also uses her spirituality to bear the burdens of activism.

"Your work as an activist is not always valued or paid and you need down time to deal with your spirituality because it's your spirit that allows you to do this work," she said.

Hustle and Bustle

Few community organizing positions and meager salaries make the world of this community activist far from glamorous. Mujahid has never made more than \$25,000 a year and links this to a corporate overemphasis on college degrees and lack of appreciation for experience.

"I went to school for two years and got bored with the idea of using my talent to make some big corporation rich, so I dropped out. Degrees are used in certain fields as barriers when they shouldn't be. Experience-wise, I know what I'm doing and could run rings around some people who do this work. I wish there was some system set up where you could get credit for life experience."

A moment of silence passes as she stares down at her hands, and then she adds, “If I have to return to the workforce, I can make a decent salary. I just don’t see that happening without a degree.”

With no job, no home and plenty of debt, Mujahid relies on what she calls her “hustling skills” – sewing, doing hair – to keep her head above water. It’s hardly enough to cover her expenses, an undisclosed amount that includes food, rent, storage fees and student loan payments (from her two years in college).

“My credit is really messed up right now because I haven’t really had the money to pay for it all, but I pay what I can,” she said. “I make about \$60 per hairdo and up to \$125 off each set of clothing that I sell.”

Though she lacks a college degree, Mujahid has been able to substitute teach at Central Park Elementary School for Kids. According to her, she doesn’t need a degree to substitute because it takes only common sense to follow the lesson plans left by the teacher. She is paid approximately \$70 per day, but it’s a sporadic way to make a living.

“I substitute teach when it’s available,” said Mujahid, “but I sometimes go weeks without being called so I can’t depend on that job to get me through the month.”

As a result of her finances, Mujahid has not had any health insurance since 2002. In lieu of medical services, she buys healthy food from places like Farmer Joe’s Marketplace and uses herbs and home remedies to cure any ailments. She admits to being overweight, but thinks she is pretty healthy.

Others in her situation might settle for any available job to get by, but Mujahid does not want to waste her talent for activism in an occupation that will not appreciate it. Like many black women who have worked as activists, Mujahid possesses a determination and

passion that allows her to attack societal issues head-on and without fear, but one thing seems to hold her back from fixing her own problems: her pride.

Mujahid's activism avoids the easy route. Her fierce independence and unrelenting tenacity allow her to embrace the art of the struggle, but appear to hinder her ability to break free of her deteriorating financial state.

"There aren't many full-time jobs out there that cater to my skill set and I'm not going to work at McDonald's. I do better to hustle and continue to help others than work there. Plus, if I'm going to be hungry after working a full-time job, I might as well be working for myself!" she exclaimed.

According to her math, she is better off working from her friend's house because she can make in four hours what the average person makes in eight, when business is good.

Lately, it hasn't been.

Since the economy's nosedive in recent months, Mujahid's hustle has been affected by a lack of demand and people's attempts to save money. She has even had to create package deals in which people who schedule two hair appointments get the third for free.

With so much going on in her life, she finds some comfort in knowing that she is not worrying her children. Mujahid's children, a 28-year-old daughter named Ihsan and a 20-year-old son name Imhotep, are given few details concerning her financial problems. Ihsan knows that her mother is forced to live with a friend, but does not seem worried about her mother's predicament.

"I speak with my mother about once a week, so I'm aware that she's without a home but she tells us very little else about her situation," said Ihsan. "My mother is a very strong woman. We know that she's okay."

Mujahid thinks it best to keep it this way.

“I don’t have little children anymore. My daughter’s grown. My son’s grown. So if I’m not eating, it’s only me,” said Mujahid. “I might struggle, but I’m willing to do whatever I have to, as long as it’s not illegal, to sustain me.”

Experience has taught her children that she can take of herself.

“They’re used to us struggling when they were younger. If I really needed help, I would ask them. But, I would do a hustle first,” Mujahid said. “I don’t ever want people to feel that I’m trying to get something for nothing.”

Despite the burden that she bears, Mujahid still believes in community work and continues to help others although she is rarely paid for it.

“My calling in life is to connect people together and ensure they’re given total access to the thing that can make their lives better. How do you place a value on this kind of work?” she asks.

Helping Hands

In 2005, Mujahid thought the pink-painted apartment A at 517 Holloway Street in Durham would be a suitable place for a fresh start. Divorced, broke, burdened with a foreclosed home, she needed an affordable place to stay. Settling for a rent of \$600 a month – the most reasonable price she could find – she moved in and began trying to pull her life together.

Mujahid immediately noticed problems with her apartment and filed a complaint with Neighborhood Improvement Services in May of that year. Upon inspection, the list of state violations included: rotten wood, a damaged porch, peeling paint and no cold water in the washing machine. Michelle Draughon, the landlord, was told to make the repairs.

After seeing little evidence of improvement, Mujahid filed another complaint in June 2006. Again, an inspector was sent out and cited persistent problems and new ones, too: peeling paint, deteriorating porch, holes/cracks in the walls and rotten wood. Draughon, who owned multiple properties in Durham at that time, was again informed that she would have to repair the property.

“I could not afford the repairs that came up,” said Draughon. “I guess nobody believes that.”

Mujahid begs to differ.

“She never really fixed anything with the house. She just used cheap temporary methods such as placing fresh wood on top of rotten wood so that the outside looked better while the inside of my house remained the same,” said Mujahid.

Despite the state of the house, which seemed to be crumbling before her very eyes, Mujahid continued to reach out to the surrounding neighborhood. Just four feet from her door, a crack house was in full operation. Like many of these places, it was in bad condition. The paint was peeling, the foundation was shaky and the screen door was made of a cheap tin that gave it a distinct, not to mention annoying, sound when anyone knocked.

“The first night that I moved in, I couldn’t sleep because people were always tapping on the door. It was all I could hear. Tap, tap, tap,” Mujahid said.

That night she began thinking of a way to shut it down. Her first step was to install a motion-sensitive floodlight.

The dealers and addicts “would meet in between my house and the crack house with little fear of being caught because it was so dark at night,” said Mujahid. “Once I installed the light, it made it difficult for them to trade drugs without the whole world seeing it.”

The next step was to strike some degree of fear in their minds and who better to do this than the police? Known to many officers because of her work, Mujahid invited some of them over to her house to scare the addicts away.

“No one wants to create criminal activity when they know the police are around,” she said.

She later called a meeting with the police chief, city manager and the neighbors to inform them of what was going on. After getting an inspector to check the house and implementing police surveillance, Muna got the crack house condemned and boarded up by the city within two weeks.

As proud as Mujahid was of that community effort, she gave the drug dealer most of the credit for the exposure of his shady business.

“He wasn’t a smart drug dealer,” she laughed. “After the city told him to move, he came to use my phone and I warned him that he didn’t need to bring that kind of attention to himself. He half-heartedly listened, but never knew that it was me who got him kicked out in the first place!”

Mujahid continued to experience problems with the conditions of her home, but she put her own needs aside to assist the tenant in Apartment C, Annie Johnson.

Johnson and her soon-to-be husband moved into the Draughon property in order to save money for their wedding. Johnson recalled how her life changed that winter. With the water and sewage entering their apartment, they needed a place to stay.

“If it wasn’t for Ms. Muna we would have to stay in that place,” Johnson said. “She got a collection of money for us from Durham Affordable Housing and we were able to stay in a hotel for a few days.”

The collection didn't cover all their hotel expenses and the Johnson family was forced to use their Christmas money to pay for the rest of their stay. Consequently, they were not able to buy gifts for their children. Indeed, the Christmas holiday would have been difficult if not for Mujahid.

"Ms. Muna got together with some of her friends and they got my babies Christmas gifts. I was so thankful," said Johnson. "We didn't have any money."

Johnson made it clear that she has not forgotten how Draughon treated her and her family. They, too, had complaints with their apartment, which included having a toilet in the kitchen and a huge crack in their bedroom floor. In February 2008, NIS relocated them to another house, but Johnson gives all the credit to Mujahid.

"This experience brought us together," said Johnson. "If it weren't for Ms. Muna we would be in the dark and we wouldn't have this house, all while she was still fighting to get her own house. Whenever she needs us, we've got her back. We're just waiting."

Housing Blues

Mujahid's experience with the poverty in Durham is not unique. Based on Neighborhood Improvement Services' (NIS) data, 21.7 percent of Durham individuals lived below the poverty line in 2005 and 32.5 percent of Durham females (without children in the home) lived in poverty that year. Across the city of Durham, tenants with limited incomes are dealing with less than favorable conditions in their homes because their small salaries afford them little more than the bare essentials. In addition, organizations that enforce housing codes have inadequate budgets that do not allow them to reconcile every housing problem. Consequently, tenants are forced to choose between the lesser of two evils: stay and live with the dilapidated conditions in their house or move out and risk being unable to find or afford

another place to stay.

According to Mike Barros, director of the Department of Community Development, many people like Mujahid will continue to wait if they think problems with rundown and neglected housing will end soon, not as long as foreclosures and issues of poverty continue to exist.

“Foreclosures are our biggest problem in Durham. We also have lots of vacant housing, some that are boarded up and others that are empty because the owners need to make repairs,” Barros said.

In 2007, nearly 14 percent of Durham’s adults and 20 percent of Durham’s children lived below the poverty line. Accordingly, residents are in dire need of low-income housing, which grows scarcer by the day.

“Every year we have less low-income housing and there are three reasons behind it,” said Barros. “One, there are more people than homes in Durham. Two, housing prices are going up faster than wages. Three, the gap between skilled and unskilled workers is getting bigger and that impacts wages.”

According to Barros, when you combine all these factors, contractors are less likely to build low-income affordable housing.

“It costs the same amount of money to build a regular home as it does to build an affordable one. At the end of the day, builders will make more money if they choose the former,” Barros said.

To mitigate problems with low-income housing, Barros suggests that federal housing policies be created with a more holistic approach.

“The policies that we use have not contributed to the prevention of problems with

low-income housing,” said Barros. “Most of them are concerned with structure, not the people. That kind of approach doesn’t do anything to break the poverty cycle or uplift a neighborhood’s spirit. We need policies that will offer tutoring to kids and allow for education expenses so that people can get a solid footing beneath them.”

Rick Hester, who is Neighborhood Improvement Services manager and spent 20 years as a housing inspector, says low-income housing is only the tip of the iceberg.

“Low-income housing might be a problem, but the real culprit is *affordable* low-income housing,” said Hester. “What’s affordable in Durham is not cheap.”

According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, affordable housing stipulates that a family should have to put no more than 30 percent of its annual income into housing, but Hester believes that individual income is not often considered when deciding what is affordable. The difference between what is considered low and affordable really boils down to the placement of property.

“We have plenty of low-income housing – housing that is supposed to meet the needs of those who make well below the median income, [\$48,000 in 2007] for this city – but most low-income housing in Durham is located in the center of the city where things are more expensive,” said Hester. “At the end of the day, it’s just not affordable for the people who really need it.”

As NIS manager, Hester works to ensure that people who lack the financial stability to purchase a home are not taken advantage of when they rent.

“You wouldn’t believe how many people are in bad houses because they can’t afford anything better,” Hester said. “I’ve seen people living in places where rats leave droppings in their children’s beds and bite their dogs.”

With the help of random rental inspections throughout the city, NIS has been able to crack down on home owners who fail to maintain housing codes. Though NIS wishes it could reach out to every substandard home in Durham, limited state funding allows it to do only so much. When NIS runs out of money, condemned homes cannot be torn down and people who need to be relocated have to look elsewhere for help.

“Do I think we do a good job? Yes, I do,” said Hester. “Could we do even better? Yeah, if we had an endless budget.”

Gary Richards, NIS budget and management analyst, knows just how limited the budget really is. For the past 10 years, NIS has received \$10,000 a year to relocate people living in substandard housing. The funds for the 2008-2009 fiscal year only last three months.

“It's a whopping 10 people,” said Richards. “We haven't had any since October and we've been working with other organizations to help place these people.”

This year is even worse.

On July 1, 2009, NIS discovered that the City of Durham had cut its operating budget by 30 percent. As a result, it has gone from a \$10,000 budget for relocations to \$0.

“We went from a budget of \$100,000 to \$70,000. They crushed us and unless the city council adds it back to our budget, we are not able to help people unless through another agent,” said Richards. “Not until June 30, 2010.”

Holding On To Hope

On a quiet street in Durham, there stands a house that Mujahid calls “the one.” Two-stories tall and three bedrooms full, it's more than enough room for one person. Its structure, built entirely of deep-red brick, sparks a sharp contrast next to its tall white columns, which

bring back images of old southern plantations. Though the grass is freshly trimmed, the cob-webbed windows and rusty front door send the message that no one lives there.

But someone hopes that they will.

“This is it,” said Mujahid. “This is going to be my new home.”

The house, owned by a local Durham man, is ready to be rented. NIS officials are aware of her interest in the house, but say they have no funding left with which to relocate her, at least, not this fiscal year.

Untouched by the disappointment, Mujahid continues to dream and plan.

“There’s a bedroom big enough for me to use as a shop where I can showcase my clothing,” she said. “The kitchen has enough space for me to continue to do hair.”

As she walks around to the back of the property, the vision continues.

“You know, there’s probably enough room in there for me to start my business, WOMMB. Women Operating Money-Making Businesses. Yeah, this house has so much potential.”

Almost as if someone snapped their fingers, she returns to activist mode.

“I’m not going to let the city take advantage of me like this,” Mujahid said. “My experience has taught me that you really have to fight and you have to have some integrity to not give up. I know it’s not going to be easy, but I’m not ever giving up. I don’t believe in fighting for the sake of a fight, but I do believe in justice. I’m going to make the city do what’s right.”

Today Mujahid is still living with a friend in Durham but is taking the steps to improve her living situation. With the help of Durham's Human Resources Development (HRD), Mujahid

is taking computer and business courses at Durham Technical Community College.

According to the Durham Chamber of Commerce, such HRD courses are designed to "train and educate adults for success in the workplace." These courses are free of charge as a result of Mujahid's low income. Mujahid also joined the FEATS (Family Empowerment Action to Self-Sufficiency) program – an entity within Durham's Operation Breakthrough – that provides development training, employment search, financial support services and referrals to participants free of charge. In May, Mujahid began working a full-time temporary position with the Partnership Effort for the Advancement of Children's Health that works to prevent lead poisoning in children and she is saving money for what she hopes is her new house.

On June 1, 2009, Mujahid met with the Durham City Council to discuss her housing situation and what she calls the "unfair treatment" she received from NIS. July 14, 2009, Thomas J. Bonfield, Durham City Manager, sent a letter to Mujahid in response to her appearance before the Council claiming the following: 1) Mujahid's residence (apartment A) was never declared uninhabitable, 2) only apartments B and C were declared uninhabitable and 3) NIS informed her in April 2008 that she was not eligible for relocation funds. Mujahid denies that she was ever told of her ineligibility for relocation funds by NIS and witnesses have confirmed seeing the two signs noting the uninhabitable nature of the entire building in which Mujahid lived. Consequently, Mujahid is looking for an attorney who is willing to take her case.

Chapter V: Destination Africa

As soon as you enter the office of Dr. Vanessa Hodges, a professor of 15 years in the School of Social Work at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and resident of Durham, N.C., you can't help but notice the painting of an African woman that hangs above her desk.

Glowing in a head wrap and dashiki the color of brown sugar and gold, she stands out among the bland tones of textbooks and paper that fill the office. Stoic and poised, the woman evokes silent dignity, not unlike the demeanor of Hodges herself, who calls forth the image of her African ancestors with her close-cut hair, brown-beaded earrings and unnaturally smooth 53-year-old skin. Hodges' brown eyes, piercing and wise, somehow manage to remain inviting and non-judging. Her voice, high and feminine, adds a distinct contradiction to her otherwise strong appearance, and it's this strength – inner and outer – that has allowed her to take on a difficult task: changing people's minds about Africa.

Hodges has used her position in the School of Social Work to develop her activism for Africa. Every one to two years since 2001, the school has offered students, alumni and others the chance to join a study abroad trip to South Africa. As a trip leader for the past four years, Hodges has played a role in all aspects of the trip – recruitment, agency visits, student assignments, etc. – and has found it a rewarding venue for increasing awareness about Africa.

In the years she has spent as both a participant and a leader in this study abroad

venture, Hodges has seen travelers' thoughts about Africa go from nonchalant and misinformed to enlightened and concerned. Such transformations are a source of motivation for her.

"People still have a very primitive stereotype of Africa that results in a great deal of ignorance about its people and their way of life," said Hodges.

According to Hodges, such ignorance includes the "Tarzan mentality" that simplifies the lives of Africans to spear-throwing, fast-running, war-inducing, scantily-clad, ape-like creatures that lack any sense of civilization. Consequently, she said, many people aren't interested in learning about Africa because they think they already know everything there is to know.

A big part of this distorted image comes from the news media, which tend to focus on Africa's problems of governance and disease. Another source of misinformation, the lack of African history taught in schools, increases American ignorance and reduces curiosity.

"There are some Americans who have a more progressive and positive opinion of Africa, but they are typically highly educated and have had the opportunity to meet someone from or go to Africa," said Hodges. "It's unlikely that you're going to see beyond the negative stereotypes if you don't have that kind of exposure. It takes a personal experience."

Ironically, Hodges' interest in Africa developed from her own early inability to connect her life and the continent, along with a series of missed travel opportunities when she was younger. When she was in middle school, Hodges' church would often hold fundraisers for its world missions. Africa received a great deal of the church's earnings, but Hodges never really gave that connection much thought.

"My mom was a part of the church circle that adopted an orphanage in Africa," said

Hodges. “Our church would send money every year to help them buy books, beds and uniforms, but I never thought about stepping foot in Africa. I wanted to help, but didn’t consider the advantages of traveling there to do so.”

During her high school years, her parents decided to take a trip to Sierra Leone to visit her brother, Reggie, who was working with the Peace Corps. When asked if she wanted to go, Hodges turned down the offer.

“I decided that I’d rather stay home and go to parties with my friends. I was immature and silly,” she said, laughing. “I realize it wasn’t the right decision because my mind is in a different place now.”

Another opportunity would present itself in the form of a graduation gift. When Hodges earned her doctorate in social work, her brother, Reggie, decided to reward her with a flight to Sierra Leone. But, civil unrest in Sierra Leone caused her to cancel the trip.

As a student in Greensboro, N.C., in the 1960s, Hodges attended segregated Bluford Elementary and Lincoln Jr. High. Even though Brown vs. Board of Education was decided in 1954, Greensboro did not move with the “deliberate speed” urged by the Supreme Court until 1971, Hodges’ sophomore year in high school. It was at this point that Hodges was removed from Dudley High School, the black school a mile away from her home, and bussed to Grimsley Sr. High, the white school eight miles away.

“I can honestly say that being segregated was better,” said Hodges.

While in elementary and middle school, the community of African Americans in which Hodges lived and attended school was very nurturing and supportive. In one of her fondest memories, Hodges recalled the it-takes-a-village-to-raise-a-child mentality of her neighborhood.

As a child, Hodges hated wearing a coat and would find almost any excuse to take it off. One cold day while walking toward a friend's house, she unbuttoned her coat as soon as she got out of sight of her own house. A neighborhood woman called Hodges' mother, Virginia, to let her know that her daughter's jacket was open to the cold air. Virginia gave the neighbor permission to tell Hodges to button her coat back up.

Hodges never tried that again.

"These people went to my church, shopped at my grocery store and did things that I did," said Hodges. "In the black community, people cared about teaching me who I was as a person and who I wanted to become as an adult."

As much as she disapproved of the community's watchful eye, it felt better than the feeling she experienced in the new white environment that she was thrown into in high school. The desegregated system lacked the community support she was accustomed to.

"I didn't know anything about these people and they didn't know anything about me," said Hodges. "Most importantly, they didn't seem to care to know anything about me."

Not surprisingly, years later the apartheid system in South Africa struck a chord with her.

"There are many parallels between Africa and the United States that we, as Americans, tend to overlook," said Hodges. "Knowing I was experiencing some of the same issues as Africans gave me a sense of compassion for them and it planted a seed of curiosity in me. I wanted to know how things looked over there and what people were thinking."

If It's Broken, She Wants It

Hodges was 16 when she made the decision to be a resource for others. She and her mother were driving through an impoverished part of Greensboro, when one man, whom

Hodges describes as “virtually homeless if not actually homeless,” caught her mother’s attention. He stood at the corner, clearly down on his luck and clearly drunk. “Do you want to work with people like that?” her mother asked with a small frown. Hodges replied simply, “Yep.”

According to Hodges, she has always had a desire to aid those in need. At the age of 6, Hodges recalled a family of eight moved into the house across the street. Being the baby in the family and living in a neighborhood with a limited number of young children, Hodges looked forward to this array of new playmates. Of the six children to choose from, she took a liking to a young boy named Warmouth who was severely mentally disabled.

“He couldn’t do anything for himself, but he was the one I always chose to be on my team when we played kickball or softball,” said Hodges. “I guess I’ve always had an affinity for people who were disadvantaged or didn’t fit in in some way.”

As she grew older, Hodges would volunteer with youth councils, where she was often the only black person in the room, but she took this as a chance to bring something different to the table.

“It was awkward but I believe my being there allowed the group to consider another perspective in their approach to young people, particularly minority youths,” said Hodges.

In college, Hodges started an annual Christmas charity act that included giving some of her money to a person in need. The amount given would vary depending on the shape of her finances, but she never skipped a year.

As a graduate student at the University of Illinois, she had the opportunity to help a young African woman. The woman, from Eastern Africa, lived across from Hodges and had a newborn. Her husband was in the Peace Corps in Nigeria, leaving his wife alone in the

United States and without financial resources. Hodges gave her \$100. It wasn't much, but the woman felt blessed to receive it.

"I am where I am today because someone has sacrificed life, employment or opportunity to lay the foundation for me and I have an obligation to do the same and pay it forward," said Hodges. "At that time, I was blessed with a family, a job and a scholarship and I felt obligated to use my resources to help her."

Much of this giving mentality comes from her role model: her mother.

"My mother gave so much love to me and other people," said Hodges. "Her values were simple: help others, learn as much as you can, be nice to people and share. She taught me to be who I am as a person."

But Hodges' activism for Africa goes beyond just practicing what she was preached. It's about responsibility.

"When an injustice exists, we have a moral responsibility to try to right that injustice," said Hodges. "I realize that many people who do what I do have religious or self-fulfilling reasons as their motivators, but my activism boils down to reversing the wrong."

Hodges admits she gets personal joy out of doing what's right, but feels that the feeling is an exchange more than a gift.

"I get satisfaction, pride and pleasure in my work with Africa, but it's a two-way street," said Hodges. "Yes, I might help someone have a better quality of life, but my experiences in Africa and making others aware of Africa does the same for me."

If her dream of bringing full awareness to Americans is ever reached, Hodges believes that people's commitment to affecting change in Africa will be more personal and professional in nature.

“For a change, I think we would see some equity between the support we give to other countries and the support that we give to Africa,” said Hodges.

Showing the Way

Hodges’ first visit to Africa in 2003, at the age of 47, was with the School of Social Work. Despite being a professor in the school, Hodges chose to be on the trip as a student to gain a better, more holistic experience.

“Going as a student participant allowed me to fully explore my curiosities. If I had gone as a professor, I would’ve been assigned as a leader, someone who was there to teach others,” said Hodges. “I didn’t want to be a teacher. I wanted to be taught.”

During the two-week trip, Hodges and other participants had 15 to 20 scheduled visits with agencies in South Africa – hospitals, battered women’s centers, apartheid museums, churches – that allowed them to see various facets of African life and history.

Most of the participants are white females in their mid-twenties, but a number of African-American females go too. Most of the participants, who range from age 21 to 69, had never traveled to Africa before and, if they’d traveled at all, had been to primarily vacation spots such as the Bahamas and Cancun. The program has proved life-changing for some who had not been to a third-world country before or experienced anything other than an American way of life.

After spending two weeks in Johannesburg and Cape Town, the main locations, Hodges returned to the United States determined to increase American awareness of Africa, Africans and their amazing culture.

Expressing a strong interest in the future of the program, Hodges made it clear to the school’s study abroad coordinators that she wanted to play a bigger role in their Africa-

awareness efforts and became a trip leader.

“It felt great to take over a new group and to see the wonder in their eyes as they experienced Africa,” said Hodges. “Initially, I worried about taking on the position of leader, but it worked for me. It just felt right.”

Next, Hodges decided that she needed to find other faculty in the school who were willing to commit to being leaders. Until then, leaders changed every year, but she felt this was not beneficial to the experience.

“If we want our participants to have a true appreciation for the trip and the bigger picture behind it, we have to have leaders who are experienced travelers in Africa and just as curious and dedicated to the cause of awareness,” said Hodges.

Sharon Thomas, director of recruitment, admissions and financial aid in the School of Social Work, was one of the first to join. Having known Hodges for over 12 years, Thomas knows how important Africa is to Hodges.

“Ever since she went on that first trip there, she’s been really inspired and dedicated,” said Thomas. “There’s always a continual dialogue about going back and she wants to see our relationship with Africa grow.”

Daniel Hudgins, a faculty member in the School of Social Work, says he was more than pleased when Hodges asked him to be a trip leader.

“When Vanessa asked me to be a part of this trip, I was happy to work with her,” said Hudgins. “She’s a well-respected leader here and in the larger community. She has a real interest in this trip and having someone like her serve as a leader gives this venture more status.”

Hodges’ work with this program is not about the amount of skill she possessed, but

how eye-opening and rewarding the experience is for those who attend. On a previous trip, a student was so touched by her visit that she decided to raise money for an agency located in a shantytown that provides medicine for African citizens.

“She went into this knowing that she was going to want to do something worthwhile and getting there only increased that ambition,” said Hodges. “That’s the kind of trip we want to provide for our participants. One that inspires them to do something about what they see, not just take pictures of it.”

Hodges has since implemented a service project for students who wish to receive extra credit hours for the trip. The option is being offered for the first time this summer and entails writing a curriculum, writing a business plan or doing fundraising for a specific agency. In choosing one of these three options, students are given the chance to leave their mark on South Africa.

But, Hodges realizes that this kind of effort is not for every participant.

“We had one student whose boyfriend lived in South Africa, so she wanted to get a glimpse of what his life was like because she had heard many things but never seen it for herself,” said Hodges.

On the 17-hour trip back home, a leader asked the young woman what was the most interesting thing she would remember about her time in Africa.

“‘The sky was so blue.’ That was her answer,” said Hodges. “You have to keep in mind that we had been to Robben Island, the Apartheid Museum, all these places where the turbulent history of Africa and the pressing issues it encounters today are overwhelmingly thrown in our participants’ faces. So for her to leave that trip with just an observance of the sky, well, it was unacceptable.”

According to Thomas, there have even been situations in which participants had such low expectations of Africa that when they arrived they failed to accept the progress the country has made in the past few decades.

“We had one student on the verge of anger,” said Thomas, “because she said Johannesburg and Cape Town were not real representations of Africa. She really struggled with the development in these two cities because it didn’t meet the lower standards that she expected all of Africa to have.”

As with anything in life, not every person can be expected to view a trip to Africa as a life-changing experience and Hodges has learned to forgive such transgressions.

“The ignorance and lack of willingness of people to learn new things is very frustrating because it leaves them with unreal notions and judgments based on limited information,” said Hodges. “I understand that people are fighting for other causes, but I want people to have the same priorities in life that I have. I want them to have the same passion that I do, but not everyone gets it.”

Despite her passion, Hodges believes that her dedication to Africa does not impose itself upon the participants. At least not often.

“Rarely does my own excitement for the trip get in the way of my participants experience,” said Hodges. “As a social worker I am acutely aware of people’s right to self-determination,” said Hodges. “I can model for them how I feel, but I don’t try to make them see it my way.”

Putting the Trip in Motion

Like anyone leading an overseas excursion, lots of Hodges’ time is invested into laying the foundations. Here is a look into the process of recruiting, agency selection and

participant orientation before the trip to South Africa.

Recruiting

Most of Hodges' recruiting is centered in social work communities. Listservs containing Carolina and United States social work students are used to ensure that people within the field are given preference. Approximately 65 percent to 75 percent of participants are Carolina students in or graduates of the School of Social Work.

"In general, we get enough participants from that first round of recruitment," said Hodges. "If we don't, we send information to national social work associations in the States and we definitely get a large enough group from that."

Those participants outside of social work comprise an eclectic group of ministers, artists, teachers, lawyers and various other professions.

In general, the process of recruiting lasts from the beginning of November to the middle of December and anywhere from 18 to 29 applicants are accepted.

Selecting Agencies

While in South Africa, participants will visit a couple dozen agencies. Though the types of agencies they visit are determined by their applications, Hodges explained that staple agencies are placed in the itinerary of every trip.

"The name of the tour is called Transformations in the New South Africa," Hodges said, "so when we look for agencies to visit, we're primarily concerned with agencies that represent the social, health and economic development post-apartheid."

Consequently, participants will always visit Parliament and the Apartheid Museum in Cape Town and Constitution Court in Johannesburg. Other agency visits are influenced by the applicants' personal essays in the primary application and supplemental applications sent

out in the spring.

“We identify the areas that they’re interested in from their essays,” said Hodges. “We then take those areas, create categories for them on the supplemental application and ask them to rank their preferences.”

Some of the categories they are able to choose from include health/mental health, government/non-government organizations, child welfare and culture. Under each of these categories, participants are given the opportunity to visit HIV/AIDS clinics, refugee agencies, orphanages and schools.

Vernon Rose, South African and graduate of Duke University Divinity School, is the in-country guide for the study abroad trip to South Africa. Hodges tells Rose what the participants want to do and he finds the appropriate agencies, speaks with the executive directors of the agencies and sets up appointments for the group.

“We’re at each agency for about two hours,” said Hodges. “For the first 30 minutes the staff will present to us what they do and then they take 30 minutes of questions. The last hour is spent touring the facility, speaking with their clients and debriefing.”

At the end of each visit, a participant presents a gift to the agency that is representative of something important about their lives in the United States. In the past, agencies have received jewelry, pieces of art, CDs, music, videos, clothing and journals. Agencies are also left with a surprise monetary contribution of \$75-\$100 (750-1000 ZAR).

“It’s important for me that we give something back to these people because I don’t want it to feel like we’re coming to an agency and just absorbing and taking things,” said Hodges. “They are always grateful for us being there, so we make a big deal about our thanks to them.”

Orientation

After applicants have been accepted and paid the \$600 deposit for the trip, Hodges spends most of her time maintaining communication with the participants from January until April. During this time, they are asked to sign summer school documents and complete the supplemental application that addresses agency visits, passports, flight costs, roommate preference and other travel elements. A directory of participants, along with their photos, is created to ensure communication among the future travelers.

“We provide an orientation in May that brings everyone together for the first time,” said Hodges. “We expect anyone within a 100 mile radius to attend and those beyond that maximum attend through the use of web cams.”

Orientation lasts approximately four to five hours and it is here that participants are introduced to one another, given a tentative schedule, told where they are staying and who their roommate will be. This is also a time when participants are lectured on the proper etiquette of being a guest in another country, such as not wearing flashy jewelry or the American flag, and behaving as professionals during agency visits.

Issues of safety and medical emergencies are also discussed to ensure that participants can handle themselves in unfamiliar territory. Even with this warning, they are told to have conversations with the people of South Africa where they can exchange their opinions and stereotypes. In addition, participants are also encouraged to keep journals and to be open-minded about what they will experience.

“What they will see could be a life-changing event for them and we want them to be able to think about what that means for them,” said Hodges. “How are they going to think, live, believe differently when they get back here?”

A Testimony

Virni Webb, a 43-year-old black social worker in Indiana, attended the School of Social Work's 2005 trip to South Africa. Before the trip, Webb believed in many of the negative stereotypes associated with Africa.

"I watched too much free-the-children and hunger programs on TV where everybody is starving and has big bellies. I didn't really know what to expect, so I expected the worse," said Webb.

Webb also had a habit of seeing things in black and white. Before 2005, she never made much of an attempt to befriend white people. What she felt toward them was never termed hate, but she admits that her relationship with whites never went beyond just cordial. Africa would change that.

"I met a white woman named Quivy, who had never talked to a black person that wasn't her servant. She was rich, you see," said Webb. "We actually sat down and had a conversation and took a liking to each other. Talking to her completely changed my way of thinking about white people and the importance of race."

Webb also admitted that the trip improved her view of the country and the continent itself. Being around so many people that "looked like her" gave her an appreciation for her own culture and she came to the conclusion that nothing was the way it looked on TV.

"You just have to turn off the tube," said Webb. "Turn off the tube!"

Furthermore, Webb learned that stereotypes work both ways. While there, she was asked many times if she owned a swimming pool and went to a boarding school.

"I was able to have conversations with Africans and talk about what we thought of the each other and it was great," said Webb. "It's funny how both Americans and Africans

have these assumptions about what the other does and does not do, what the other has and does not have. At the end of the day, we're the same people."

Ignorance is Bliss ... Sometimes

Education is a precious value in the Hodges family. Both her parents were college-educated, a rarity for African Americans during the early twentieth century. Virginia, her mother, attended Hampton Institute, now Hampton University, and her father, Samuel, went to North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University, which has seen the enrollment of three generations of men in the Hodges' family.

"It was almost expected that you would go to college," said Hodges. "My parents knew the importance of being educated."

At the age of 10, Hodges' had her first lesson in the value of being educated.

She recalls walking home from school, when a male schoolmate, also 10, ran up and hit her. Horrified by the experience and suddenly feeling ill, Hodges continued ran home.

It was a Friday night and her parents were getting the house ready for "company" – the friends they invited over to play Pinochle every week – when Hodges' mother noted a change in her daughter who had gone straight to bed after dinner and said a word to no one. The conversation, one that would be life-changing for Hodges, went something like this:

Virginia: What's wrong with you, Vanessa?

Hodges: Nothing.

Virginia: Are you sick?

Hodges: No.

Virginia: Have you started your period?

Hodges: No.

Virginia: Then what's the matter?

Hodges: I'm pregnant.

Virginia: (brief pause) How did you get pregnant?

Hodges: A boy touched my butt. That's why I came to bed. Pregnant women need to sleep.

Virginia: (smiles) That doesn't mean you're pregnant, sweetie.

Hodges: I'm not?

“It was that day that I learned the importance of being educated and being aware,” Hodges said, laughing. “I was a 10-year-old who thought she was pregnant because no one had taught me how people had babies, so I made my own assumptions. Just like many people in this world make up assumptions about other peoples and cultures. Whether it's Africa or pregnancy, each scenario is just as ridiculous.”

A History with This Heritage

Whether in the form of the strong sense of community maintained throughout slavery, the back-to-Africa goals of Marcus Garvey's followers, the natural, non-chemically treated hair-dos of Black Panther members, or the celebration of African descent during Kwanzaa, African Americans have kept their connection to Africa an important part of their everyday lives.

Regardless of the geographical divide that separates Africans and African Americans, there is no denying that they are inextricably linked through their pasts and African Americans historically have tried to retain what they can of their heritage.

In general, Hodges believes that though it's important for every ethnicity to have an appreciation for Africa, it's even more essential that African Americans try to make that

connection.

“It’s vital for U.S. blacks to have a perception or understanding of the richness from which they came,” said Hodges. “The value, the creativity, the work ethic, the struggle. It can all be a source of motivation and encouragement for black people.”

Hodges’ first encounter with an African came at the age of seven when Japhet Nkonge was introduced into the family.

Hodges’ dad, Samuel, was an agricultural extension agent, helping farmers grow better crops and be more productive agriculturalists. In the segregated South, he could work only with black farmers. One day while making a routine visit to a local farm in Pitt County, Samuel encountered Japhet or “Jeff” as he is called by the Hodges family. Jeff was 15 and had come to the United States from Kenya to go to high school because his Kenyan village only allowed the top 50 junior high students to advance to high school.

Jeff was number 51.

After obtaining a study visa, Jeff moved to a farm in North Carolina. Complaining of being overworked on the farm and unable to focus on his studies, Jeff begged Samuel for help. Samuel considered the issue and discussed it with his family.

“How do you feel about adding another member to our family?” Samuel asked.

The Hodges, after hearing the details, decided that they would take Jeff in, making their family of seven a family of eight and the gap that existed between Hodges and Africa was officially closed.

“Jeff was my first real and intimate introduction to another country,” said Hodges, “and it opened up a part of the world that I hadn’t even thought about.”

What Hodges didn’t know was that at the age of 12, circumstances overseas would

introduce two more African children into her family.

In his work with the Peace Corps, Reggie became friends with a pregnant Sierra Leonean woman. After giving birth to triplets, one of whom died, she was unable to care for the surviving two because of substance abuse, so Reggie, 25, took responsibility for the boy and girl and financed their placement in an African orphanage for a year.

After completing his two-year commitment with the Peace Corps, Reggie went back to the orphanage and adopted the boy, Mowlee, who was 18 months old. He then left the child in his parents' care while he went back to work and live in Africa. While there, he met and married a white African woman before returning to the orphanage to adopt the sister, Angela.

“My parents raised us to know the importance of service in and outside the home. They always took people in during their times of need, despite the limited space in our house,” said Hodges, “and my brother followed my parents' example when he adopted those two kids,” said Hodges.

Taking a Harder Look

After World War II, African countries began to fight for independence from the European colonial powers that controlled them. Even after independence, many of these countries would continue to struggle with the influence that the white population held over them. South Africa epitomized this conflict during its struggle under the system of apartheid, which lasted until 1994.

Africa has experienced growing pains as a result of its young and still-developing independence, but there is no denying that it is a place of great natural resources and cultural wealth. Today, however, many of the perceptions of Africa are a reflection of its flaws.

Bushman.

AIDS.

Dark.

Malaria.

Poverty.

These are just five of the most common negative adjectives mentioned when 30 UNC-Chapel Hill students were asked, “What word comes to mind when you think of Africa?”

Positive attributes like “resources,” “culture,” “heritage” and “smiles” were mentioned by students, but such constructive beliefs were few in comparison to the more prominent negative stereotypes.

Julius Nyang’oro, a professor and chair of the department of African studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, thinks the amount of ignorance you encounter depends on the type of American.

“If you’re dealing with someone who is well-traveled and has gone to Africa, of course their thoughts on Africa will be different and less unaware than someone who has spent their entire life sheltered in the U.S.,” said Nyang’oro.

This professor of 20 years believes the biggest catalyst for ignorance is television.

“Americans haven’t kept up with the progress in Africa because they get most of their information about it from the television. TV doesn’t report many things about Africa,” said Nyang’oro, “and when it does, it’s usually a negative happening. How and when news is reported drives the American image of Africa.”

Originally from Tanzania, Nyang’oro knows the fact from the fiction and believes

Americans' perspective toward Africa will not change until they begin to see the connection between them and the people of Africa.

“Americans have to consider the reality of this global world and know that what happens in Africa does impact the United States,” said Nyang’oro. “If we continue to think that an issue in Africa is Africa’s problem, that’s a short view to have. What happens there can happen here.”

In the years of her activism, Hodges has noticed that Americans associate their values with what they believe the rest of the world should value. But, it just doesn’t work that way.

“In this country, we think success equates being white, English-speaking and intelligent, but that’s not always the case in other parts of the world,” said Hodges. “We can’t throw our American values upon other groups of people. Taking the steps to learn about a place like Africa gives us a new appreciation for how people can be different and manage to be just as accomplished in life as we are.”

The majority of the people involved with Hodges’ study abroad program do have a deeper interest in Africa than mere leisurely travel, but Hodges wants this attempt to reach out to extend beyond just students. Calling Africans some of the most “amazing, creative and adaptive people in the world,” Hodges believes that if Americans took the time to look closely at the African people, they would see the greatness that she sees in them.

Natives of South Africa, a place that in the past 20 years has seen numerous changes—the end of apartheid, the election of the first black president, the implementation of a post-apartheid constitution – agree that Americans’ perception of Africa could be improved if they viewed the continent in a more thoughtful manner.

During a recent trip to Africa, concerns for American’s view of Africa were

addressed during a conversation with Zubeiga, a black 24-year-old parking marshal and South African. Though she has never had a personal relationship with an American, she has encountered American tourists in her work.

“Americans look at Africa and treat it as a subject. They come here with their cameras and money and only want to take in the better parts of our world,” said Zubeiga. “Then when they leave, they go just as ignorant about us as when they came. Come to my shanty town and see what life is like in my world.”

Zubeiga lives in a small shack of approximately 600 square feet with nine other people – six under the age of 18 – in a shanty town known as Manenberg. About 20 minutes outside of the center of Cape Town, South Africa, life for Zubeiga’s family doesn’t fit the white-picket-fence ideal in the United States, but they appear content. Zubeiga’s mother, known as Mama Z, claims never to have come across an American who genuinely treated her as an equal.

“We are not a it, a thing,” said Mama Z. “We are a people with hearts and lives. We are just like you.”

In general, this family seems to dare Americans to open their eyes to the state of their country, to see Africa as a place where life thrives in all its positive and negative forms.

Nebojga, a white 35-year-old South African who lives in the center of Cape Town, has had more opportunities to speak with and develop relationships with Americans, but his opinion of them is nearly the same.

“I have many American friends who come here to visit me because they think South Africa is interesting and they want to fulfill a curiosity about Africa,” said Nebojga. “But, I can’t honestly say that I think they fully appreciate the people or the culture. Many of them

just want to be able to say they have come to Africa and lived. That they survived the most ill-reputed place on Earth.”

Daniel Hudgins, a UNC-CH trip leader, believes Americans would benefit from a better understanding of Africa as well. Linking the emphasis on European culture to the diminished image of Africa, Hudgins suggests that Americans open their minds to a new ideal.

“We’ve been Euro-centric for far too long and we expect that our participants will gain an appreciation for the strengths and challenges that are faced by Africa today,” said Hudgins. “As Americans, we need to understand that our heritage is Africa’s heritage and one is not more important than the other.”

Her Work Is Never Done

Applications for the South Africa study abroad program are increasing every year and Hodges couldn’t be more pleased, yet she finds it difficult to let go of her fear that this interest will fade.

“I only hope that the next generation is full of people who are willing to fight for Africa,” said Hodges. “I’m worried that with change there will come forgetfulness and that people will overlook the struggles that have gone into increasing the positives associated with Africa and reducing the negatives.”

Hodges plans to conquer this potential problem by making sure the foundation of this program, which only has four trips under its belt, has strong leaders and plenty of room for growth.

Part of this growth would include the implementation of a service project at the end of the trip that would allow each participant to give back in a way that is truly measurable.

According to Sharon Thomas, another trip leader, many people join this program because they believe “their social conscience and spirit will be driven to do something special” and the addition of a service project would only reinforce that idea.

In addition to that, Hodges wants to add an exchange element that would allow American and African students to trade places during the summer. Not only would it aid in the defeat of American stereotypes about Africa, but it would also help eliminate stereotypes held by Africans about America.

“There are negative images of Americans that need to be reversed as well. It’s not just Americans who make assumptions,” said Hodges.

Outside of the program, Hodges wants to keep her efforts going by making the big move – to Africa, that is. Hoping to teach at a university, she believes in her ability to impart some source of knowledge to African students. Plus, she thinks it would be a great learning experience.

When she is more financially prepared to do so, she plans to partner with an agency, be it health care, child care or school-development related, and provide financial support and people to aid with its work.

“If I had a will, which I don’t, and if I died tomorrow, I hope I won’t, I would leave part of my money to them,” said Hodges. “I see it as a reciprocal thing, not because they are poor and pitiful but because I have as much to learn in the experience as they do.”

Lastly, Hodges prays that her passion for Africa continues to grow.

“Doing what I do, this activism, keeps my life in perspective. It makes me creative. It makes me responsible. It makes me understanding,” said Hodges. “And most of all, it helps me remember that the world is so much bigger than me.”

Chapter VI: In the Name of Social Justice

It was the year 2006 when Michelle Johnson, a clinical social worker and activist, walked into her classroom in the School of Social Work at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She was 31 years old and the first black instructor that many of her students had worked with. The course was entitled: Confronting Oppression and Institutional Discrimination.

Eleven years had passed since Johnson made the decision to become a race activist and remove the ignorance produced by stereotyping and lack of tolerance. During the early years, she struggled to find her niche in the field but after attending a training session about racism in 1999, Johnson found her path.

In 2003, she joined forces with Dismantling Racism Works (drWorks), formerly known as ChangeWorks, and has since used the agency to help people and organizations understand the importance of anti-racism and anti-oppression communication. She's even confronted a few of her own demons in the process.

As a part-time trainer for drWorks, Johnson walked into class every day prepared to enlighten graduates students about the foundations of racism and oppression and to engage them in discussions of their own discriminating beliefs. It was the first time she had ever taught a course as a drWorks employee and she hoped the experience would be an enlightening one for the students.

It turned out she was the one being taught a lesson.

As weeks went by, Johnson began to notice that some students were resistant to her

teaching. One student, a white male, accused her of grading him more harshly than others because he was white.

“He told me that I had so much power and that I was using it against him,” said Johnson. “When I walk out of the room into the world, I don’t imagine I could have more power than you.”

As the only person of color in that room, Johnson believed that people assumed she was just another black woman with a militant agenda.

“Students don’t always know what to do when they have a woman of color talking about race,” said Johnson. “People resist by saying that it’s about my politics, but I’m not forcing people to agree with me. I just want them to struggle with the truth and think critically.”

Like she has with other accounts of racism, Johnson labels it a learning experience and moves on in her journey to end racism and oppression. For over a decade, she has dedicated her life to the cause and expects there will be other such bumps in the road in her career as a social worker.

“I try to remember that love has to be connected to resistance and building change,” said Johnson. “It would be easy for me to be frustrated with my work if I didn’t remember my compassion.”

She’s Been Here for Years

Johnson was like any other kid, at any other school, on any other photo day, but one thing always made her picture stand out from the rest: Johnson almost never smiled.

“I used to tell my mom that it was raining that day and I was sad,” said Johnson. “In reality, I wasn’t smiling because I was thinking about the weight of the world.”

Unlike most children whose minds were preoccupied with youthful trivialities, Johnson spent a lot of her time pondering heavy topics such as poverty, oppression and even motherhood. She recalls telling her mother that she did not want to have children and when her mother asked for an explanation, Johnson explained that she did not “want to bring them in this kind of world.”

Yes, she was serious. Yes, she was reserved, but anyone who misconstrued those two qualities as passivity was sadly mistaken. Beneath all that youthful brooding and contemplation lay a fierce protector.

While attending private school in Richmond, Virginia, Johnson remembers a girl named Allison. Allison was from a wealthy family and had no trouble paying the high tuition cost each year, unlike Johnson’s family who were able to send their daughter to private school because of a scholarship that Johnson received. Despite the contradiction of wealth, Allison and Johnson became friends.

It did not take long for Johnson to notice that other students were teasing Allison. Though she recalls not seeing any visible reasons why they would pick on her, Johnson made sure they knew that she would not put up with that kind of behavior.

“I would always intervene on her behalf and tell them to stop because Allison was my friend,” said Johnson. “I didn’t pick on other kids, so it didn’t resonate with me. I was always sticking up for kids that were made fun of.”

By the time Johnson entered 9th grade, her awareness of discrimination was in full gear and her fight against racism was flowering, so she used every opportunity that she could to highlight the problem to others. Art assignments would turn into illustrations of race dynamics and Johnson’s fight against racism would continue to develop through her

undergraduate years.

While taking a wood-working class, Johnson made a box that was white on the inside and black on the outside. Inside the box, a recorder played the voice of Martin Luther King, Jr.

“I don’t know that I connected those things back then with where I am now,” said Johnson. “Now I can look back and see the connection.”

Even with her art projects and protective behavior over friends, the school environment did not provide a setting that truly allowed Johnson to be an activist. Lack of clubs in middle and high school prevented it and her discomfort in college kept her from joining campus organizations.

“The College of William and Mary was pretty isolated for students of color. Students of color were not welcoming to me and they didn’t understand why I wasn’t in the black student movement,” said Johnson. “I always had white friends, but I didn’t feel accepted by them either. I never felt like I fit in anywhere.”

It was only when Johnson entered graduate school that she was truly given the opportunity to become an activist. Her undergraduate degree was in psychology, but she was not sure if she wanted to continue with it in graduate school. A friend’s mom recommended social work.

“I grew up knowing that I wanted to do something with people and communities, but I didn’t know it was going to be social work,” said Johnson. “When I talked to my mom about it, she said she was not going to pay for me to go to school to be a teacher – she was a special ed. teacher – so I decided to give social work a try.”

Johnson enrolled in the School of Social Work at the University of North Carolina in

Chapel Hill at the age of 21. It was a close group of 36 students.

“Grad school was like college for me as far as friendships and getting involved. I was surrounded by people concerned with social justice.”

Johnson graduated from The School of Social Work in 1998 and credits the experience with providing the motivation she needed to become an activist. At the end of the day, however, she knows two people deserve this credit more.

Her dad used to play professional football and, coming from a small town, he experienced how fame impacted people’s view of black people.

“He was picked up by the cops once because they thought he stole something,” said Johnson. “My dad has a consciousness of race and talks to me more about it than my mother.”

Johnson’s mother is the source of her efforts in service.

“My mother used to bring kids home when they missed the bus and let them eat dinner with us. She would pay for field trips when some kids’ parents didn’t have the money to pay for it themselves,” said Johnson. “I think I got that from her, that need to do something greater than yourself.”

Dismantling Racism: One Person at a Time

Dismantling Racism Works was founded in 2005 with the mission of helping “leaders and organizations who want to proactively understand and address racism” (www.dismantlingracism.org). This work is carried out mainly through the use of workshops that can last anywhere from two days to two years depending upon the request of the organization or the person. There is a fee. For example, two-day training costs \$50, but many trainers are lenient with the fees because they realize that the non-profit organizations that

contact them do not have much money.

While working with a non-profit organization in Durham in 2005, Johnson was introduced to drWorks training. It was there that she met Tema Okun, her role model.

Okun, 57, is one of the founders of drWorks and is currently a doctoral student at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro and native of Chapel Hill, N.C. Having grown up with a family that was committed to civil rights, Okun naturally fell into a position as an activist.

After meeting Johnson in 2005 and maintaining a relationship with her over a year later, she suggested that Johnson become a trainer, too.

And she did.

“It was the best training I’d ever been to and it changed my life,” said Johnson.

drWorks does not have a set curriculum for its training. Johnson’s training consisted mainly of watching other trainers in action and participating in the group activities. After each training session, she was given feedback on her progress. The whole process took a little over a year.

Today, Johnson has been working as a drWorks trainer for six years and thinks her relationship with Okun has allowed her to deal with the stress of addressing racism every day.

“Tema and I are really different in a lot of ways. She’s white, Jewish and 24 years older than me, but we’re able to talk about our differences,” said Johnson. “We talk about race all the time and when I encounter problems during my trainings, she discusses my options with me. She’s someone I can really look up to.”

Okun is just as grateful for her friendship with Johnson and believes Johnson has a

special place in this field of work.

“Michelle brings so many gifts to this work. She has a strong social background, a strong sense of self, a desire and ability to think critically and a sense of compassion,” said Okun. “I’ve worked with people of color before and it has impacted my ability to see the world. I’m very privileged to be partnered with her and my relationship with her is precious.”

Because drWorks has no headquarters, three women run the organization, two of which are Johnson and Okun. All work is contractual, so they wait for agencies to contact them about the training. When a person(s) decides to attend a drWorks training, they are broken up into caucuses: one for people of color and another for whites. This is done to promote comfort during discussions of racism and oppression. After individual caucuses have met, the caucuses are rejoined to share what they discussed.

Like many situations that bring people of color and whites together, open discussions of race and oppression can be tedious for the participants, but Johnson believes it is a part of confronting racism. She has even been upset by the experience herself.

“I get overwhelmed all the time because I’m really putting myself into it. I’m a black woman talking about racism,” said Johnson. “When I see resistance, it makes me angry. When I see people struggling with the change, it affects me. There are many different emotions at these trainings.”

Students who have received training by Johnson know just how emotionally driven these sessions can be. Darshan Mundada, an Indian student in the School of Social Work, is currently taking a drWorks course under Johnson’s instruction. The course has completely changed him.

“I should say that there are few things that actually change your life and this course is

one of those,” said Mundada. “It’s like peeling an onion except here I’m peeling the layers of my heart. Now, I’m much more open about things.”

His praise for Johnson could not get any higher.

“She is very much fit for this work. She’s the activist who when she sees things are not moving, she will stand up for what is right. She’s provided an amazing amount of emotional support for me,” said Mundada. “There are few people in life that you find you want to be connected to for a life time, but Michelle is one of those people.”

For Johnson, it is the reaction of people like Mundada that makes this work worthwhile.

“Hearing students say they are thinking about what I teach and really struggling with the material lets me know that I’m doing my job,” said Johnson. “When they leave with more questions than they came with, I know that they are more self-aware. That’s what I want.”

So Many Jobs, So Little Time

For many people involved in community work, job stability is unpredictable due to limited positions and limited pay. Plus, once an activist completes a goal within a community, they usually move on to other communities that need their help. Over the past 11 years, Johnson’s activism has taken many forms.

After graduating with her masters at UNC in 1998, Johnson became a full-time family specialist at East Chapel Hill High School. As a part of the school’s counseling department, Johnson made home visits to check on students, handled emotional counseling and facilitated support groups. In addition to these services, Johnson created a peer mediation program that taught students conflict resolution skills and provided them with diversity training. She also formed a women’s caucus.

“With the women’s caucus, I was able to take girls to places like Planned Parenthood with parents’ permission of course,” said Johnson. “The girls learned about breast exams, various health issues for women and the other services offered by Planned Parenthood. Planned Parenthood isn’t just about abortions.”

While at East Chapel Hill, Johnson struggled with the impact of socioeconomic factors on the students.

“Many of the kids either had or didn’t have and it was based on race. There was no middle ground,” said Johnson. “I noticed this and couldn’t figure out what it meant or how to deal with it.”

After the board directors sent her to a training workshop on racism, Johnson came back to the high school, but she was ready to leave.

“The training gave me the language for what I was seeing and experiencing, but I came back thinking, ‘I can’t work here,’” said Johnson. “I didn’t think I could work with people who weren’t going to be involved with the movement. How could I work in a setting that had racism and oppression?”

Johnson used her position as the school’s family specialist to discuss racism and oppression with the students, but she would leave this job, and its \$38,000 salary, behind in 2002.

From there, she joined Counseling and Wellness Services at UNC. Short-term therapy sessions (six to eight visits) were provided to students as well as support groups. Wanting to ensure that racism was addressed, Johnson started a diversity committee. Back in 2000, she opened her own private practice as a part-time clinical social worker so that she could provide one-on-one clinical therapy. Most of her referrals today come from Counseling and

Wellness Services despite having left that position in 2006.

The Orange County Rape Crisis Center would be her next full-time position.

For the first year, Johnson was a client service director which entailed coordinating support group programs and supervising interns. By 2007, she became the associate director in which she supervised education and client services at the Center and provided therapy. She made approximately \$36,000 her first year.

Ashley Trice, one of the interns that Johnson supervised at the Center and a student in the School of Social Work, believes the lessons she learned from Johnson were priceless.

“If I could just take everything from Michelle and put it in my brain, I would do it because she’s so smart. She’s an amazing woman who helped me confront my own issues in the therapy room,” said Trice. “I really want her to come back and take the executive position. I would love to work with her again.”

After leaving the Rape Crisis Center, Johnson worked part-time with the Mental Health Association (MHA) in 2008 and joined Heirs to a Fighting Tradition shortly after in 2009.

Johnson currently works four part-time jobs. One with the Mental Health Association, another with drWorks, a third with Heirs and the fourth being her private practice. According to Johnson, she makes the most money with MHA. Her private practice brings in the second highest income. Though she charges clients \$95 an hour for a session, she rarely gets that amount because of insurance policies and her commitment to work with low-income clients. Lastly, Heirs and drWorks bring in similar, undisclosed, salaries at the bottom of her salary ladder.

Financially, Johnson never expected her life’s work of servicing others to be a

lucrative business. With the added income of her husband, who has a Ph.D. and works as an ecologist at RTP, she and he are able to live comfortably.

“I’m fine, financially, but I’m not a well-off activist,” said Johnson. “I have a degree, but people are historically not paid well in this field of work. There’s no way I would be able to live off my part-time salaries alone.”

Her work among these various positions has also taught her that there is more than one kind of activism. For a while, Johnson never thought of herself as an activist. In her eyes, activists operated strategically outside of an agency and she had always been part of an agency in her work. Eventually, she determined that she was wrong.

“There’s this belief that because we’re not creating our system or working outside the system, that street activists get held-up more than people working in organizations, so I didn’t think that I fit the description of an activist,” said Johnson. “Now I realize that activists are needed within the system to change and convert its flaws. There’s a place for both types.”

Keeping Tradition Alive

As you click play on the YouTube video screen at heirsproject.org, you are greeted by the sound of Jefferson Airplane’s “Volunteers,” as he sings:

Look what’s happening out in the streets

Got a revolution Got to revolution

Hey I’m dancing down the streets

Got a revolution Got to revolution

As the song continues to preach the words of uprising, images of Whites and Blacks, adults and children, are seen protesting in North Carolina, marching down packed streets and holding signs that beg for equality. The words “activism,” “unity,” “oral tradition,” “change”

and “social justice” appear and fade at the bottom of the screen.

This is Heirs to a Fighting Tradition (Heirs).

Johnson became the director of Heirs in January 2009 and works there part-time. Created to “strengthen and broaden the base of the North Carolina social justice organizers,” Heirs’ curriculum is designed to spread awareness of local efforts, maintain the fight against injustice and engage community members.

One of the ways in which Heirs carries out its mission is by offering organization and leadership development training to members of the community. Some workshops focus on issues of disparity and discuss the impact of power, privilege and oppression, while other workshops are more constructive and offer opportunities for participants to form grassroots organizations or become better activists. Each workshop is led by educators, community organizers and community workers in the triangle area like Johnson. Like drWorks, Heirs does not have a headquarters, so workshops and meetings have flexible locations for the participants and employee meetings are often held at Johnson’s house. Because Heirs work is all contractual, however, Johnson’s schedule with Heirs can be somewhat unpredictable.

“Some days I’m training with organizations to help them implement a plan to eliminate racism in their work environment. Other days, I’m planning leadership development,” said Johnson. “There’s no typical day for me.”

As an employee of Heirs, Johnson has to abide by eight grounding principles:

1. Speak Your Truth
2. Deepen Analysis, Gain New Knowledge, Engage w/Theories of Social Change & Liberation

3. Bring Your Full Self: Body, Mind & Soul
4. Develop Your Humanity
5. Confront Oppression and Privilege
6. Community Organizing for Social Justice
7. Analyze, Dialogue, Reflect, Organize, Act. Repeat.
8. Be an Heir to a Fighting Tradition

As an organization that believes in the “inherent ability of all people to learn, identify their problems and their strengths and to work collectively to make change,” Heirs takes great pride in the positive impact it has on the community. Because it is not your everyday business, the units of measure are less tangible than people are accustomed to.

“We measure our impact by the connections we make with people,” said Johnson. “We worked with a class at UNC this semester and the students showed an interest in organizing work when they decided to make the Heirs project their own. We’re enabling the next generation to carry on and become activists.”

Explaining that it is important to build activists and community leaders to ensure people feel that they can make change, Johnson does not believe in just building new activists and organizers. She also believes in remembering the ones who came before.

“My generation and my mom’s generation won’t be here forever, so we have to ask ourselves, ‘What can we learn from them?’” asked Johnson.

Heirs’ oral history project would answer that question.

The oral history project consists of the collecting, recording and archiving of stories

detailing the efforts of North Carolina activists and organizers. Calling it a “project of the people,” Bridgette Burge, a planning team member at Heirs and creator of the oral history project, got the idea for the venture after being paired with a 95-year-old black man for an oral history assignment in college.

“Here I was this young, blue-collar white girl and Miller was the son of a slave,” said Burge. “He was the most amazing and down-to-earth man I’d ever met and recording his story was a life-changing experience for me. I learned the power of people’s voices through him.”

In 2005, Burge decided to do something about this idea that had been festering in her mind for the past seven or eight years. She got a number of thumbs up from friends, applied for a grant, which she got from the Southern Oral History Program at UNC, and set the project in motion. Since then, the oral history team has managed to use the \$10,000 grant to gather 11 stories, each of which will be placed in the Southern Historical Collection in Wilson Library at UNC.

As the director of the oral history team from 2005-2008 and a social justice advocate for over a decade, Burge knows how important these stories could be to residents of North Carolina.

“North Carolina is an incredible state with one of the richest histories in the south and a thriving social justice movement,” said Burge. “There is a poverty of information written about today’s justice movement and this project validates those efforts that go unseen. It takes the time to honor them and adds those voices to the tradition.”

Barbara Zelter, who helped Burge get the project started, is also an author in the Heirs collection. For her, having her activism highlighted is an unusual but welcomed experience.

“When you’re an activist or organizer, you’re so used to it not being about you,” said Zelter. “The general public doesn’t see these kinds of lives and I think people need this kind of inspiration.”

Johnson believes that despite the young age of the project, it has the potential to profoundly impact the community’s attitude toward activism.

“This work is all about using oral history to motivate people to become organizers,” said Johnson. “It’s about getting people involved in their communities.”

When Johnson first starting working for Heirs, Burge asked if she would be willing to help with the oral history project and Johnson agreed. It has only been a few months, but Burge could not be more pleased with Johnson’s leadership at Heirs.

“I think Michelle embodies, exudes, teaches, breeds and is social justice. She is just an astonishing woman,” said Burge.

Let the Fight Continue

With the election of President Barack Obama in 2008, many Americans have pondered the progress of race relations in the States. For Johnson, Obama’s triumph was not so much about race as much as it was about his skilled utilization of a great power: the power of people.

“Obama had the ability to mobilize people and help people believe that they could make a difference,” said Johnson. “He put them in connection with each and showed that with more people comes more power.”

Arguably, there are things that activists can do as individuals to promote change, but Johnson thinks a collective effort always has more of an impact because it enables people to become engaged and feel connected to the fight. Furthermore, group activism brings a

cohesiveness that is essential to social change.

“Imagine what happens to a community when it gets the message that it’s disposable and invisible to the rest of the world. What happens to those people?” asked Johnson.

“They’re damaged.”

In the future, Johnson hopes to expand her organizing work in local communities. She would like to do more long-term work with drWorks and anti-oppression training. At some point she plans to stop working with the Mental Health Association so that she can do more consulting and teaching and spend more hours operating her private practice.

Though you would think that four part-time jobs would leave her with few opportunities to think, Johnson believes she is finally reaching a point in her life where she can be happy with where she is.

“I hang out with all these cool activists and do all these great trainings, so I feel like I’m coming into my own self,” said Johnson.

Most importantly, Johnson wants her influence to be strong enough to help activism continue.

“I want to be an agent of change,” said Johnson. “I want the skills that I’ve acquired to be transferred to the next generation of activists. That’s what I really want done.”

Chapter VII: Summary and Conclusion

As has been stressed throughout this thesis, activism has been an important aspect of the African experience. Slavery, gender bias and racial discrimination have placed black people in situations where they had no choice but to fight their way to a better standard of living. Black women, experiencing the blow of both racism and sexism, knew this better than anyone. As a result of the focus on white women and gender during the women's movement and the emphasis on black manhood during the civil rights movement, black women's activism in both phases remained in the shadows. Consequently, their activism developed on the grassroots level, utilizing the networks of the communities in which they lived and worked. That being said, this thesis set out to do one thing: provide illustrations of black women's activism and community status that were representative of their experience with slavery, the women's movement and the civil rights movement. These three phases are so intertwined with the history of black women in the United States that it is virtually impossible to separate them.

In Chapter IV, the story of Muna Mujahid is most relevant to slavery and the civil rights movement. After moving out of the inhospitable setting called her house, Mujahid's life began to fall apart for many reasons, the biggest one being that she worked a lot from home. Home was where Mujahid made her clothes, did people's hair and held meetings with people in the neighborhood. Without a home, Mujahid's activism was in danger of coming to an end. During slavery, homes held a similar significance. Slave properties were often selected by slave masters and in horrible conditions, but that did not stop slaves from making

them a place of familial comfort. Families in the slave community would gather for dinners, oral traditions were spread on front porches, prayers were said for those in need. Mujahid's stubborn nature fit well with the stereotype of black women as hard-working and domineering during the civil rights movement. Even when job opportunities – of minimum wage – were available to her, Mujahid refused to take them because she felt they were beneath her skill level. She allowed few people to actually help and even her own children were kept out of the loop concerning her housing situation. Mujahid insured that her fight was a solo one.

Chapter V, the story of Vanessa Hodges, is mostly linked with slavery and the civil rights movement. As slaves were brought over from Africa, they did what they could to maintain African traditions such as the preservation of extended families. After slaves were emancipated and issues of race equality continued, African Americans attempted to cling to their African heritage through artistic forms as seen during the Harlem Renaissance. By the time of the civil rights movement, groups like the Black Panthers had many participants who held onto their African roots by refusing to straighten their hair. Hodges method of African awareness is not expressed through her appearance or through art, but she does use academia. As a professor, Hodges is able to promote awareness in a way that Mujahid could never afford to do in that she travels to South Africa every couple of years, a \$2,000 expense. Hodges' story really illustrates how financial wealth can lead to a different kind of activism than the grassroots method used by Mujahid.

Chapter VI, the story of Michelle Johnson, has the strongest connection with the women's movement and the civil rights movement. In comparison to Mujahid and Hodges, Johnson presents a side of activism that addresses race and gender. As the associate director

at the Orange County Rape Crisis center, Johnson was able to address issues with women. As a trainer with drWorks, she was able to address race. As a clinical social worker, Johnson was able to tackle both race and gender simultaneously. Black women were constantly torn between their allegiance to womanhood and black manhood during the fight for civil rights and women's rights, but Johnson managed to meet both the needs of gender and race in her activism. Though her advocacy of anti-racism seems to be her main goal, she has not compromised her support for women in the process.

The Difference

As black women came together in late 19th century to form women's clubs and organizations that would assist in their community efforts, they would encounter a factor that would ultimately split them into very distinct groups: class. As members of either the lower, middle or upper class, black women were able to utilize different, though not necessarily better, resources. For example, while lower class women held meetings at their homes and local churches, upper-class women were able to gather at halls and conference centers. Today, class is still an important factor in the lives of black female activists.

Unlike Muna Mujahid, whose fight for quality low-income housing is done in poverty and among the poorest residents of Durham, N.C., Hodges' professor's salary provides the financial support she needs to be able to travel to Africa with participants who pay the nearly \$1,000 price tag to go with her.

Mujahid's position within the lower class and Hodges' position within the upper-class have given them very different audiences. Virtually every person that Mujahid has helped in Durham has been black, not because she is racist – though she admits to having a dislike for white people – but because she thinks black people need her services more. Conversely,

of the 28 people who went on the last trip to South Africa with Hodges, six were black and the rest were white (79 percent).

Unlike Muna Mujahid, who catered to the black population, and Vanessa Hodges, who worked mainly with whites, Johnson's activism is spread across various ethnicities and she prefers it that way.

"Racial identity development is something that people go through where they want to be with their people, so it makes sense that they want to be in that space and want to stay there," said Johnson. "I just wonder what happens when people stay in that space forever. There is a place to do community work with a particular group of people, but it's an AND not an EITHER/OR for me."

Educational attainment has everything to do with who Mujahid, Hodges and Johnson manage to reach.

Even though Mujahid has more years of experience as an activist, lacking a college degree has been detrimental in her attempts to find decent-paying community activist jobs. As a result, she is forced to rely on her hustling skills and the limited wealth of people in her community who are willing to buy into them. Hodges admits that life as part of the financially and educationally privileged has fitted her for a different kind of activism, but it is not a perfect system.

"I think having an education has absolutely given me more credibility, access to resources and contacts and, thus, enabled me to advocate in an effective way, but it has downsides, too," said Hodges. "It's not easy to mobilize grassroots people if you're not one of those people. I would have no credibility there."

Having a college education has definitely prevented Johnson from living in poverty

and she recognizes the impact education has on other activists.

“When non-profits became more professionalized, the activists who created them had to find other venues, so there is a tension between the agency starters who lack a degree and those who came in and took over who do have a degree,” said Johnson. “Most of the people I work with have master’s degrees and I think my social work degree helps me to listen differently and be more reflective than someone who doesn’t have it.”

Overall, despite the differences between these women, each female activist featured in this thesis has behaved in some shape or form as a representation of African American’s women’s history and activism. Though they may have used different approaches and had different backgrounds, they ultimately had one thing in common: a desire to uplift those in their community.

Reflection

As a graduate student taking on the narrative form of journalism and the task of a thesis, I stumbled more times than I care to recall. Flaws in my writing, thinking and relationships with subjects were frequent and I often questioned my ability to be a journalist. But, as I near the end of this amazing project, I have to say that the impact of this work on me and my subjects has been worth every bit of self-doubt and frustration.

When I first began the research on slavery, the women’s movement and the civil rights movement, I thought I knew all there was to know. After all, I was a black woman. How could I possibly have missed anything about my own history? I was terribly mistaken and my assurance was soon put in its proper place. I was surprised, and a little embarrassed, by just how little I knew about the history of black women and their profound impact on the black community. Months of research would help fill some of the holes, but that initial

ignorance taught me the importance of good research skills. Nonetheless, there are sure to be gaps in this work though I made every effort to ensure the factual nature and validity of this thesis.

As a result of revisiting the treatment of blacks during slavery and the civil rights movement, I found it difficult to always be objective about issues concerning black womanhood. After having developed a sense of pride in all that black female activists had done to ensure the rights I have today, I grew hostile and angry upon reading about the lynchings, shootings and unfair treatment they received. Many times throughout the process of this thesis, I found myself confronting my inner activist and attempting to keep it at bay. Always reading and hearing about the historical mistreatment of black people (particularly black women) had a way of bringing out the worst in me. As Dr. Fee can attest, the very first draft of my thesis proposal was very militant in tone and it took a great deal of effort to suppress that emotion in this thesis.

As I set interviews with my subjects into motion, I encountered various problems in my relationships with them. For starters, I found it difficult to, for lack of a better phrase, lay down the law with my older subjects. Muna Mujahid and Vanessa Hodges were both in their fifties and as someone who had been taught to respect their elders, I found it hard to stress the importance of promptness with them. When Mujahid went weeks without returning my call, I said nothing. When Hodges cancelled an evening of interviews without my knowledge, I said nothing. From these experiences, I have learned that journalists have to hold their ground. If I do not think my work is important enough to address these problems, why on Earth would my subjects?

In addition to this, I struggled with presenting the flaws of the three activists. Because

of the sense of gratitude I felt toward these women, I left out many of their flaws and presented a side of them that was almost perfect. After a while, I realized that I was not doing them, myself or the field of journalism justice if I did not present them in their full form. But, even when I tried to show all their facets, I sometimes failed.

As I mentioned earlier, despite the flaws that I brought to this project, the good has outweighed the bad. Not only have I grown as a writer, but I have grown as a person and I owe most of that personal growth to the lovely women who worked with me.

Muna Mujahid, my very first subject, was what every grassroots activist should be: talkative, strong and afraid of nothing. At our very first meeting, she took me to a gathering of friends at a home in Durham. There I was, in a house full of strangers, and somehow she managed to make me feel right at home. I recall her saying to me, “You have a second family now.” It was an astonishing thing to hear from a woman I had just met an hour ago. As stubborn as the day is long, Mujahid was a frustrating subject at times, but her dedication to the black community was unwavering and I respected that drive in her. I can only hope that one day I will possess such inner strength.

Vanessa Hodges, professor and lover of all that is Africa, was an unexpected find. For months, I had been searching for an activist with interests in Africa, but to no avail. Then, one day while attending a diversity conference in Durham, N.C., I encountered a North Carolina State University professor from Africa. I randomly asked if he knew of any activists and he pointed me in Hodges’ direction. Before meeting Hodges, I was unsure about doing a piece on Africa, but once I saw her enthusiasm for the study abroad program, I knew I had found my story. Hodges instilled in me an interest in Africa that I had never felt before. Now more than ever, I am able to see the connection between me and Africa and I feel closer to

my heritage.

My last subject, Michelle Johnson, was a breath of fresh air. Thirty-three and still figuring out her life, she brought a younger perspective to this series of profiles. By the end of my interviews with her, I realized that Johnson's sincerity in addressing racism and oppression was inspirational to me. Up until this point, I had yet to come across anyone who could talk about being a victim to discrimination without extreme anger. But, she could. And she did so without the slightest furrow in her brows. In addition to this talent, Johnson seemed so self-aware and sure of herself. Someday I would like to be that comfortable in my own skin.

What I learned from all three of these women is that no matter what your passion in life, you have to have heart. Heart to get over the disappointments. Heart to celebrate the victories. Heart to keep that passion alive.

I was not always sure that these stories would accomplish the goals this thesis was set out to do until my subjects thanked me for telling their stories. They explained to me that few people are aware of their work and that it felt nice to be appreciated and recognized. Muna Mujahid credited me with inspiring her continued fight for a home, claiming that she had almost given up before meeting me. Vanessa Hodges was thankful to have her story told because it would draw attention to the study abroad program that was fairly young and unheard of outside the School of Social Work. Michelle Johnson thanked me because she believed that recording these stories would inspire readers to become activists. After hearing such gratitude, I cannot help but believe that the goal of this work was truly reached.

In closing, I want to stress how important this thesis is to me. Initially, I went into this project thinking I would be just another student completing another thesis, but I was wrong.

Working with these women and seeing the good they have done for their communities, the pure sacrifice that they have exhibited and the strength they have shown in the face of non-believers, I am humbled. This thesis and this experience has been a labor of love and I am eternally grateful.

Reference List

- Amott, T., & Matthaei J. (1991). We specialize in the wholly impossible: African American women. *Race, gender & work: A multicultural economic history of women in the United States* (pp. 141-191). Massachusetts: South End Press.
- Baker, E. (1972). Developing community leadership. In G. Lerner (Ed.), *Black women in white America: A documentary history* (pp. 345-352). New York: Pantheon.
- Berkeley, K. C. (1997). *The women's liberation movement in America*. Westport: Greenwood Press.
- Berry, B. (1988). *Black on black discrimination: The phenomenon of colorism among African Americans* (Doctoral dissertation, Kent State University, 1988). University Microfilms International.
- Breines, W. (2006). *The trouble between us: An uneasy history of white and black women in the feminist movement*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Brooks, E. (1984). *The women's movement in the black Baptist church, 1880-1920*. Rochester: University of Rochester.
- Brown, D. (2008, March 24). A vote of allegiance? In the Obama-Clinton battle, race & gender pose two great divides for black women. *The Washington Post*, pp. C1. Retrieved December 12, 2008 from America's Newspapers database.
- Brown, E. (1992). *A taste of power: A black woman's story*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Collins, P. H. (1991). Learning from the outsider within: The sociological significance of black feminist thought. In J. A. Cook & M. M. Fonow (Eds.), *Beyond methodology: Feminist scholarship as lived research* (pp. 35-59). Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- (1998). *Fighting words: black women and the search for justice*. C. Calhoun (Ed.), Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- (2000). *Black feminist thought: knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment*. New York: Routledge.
- Dicker, R. C. (2008). *A history of United States feminisms*. Berkeley: Seal Press.
- Dill, B. T. (2004). Our mother's grief: Racial-ethnic women and the maintenance of families. In M. L. Andersen & P. H. Collins (Eds.), *Race, class, and gender: An anthology* (pp. 266-280). Australia: Wadsworth.

- Dodson, J. E. (2002). Organizing for effectiveness. *Engendering church: women, power, and the AME church* (pp. 41-61). New York and Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- Du Bois, W. E. B. (1920). The damnation of women. *Darkwater: Voices from within the veil* (pp. 163-186). New York: Harcourt, Brace and Howe.
- Ebanks, M. (2005, May). Our power, our glory. *Essence*, pp. 32. Retrieved December 12, 2008 from LexisNexis Academic database.
- Flono, F. (2008, February 8). Voting black? No - free to think for ourselves - blacks can, will vote for or against blacks - and not because of race. *The Charlotte Observer*, pp. 15A. Retrieved on December 12, 2008 from the America's Newspapers database.
- Giddings, P. (1996). The women's movement and black discontent. When and where I enter: The impact of black women on race and sex in America (pp. 299-324). New York: William Morrow.
- Giddings, P. J. (2008). *Ida: A sword among lions: Ida B. Wells and the campaign against lynching*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers.
- Gilkes, C. T. (1983a). From slavery to social welfare: Racism and the control of black women. In A. Swerdlow & H. Lessinger (Eds.), *Class, race and sex: The dynamics of control* (pp. 288-300). Boston: G. K. Hall & Co.
- (1983b). Going up for the oppressed: The career mobility of black women community workers. *Journal of Social Issues*, 39, 115-139.
- (1994). If it wasn't for the women...: African American women, community work and social change. In M. B. Zinn & B. T. Dill (Eds.), *Women of color in U. S. society* (pp. 229-246). Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Ginsberg, Carl. (1989). Preface. *Race and the media: The enduring life of the Moynihan report* (pp. vii-xiv). New York: Institute for Media Analysis, Inc.
- Harley, S. (1990). For the good of family and race: Gender, work, and domestic roles in the black community, 1880-1930. *Signs*, 15, 336-349.
- Haygood, W. (2006, February 1). A sisterhood of support: The pillars of civil rights. *The Washington Post*, pp. C1. Retrieved December 12, 2008 from the News Bank America's Newspapers database.
- Higginbotham, E. B. (1993). *Righteous discontent: The women's movement in the black Baptist church 1880-1920*. Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press.

- Jones, C., & Shorter-Gooden, K. (2003). Can I get a witness? Black women and the church. *Shifting: The double lives of black women in America* (pp. 259-278). New York: Harper Collins Publishers.
- Jones, J. (1985). *Labor of love, labor of sorrow: Black women, work, and the family from slavery to the present*. New York: Basic Books, Inc.
- Kivett, V. R. (1993). Racial comparisons of the grandmother role: Implications for strengthening the family support of older black women. *Family Relations*, 42, 165-172.
- Koinange, J. (2006, August 30). Oprah's school: Pandemonium and shouts 'viva!'. *CNN*. Retrieved October 25, 2008, from the World Wide Web:
<http://www.cnn.com/2006/WORLD/africa/08/26/btsc.koinange/index.html>
- Ladner, J. A. (1972). Yesterday: Black womanhood in historical perspective. *Tomorrow's tomorrow: The black woman* (pp. 15-54). New York: Anchor Books.
- Leighton, J. M. (2007). Ida B. Wells-Barnett (1862-1931). In Y. Williams (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of African American women writers volume 2* (pp. 601-605). Westport and London: Greenwood Press.
- Lumsden, L. (2008, October). *Good mothers with guns: The social construction of black womanhood in the black panthers, 1967-1980*. Paper presented at the American Journalism Historians Convention, Seattle, WA.
- Miller, J. A. (2008, June 11). With 'Ida,' a civil rights pioneer's story is finally told. *The Boston Globe*, pp. 6E. Retrieved on December 12, 2008 from News Bank America's Newspapers database.
- Moynihan, D. P. (1999). The tangle of pathology. In R. Staples (Ed.), *The black family: Essays and studies* (pp. 7-17). Belmont: Wadsworth.
- Nolen, C. H. (2001). *African American southerners in slavery, civil war and reconstruction*. Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc.
- Riggs, M. Y. (2003). *Plenty good room: Women versus male power in the black church*. Cleveland: the Pilgrim Press.
- Rooks, N. M. (2004). *Ladies' pages: African American women's magazines and the culture that made them*. New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press.
- Shaw, S. M. (2008). *God speaks to us, too: Southern Baptist women in church, home and society*. Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky.
- Smallwood, D., West, S., & Keys, A. (1996). *Profiles of great African Americans*.

Lincolnwood: Publications International, Ltd.

- Smooth, W. G., & Tucker, T. (1999). Behind but not forgotten: Women and the behind-the-scenes organizing of the million man march. In K. Springer (Ed.), *Still lifting, still climbing: Contemporary African American women's activism* (pp. 241-258). New York: New York University Press.
- Springer, K. (1999). African American women in defense of themselves. In K. Springer (Ed.), *Still lifting, still climbing: Contemporary African American women's activism* (pp. 42-43). New York: New York University Press.
- Streitmatter, R. (1994). Ida. B. Wells: Militant crusader against lynching. *African-American women journalists who changed history* (pp. 49-60). Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky.
- Townes, E. M. (1993). Keeping a clean house will not keep a man at home: an unctuous womanist rhetoric of justice. *New visions for the Americas: Religious engagement and social transformation*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- Wade, T. J. (1996). The relationship between skin color and self-perceived global, physical and sexual attractiveness and self-esteem for African Americans. *Journal of Black Psychology*, 22, 358-373.
- Weathers, D., & Roberts, T. (1996, May). Kathleen Cleavers and Angela Davis: Rekindling the flame. *Essence*, pp. 82. Retrieved on December 12, 2008 from the LexisNexis Academic database.
- White, C. W. (1995). Toward an Afro-American feminism. In J. Freeman (Ed.), *Women: A feminist perspective* (pp. 529-546). California: Mayfield Publishing Company.
- Williams, F. B. (2002). *The new woman of color: The collected writings of Fannie Barrier Williams, 1893-1918*. In M. J. Deegan (Ed.), Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press.
- Williams, R. Y. (2008, July). Black women and black power. *OAH Magazine of History*, 22 (3), 22-26. Retrieved on December 12, 2008 from the Academic Search Premier database.
- Willis, L., & Lucy, B. A. (1997, October 24) Black women ready to stand and be counted. *Raleigh News and Observer*, pp. A1. Retrieved on December 12, 2008 from the News Bank America's Newspapers database.