Funneled Into Prison: Race And Behavior Modification At A Mississippi Alternative School

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FUNNELED INTO PRISON:
RACE AND BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION AT A
MISSISSIPPI ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL

A Thesis
submitted in partial fulfillment of requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology
The University of Mississippi

by
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ABSTRACT

African American youth are 3.5 times more likely than their white counterparts to be expelled from traditional public schools and sent to an alternative school—an exclusionary disciplinary setting focused on behavior modification. Yet how administrators and faculty supervise students’ behavioral achievement in these settings is seldom examined. This research investigates how faculty and administrators define and implement a behavior modification program at Richmond Learning Center, an alternative education setting in Mississippi, and places African American boys as young as 12 years old on a path to prison. To understand how faculty and administrators perceive and practice this program, I performed 9 semi-structured interviews with administrators and faculty and approximately 100 hours of participant observations at the school. I find that administrators and faculty implement a structurally undefined behavior modification program that 1) takes a hands-off approach to the educational and behavioral development of its students; and 2) relies on both the insidious and spectacular surveillance of its African American students. Notably, while faculty and administrators acknowledge the shortcomings of the alternative system, they ultimately blame students who get in trouble under the watchful eyes of the school. These findings have important implications for understanding how some alternative centers criminalize African American boys and places them in the school-to-prison pipeline.
Always keep some city soil under ya feet.

For J.D.S. and the kids in the city.

#TeamWin
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would first like to express my deepest gratitude to my thesis advisor, Dr. Amy McDowell. Without your guidance, patience, positive vibes, ethnographic knowledge, and scholarly insight, this thesis would not have been possible. You taught me to be bold and concise in my writing, draft after draft, after draft. To my committee members, Dr. Kirk Johnson and Dr. James Thomas, thank you for your contributions both big and small. To the department of Sociology and Anthropology at the University of Mississippi, thank you for providing me with the opportunity to do great things, especially this thesis. To my writing group and friends of B.G.M., Caitlin and Kei, thank you for brainstorming with me, reading drafts, and bringing the good vibes every time we linked up.

This project would not be possible without the administrators and faculty of Richmond Learning Center. Thank you for unselfishly opening your doors to me as a researcher as well as a mentor and tutor for the kids. Richmond has earned a special place in my heart.

To my siblings and friends for being understanding of the time and dedication this took for me to complete, thank you. I’m glad that good vibes travel far, especially from amazing Kings and Queens like you. Finally, to my loving parents, Lendward, Jr. and Beverly Griffin, thank you for instilling in me hard work and dedication. While my track and field days are long gone, thank you for being my #1 fans. Love you always, your baby girl, kwēn.
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See fantasy is what people want, but reality is what they need.

And I just retired from the fantasy part.

-Lauryn Hill
I. RICHMOND LEARNING CENTER

Secluded at the end of a dead end street sits the district’s alternative education institution\(^1\), Richmond Learning Center, where the school district’s “troublemakers” are housed. It is a small building with just enough numbered parking spots for administrators, faculty, and a visitor or two. I am assigned vacant parking spot number 24, which is where I am to park every morning during the school day for the next eight weeks.

It’s October. Autumn is well underway. I arrive at approximately eight o’clock every morning feeling mentally, physically, and emotionally prepared for what awaits my attention at Richmond. Sometimes I arrive at the same time as the bus driver as he drops the students off at the front door. “Good morning, y’all,” I say as I pass the group of African American boys who congregate around the main entrance. To the left of the main door, a sign reads, “No Drug Tolerance.” Beside the sign is a list of items, such as marijuana, knives, and tobacco products that are prohibited on campus and the rules that the school promises to enforce.

“Press the green button to enter,” another sign reads. Upon pressing the green button, I turn to face the camera nearly the size of a mailbox so that the secretary,

\(^1\) Alternative education center or alternative school will be used interchangeably within this text.
Ms. Thomas, an African American who has worked at Richmond for 22 years, can recognize my face through the computerized surveillance system. When I hear the click, I know that the door is unlocked, granting me access to Richmond. I am instructed to wear my university identification card during every visit so as to avoid using the “LobbyGuard” kiosk, a visitor management system used to “streamline the visitor sign-in process” (LobbyGuard Solutions 2013).

The school is structured with only two short hallways leading to the main office, the principal’s office, six classrooms, In-School Suspension (I.S.S.), and the largest of the rooms, which functions as a library, teachers’ lounge, storage, and copy room. In less than one full step inside the small building, a metal detector stands directly in front of me. The metal detector is used to scan for weapons and metallic objects as students pass through. There are no other metal detectors in the school district. But now that students have been labeled “at-risk” and moved out of their traditional public school (which for some students sits at the top of the hill), surveillance becomes an everyday routine. As a Master’s degree student conducting research, I have the luxury of walking around the metal detector instead of through it. I do not pose a threat to anyone at Richmond.

2 Upon entering Richmond Learning Center, you are to enter your driver’s license into the “LobbyGuard” kiosk (LobbyGuard Solutions 2013). The machine will then run an instant background check in order to “stop sex offenders [and] criminals.” The machine can also be programmed to “make a custom list of banned individuals from your school.” The machine extracts your name as well as snaps a picture of you and prints them on the adhesive nametag that you are to wear during your visit (see Appendix A). Upon exiting the building, you are to scan the nametag, indicating that you have left the premises.

3 Richmond is located next to the district’s school for severely mentally and physically challenged students, both of which sit at the bottom of the hill to an Intermediate School for fifth and sixth graders.
Richmond Learning Center is an alternative school located in a Mississippi town tainted by a history of racial segregation. Housing students’ grades 6-12, Richmond offers senior advancement and credit recovery for classes’ students did not pass but is known primarily for its behavior modification program. The stated mission is to promote academic success, modify behavior, provide an acceptable alternative to a diploma, facilitate employability and functional skills attainment, and support career and character education development (Richmond Student Handbook 2014). The purpose of its behavior modification program for “troublemakers” or “at-risk” students is “to provide students with the necessary skills to help them modify behaviors that often impede their ability to be successful in the traditional classroom setting” (Richmond Student Handbook 2014:15). Richmond houses significantly more black students than white students over the course of the school year. The overall district figures show that students are 50.67 percent white, 41.97 percent African American, and the remaining 7.36 percent are Asian, Hispanic, or Native American decent (AdvancED Richmond Alternative Center 2012). Statistics for Richmond showed that students were 74 percent African American, and 26 percent white (AdvancED Richmond Alternative Center 2012). These statistics differed from the racial composition during my fieldwork that showed a fluctuation between 90 and 100 percent African American students (approximately ten boys and one girl). This disproportionate representation of African Americans in alternative schools is not unique to Richmond (Ferguson 2001; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, and Paterson 2000; Skiba and Rausch 2006; Rios 2011).

Sociologists find that African American men and boys are stigmatized and punished at alarming rates (Ferguson 2001; Rios 2011), especially in the educational setting. Data show that African American students are 3.5 times more likely than whites to be expelled from traditional public schools (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights 2012; Free 2008) and sent
to alternative education centers, which isolate and segregate students from “dominant, or mainstream educational opportunities” (Pane et al. 2013:298). However, few studies focus on the alternative education programs that were established to modify the behavior of “at-risk” youth. Instead, most studies on racial inequality in schools focus on discipline and punishment in traditional public schools (Ferguson 2001; Rios 2011) and show how African American and Latino boys get funneled into the school-to-prison pipeline. My research looks at the school-to-prison pipeline from another direction. It shows how an alternative education system that is supposed to help “at-risk” students ironically places these students further down the pipeline to prison. Specifically, I show how administrators and faculty implement an ill-conceived behavior modification program at an alternative school in ways that push students closer to prison.

The next chapter outlines the literature I used to make sense of the school-to-prison pipeline. I start with a brief overview of how zero-tolerance policies are instituted and then show how zero-tolerance polices got channeled into public education. From there, I describe how zero-tolerance polices not only target black boys and men, but actually construct black masculinity. In the conclusion of the chapter, I introduce alternative education programs, which I argue are the result of these punitive social control practices in the educational setting. In Chapter three, I describe the ethnographic methods and data I used to study the behavior modification program at Richmond, wherein I give a glimpse of my everyday routine at Richmond.

In the first analytic chapter, “Behavior Modification at Richmond,” I examine the dysfunctions of the behavior modification program at Richmond Learning Center, which is considered the primary focus of the center. In examining the program, I first show that administrators and faculty are underprepared for employment in the program and show how alternative education fails to meet the academic and behavioral needs of students. In the next
analytic chapter, “Trust Building and Surveillance,” I show how administrators and faculty establish what they call “building trust” with students. I find that administrators and faculty “build trust” with students to find out what students are doing wrong. To “build trust,” they 1) joke with students about their drug use and bicycle theft; and 2) avoid confronting students when they do something wrong at the school. By playing these roles, I show that administrators and faculty participate in an ongoing surveillance of student behavior. My last analytic chapter, “The Blame Game” shows that administrators and faculty rarely fault the institution when students fall behind or get in trouble with the law. Instead, they claim to have exhausted every option and opportunity to help students at Richmond. In the conclusion, I emphasize how a combination of poor academic mentorship and inconsistent interventions of behavior modification programs push students further down the pipeline to prison. In that chapter, I also make recommendations for future studies on alternative education.
II. THE SCHOOL-TO-PRISON PIPELINE

Alternative schools have become the by-product of zero-tolerance policies that have dominated recent efforts to maintain school discipline. Research shows that African American and Latino boys are most disadvantaged by zero-tolerance policies (Skiba and Rausch 2006; Rios 2011). In this chapter, I examine how zero-tolerance policies help to structure the school-to-prison pipeline, a process that disadvantages minority youth that are considered “at-risk” or “troublemakers” in their traditional public schools. I begin by examining the origin of zero-tolerance policies that punish all minor offenses in the educational setting. I use Victor Rios’s (2011) “youth control complex” and Ann Ferguson’s (2001) work on the making of black masculinity to show how African American and Latino boys are treated as criminals in school. This chapter concludes with a brief history of alternative schools and describes how these schools have transformed over time.

Zero-Tolerance Policies

After gaining national attention in 1986 through United States Customs Service, zero-tolerance policies have since made their way to the education system. Originally, zero-tolerance policies were used as a program that would impound ships carrying drugs. Two years later, zero-tolerance policies were in wider use: any property or vehicles crossing the border with drugs were seized and the owners charged in federal court (Skiba and Rausch 2006). By 1989, the same zero-tolerance policy used in customs seizures made its way into the school districts of
three states: California, New York, and Kentucky (Skiba and Rausch 2006). Not only did punishment for drugs endure as it did in U.S. Customs, but fighting, gang-related activity, weapons, and smoking, along with minor disruptions were added to the list and could result in expulsion from school (ibid.). Eventually, some 94 percent of schools in the U.S. adopted zero-tolerance policies (Pane, Rocco, Miller, and Salmon 2014). In due time, the list of offenses expanded within school systems. In addition to more serious crimes, students caught swearing or making threats were subjected to zero-tolerance policies and as a result suspended or expelled from school and sent to alternative schools.

Zero-tolerance policies “have largely transformed alternative schools into a key juncture in the school-to-prison pipeline” (Weissman 2015:41). Zero tolerance policies are disciplinary policies that are “intended primarily as a method of sending a message that certain behaviors will not be tolerated by punishing all offenses severely, no matter how minor” (Skiba and Patterson 1999:373). Minority youth are affected most by zero-tolerance policies implemented in schools. Zero-tolerance policies deprive many minority students of their fundamental right to an education (Elias 2013). As early as 1975, the Children’s Defense Act emphasized that African American boys were disproportionately numbered in office referrals, corporal punishment, and school expulsion, even with no evidence to prove they misbehave more than whites (Skiba and Rausch 2006; Pane et al. 2013). Disorderly conduct (Rios 2011; Pane et al. 2013), disrespect, excessive noise (Pane et al. 2013), disobedience (ibid.), and looking at administrators or faculty “crazy” (Rios 2011) often resulted in expulsion or suspension from school for African American and Latino boys. Due to inequalities in policies, procedures, and practices, which stem from a systematic racial and gender bias, African American and Latino boys are viewed as discipline problems (Pane et al. 2013) before even doing anything wrong.
The racial myths that frame black men as an object of “suspicion and fear” (Ferguson 2001) and “criminal” (Feagin 2010:108; see Alexander 2012) make administrators and faculty uncomfortable with their “active and boisterous style of interaction” (Skiba and Rausch 2006:91). As a result, minority boys fall victim to discipline policies like zero-tolerance that exclude and suspend them, which bears inherent risk of social and racial disadvantages throughout the life course (Ferguson 2001).

Youth Control Complex and the Making of Black Masculinity

As a result of prejudiced enforcement of zero-tolerance policies, punitive social control is an everyday reality for minority youth. In Punished: Policing the Lives of Black and Latino Boys, sociologist Victor Rios (2011) examines the daily lives of 40 African American and Latino boys ages 14 to 17, experiencing life as they know it in the “youth control complex.” The youth control complex is “a system in which schools, police, probation officers, families, community centers, the media, businesses, and other institutions systematically treat young people’s everyday behaviors as criminal activity” (Rios 2011:xiv); a process he also identifies as hypercriminalization. This process shows how community institutions and the criminal justice system work together to punish minority youth. However, Rios (2011) claims that these minority youth are not to blame for their criminal behavior. They are plotted against by “full force criminal justice institutions [in order] to regulate students’ behavior” (Rios 2011:81). In an interview with Dalton Conley, Rios describes the youth control complex as the “punishing arm” imbedding itself into the “nurturing arm.” The punishing arm is the state, and the nurturing arm is the school system. As a result, minority youth endure symbolic criminalization as they are

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4 Victor Rios and Dalton Conley discuss the youth control complex (September 7, 2010) - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PUv93rjxzGM
stigmatized and monitored on a daily basis in schools and their community. Although Rios (2011) implies that most people in the community are “well intentional and [have] a genuine interest in the well being of [the] boys” (Rios 2011:75) achievement, he believes that the “system of imposing punitive social control” (Rios 2011:75) puts youth on the path to prison.

In Bad Boys: Public Schools in the Making of Black Masculinity, sociologist Ann Ferguson (2001:19) aims to understand “how institutional norms and procedures in the field of education are used to maintain a racial order, and how images and racial myths frame how we see ourselves and others (in particular, ‘bad’ black boys) in a racial hierarchy.” In her study, she shows how not only race but also gender and class intersect and marginalize black boys. She describes three types of boys she observed and interacted with during her research: 1) the middle-class white boys; 2) the black “Schoolboys” (Ferguson 2001:9) who attempted to separate themselves from the common ideas of Blackness; and 3) the stigmatized tough masculine boys known as the “Troublemakers” (Ferguson 2001:9). Significantly, she finds that when white boys act out, they are seen as “naughty.” When black boys do the same, their behavior is “adultified,” meaning they are seen through an adult lens. As a result, the black boys inevitably are seen as having a “jail cell with [their] name on it” (Ferguson 2001:1), and therefore construct a sense of self under the circumstances of being stripped of their innocence.

As opposed to being in the regular classroom setting, these boys described as “Troublemakers” are sent to the Punishing Room, a room for students who get into trouble during school, or the jailhouse, the setting for after school detention and In School Suspension (I.S.S.), as a place to create self-worth and dignified masculine identities. This racial and gender bias in schools reflects and reinforces racial biases in other social institutions like the media, community, and the criminal justice system.
Alternative Schools

Operating outside of traditional public school education, alternative education centers carry an extremely broad definition: a place that houses students who are considered “at-risk” (Skiba and Rausch 2006; Glassett 2012; Caroleo 2014; Porowski, O’Conner, and Luo 2014), a school that focuses on special education students, a location to earn a GED degree (Porowski et al. 2014), or a program for gifted, magnet and talented students.

Alternative education schools were introduced in the mid-1960s as a solution for educators, parents, and students to escape the bureaucratic patterns of traditional schooling such as assessing progress toward learning goals and arbitrary discipline practices. These schools adopted the name "Freedom School," as a part of a nationwide effort during the civil rights movement. The goal was to “compensate for the substandard education offered to Black children” (Weissman 2015:50) thus allowing African Americans the opportunities to achieve social, political, and economic equality in the United States by being freed from conforming to arbitrary state laws (Cable, Plucker, and Spradlin 2009). A flyer from the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO) [see Appendix B] explains that Freedom Schools were “where high school students [would] be able to talk about things they can’t talk about in regular school. They [would] learn about civil rights.”

wastelands” (Cobb 1963); however, Freedom Schools allowed a different opportunity. Student activists from Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) promoted the Mississippi Freedom Schools as a place that could make up for the poor public education system offered to African American children (Payne 1997; Perlstein 1990). Freedom Schools also served as a place of shelter for black students who were thrown out of class for speaking out about voting rights and freedom rides. Over the next few years, Freedom Schools became the model for both blacks and whites who were opposed to traditional schools, giving them the opportunity to develop their own structure, philosophy, and approach to education.

Along with Freedom Schools, Free Schools were established as a counterculture measure to “[enrich] and [expand] the public education provided to the more privilege[d] children of the white upper middle class” (Weissman 2015:50). The Free School “emphasized individual achievement, as opposed to community emphasis” (Settles and Orwick 2003:1), allowing students to explore and learn according to their own personal interest and abilities (Settles and Orwick 2003). African American and Latino students were unable to attend these schools because they were tuition-funded, and thus were out of reach for students of color; however, both settings outside of the public school sector adopted the same philosophy: one size does not fit all (Raywid 1994).

While both Freedom Schools and Free Schools were thought to be two of the best ideas that would relieve students, teachers, and parents from oppressive educational processes (Lange and Sletten 2002), neither of them survived the test of time. By the early 1970s, both movements began to fade, and, as time elapsed, the 1980s saw a growing number of alternatives geared
towards students who were disruptive or failing in their traditional public schools. This resulted in a change that shaped alternative schools into how we know them today (Lange and Sletten 2002). While alternative schools are designed to alleviate, or cover up, the shortcomings of the traditional public school setting by catering to the needs of problem students (Holdsworth 2004; Swain N.d.), they are often identified as: the “last chance” school, a school for “at-risk” students, a “soft-cell jail” (Cable, Plucker, and Spradlin 2009:3), “dumping grounds” (Kim and Taylor 2008) and a “warehouse” (Kim and Taylor 2008; McNulty and Roseboro 2009). These terms suggest that alternative schools are seen as places where failure to provide for students’ educational needs is all but inevitable, because education is not the intent. Rather, the students are seen as goods—dangerous goods that are stockpiled in alternative schools for the safety of the community, and whose likely destination is prison.

Despite the intent to modify students’ behavior as an intervention between being expelled from the traditional public school setting and the possibility of dropping out, alternative education centers further stigmatize and profile students as “failures,” isolating and alienating them from the potential positive forces of school and future aspirations (Flom et al. 2010; NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund 2005). In addition, due to the less rigorous academic curricula used in alternative education centers, students are ill-prepared for the next level of education, thus creating not only an achievement gap, but an overall opportunity gap (U.S. Department of Education 2012). These obstacles disproportionately affect African American and Latino men, stemming from race and class segregations (Massey and Denton 1993; Kozol 1991) that are perpetuated in the modern day alternative school.
After long periods of disengagement in alternative education settings, students may drop out. Studies show that dropouts are twice as likely to be arrested and later incarcerated than those who completed high school (Sweeten 2006; Farrington 2003).
III. METHODS

My research was conducted from two methodological angles: face-to-face interviews with administrators and faculty, and shadowing administrators and faculty at Richmond Learning Center for eight weeks [See Appendix C through E]. The first process included participant observations with 11 administrators and faculty for five weeks, all of who are employed at Richmond. Every day I arrived before the first bell at 8:25 a.m., and occasionally left after the final school bell at 3:40 p.m. I observed the daily routines of administrators and faculty; their routines became my routine for approximately seven and a half hours.

Most of the administrators and faculty appreciated my presence while at Richmond. They offered to buy my lunch on several occasions, invited me to staff only events, requested that I substitute for their class if they were absent, and allowed me to speak freely in teachers classroom when given the opportunity. I also regularly joined two of the youngest faculty members in the teachers lounge to talk over a cup of coffee. Faculty members were most expressive of their feelings about students’ behavior and racism in this space. They talked about how “bad” the students are at Richmond but they also talked about how African American students are targeted at the school because of race, a practice that they often related to current events of police brutality.

Getting permission to conduct research at alternative schools takes time. Before beginning my research, I engaged in numerous email exchanges with the principal, Mrs. Jackson, a white
woman in her mid-60s. During this time I requested her permission to conduct research at Richmond. After informing me that no one had ever conducted research at the learning center and that she was very interested, she explained that she would discuss my research with the Superintendent to be sure that it was okay. Over a month later, Mrs. Jackson granted my request to do research at Richmond. A week before starting the project, I took a tour of the school and met the administrators and faculty members. Within a short time, I was immersed in Richmond. So much that I believe administrators and faculty forgot that I was conducting research, especially on them. I was rarely asked to leave a room when administrators or faculty members discussed students’ behavior, personal and family life, and even academic standing. During my time at the learning center, I engaged in academic activities as well as physical fitness activities with administrators, staff, and students. I sat at the tables and desks with the students during their classes, listening as they attempted to improvise lyrics over instrumentals blaring out of their large padded headphones or mimic the lyrics of Young Thug and Chief Keef. I exercised in the parking lot with students, rode the school bus with students, helped teachers with class instruction, chatted with faculty in the teacher’s lounge, and did my fair share of lunch runs (sometimes I walked with students up a hill to pick up bag lunches from the Intermediate School for fifth and sixth graders - Richmond does not have a cafeteria; the students have to eat lunch in the classroom). At the center, I stood in the hall and watched as the School Resource Officer (SRO), Mr. Burns, lined students’ backpacks against the wall to be sniffed by the police dog. I even sat in the classroom with the lights off, windows covered, and doors locked for a “test” lockdown of the school. One time I got caught on my restroom break during the practice fire drill. I was the last person to exit the building.
Table 1: Administrator and Faculty Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME*</th>
<th>AGE</th>
<th>GENDER</th>
<th>RACE/ETHNICITY</th>
<th>ROLE AT RICHMOND</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Adams</td>
<td>Early - Mid 40s</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Social studies teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Bradley</td>
<td>Late 40s</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>English teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SRO Burns</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>School resource officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Jackson</td>
<td>Mid 60s</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Rogers</td>
<td>Mid - Late 40s</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Math teacher and school bus driver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Scott</td>
<td>Late 30s</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Science teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Smith(^5)</td>
<td>Early 20s</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Step Up teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Stewart</td>
<td>Early - Mid 50s</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Special ed (SPED) teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Thomas</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Secretary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Washington</td>
<td>Late 40s</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Behavior specialist</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* All names for administrators and faculty are pseudonyms assigned by the researcher.

At the conclusion of participant observations (N≈100 hours) I conducted nine face-to-face in-depth semi-structured interviews over the course of three weeks. All interviewees were employees of the school, and were recruited for my research through email as well as onsite. Interviews were arranged through VolunteerSpot\(^6\) where I listed my availability, allowing administrators and faculty to select and sign-up for a date and time that fit their schedule. We both would receive a confirmation email and reminders as the appointment approached.

Interviewees [see Table 1] included four administrators and five faculty members. The racial

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\(^5\) Ms. Little was not interviewed but was observed during my data collection. Midway through her observations I realized she did not interact with the students in the behavior modification program at Richmond. As a result, I did not proceed with her observation and did not conduct an interview.

\(^6\) An online database used primarily for volunteer sign-up
make-up of the administrators and faculty was approximately 70 percent white, and the remaining 30 percent African American. All research participants were assigned pseudonyms because they and their place of employment were ensured confidentiality and anonymity. Interviews were conducted in the library, classrooms, I.S.S. room, designated offices, and the main office area of Richmond. The length of the interviews ranged from 30 minutes to approximately one hour. Interviews were recorded using the voice memo application on an Apple iPhone and then transcribed.

As a 26-year-old African American woman who only has one year of experience educating students in a predominately African American school setting, I often felt uneasy about conversing with some of the white faculty members who blatantly degraded the African American students. Although resorting to “What do you mean?” after an obnoxiously racist comment was my copout or my “go-to” phrase, administrators and faculty rarely “checked themselves” or felt their comments to be racist as they would often resort to saying “you know,” as if I really understood what they meant. Conversations like these made me extremely uncomfortable. It was if they thought I shared the same opinion about the students. I did not. As a result, I did not explicitly discuss race with administrators and faculty. Yet, I have still managed to draw conclusions about race based on the observations and interview responses that undeniably focus on the African American boys at Richmond.

Despite these obstacles with administrators and faculty at Richmond, I valued the time when students made their way to me for casual conversation. We discussed school, their personal life goals, sometimes sports, and sneakers, which always sparked a genuine conversation because of our common interest in sneakers. I recall the day after attending the Memphis Grizzlies NBA season opener at the FedEx Forum against LeBron James and the Cleveland Cavaliers where I
shared with students the experience I had attending the basketball game. Moments such as these allowed me to establish a rapport with the students, which the administrators and faculty noticed. Because of that, I began mentoring and tutoring the students for approximately two hours a week once I concluded data collection.
Gather round black men that’s if you still living.
I know that some are sitting inside a private prison.
I know that some are strung out or drug dealing.
Crooked system victims and they tryna keep us in it.

-Add-2 (Good Mourning Black America)

**IV. BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION AT RICHMOND**

During my first day of observations a teacher who credits himself for being able to “defuse problems before they escalate to violence,” approaches me. He jokes about not wanting to participate in the observation portion of my thesis research, but agrees to participate in an interview. When asked why he did not want to participate in an observation, he replies, “You know, it’s like when your house is dirty you don’t want anyone to come over.” The *house* that this teacher refers to is Richmond Learning Center, where he has taught for the past several years. If you were to imagine a dirty house, there would be trash scattered across the floor, possibly clothes everywhere, piles of unwashed dishes in or around the sink, a foul odor, and bugs flying and roaming freely—a place of total embarrassment and shame. A *dirty* alternative school, although clean in appearance, can be described as a poorly managed, disorganized, even crooked institution of learning.

In this chapter, I show that Richmond is “dirty” because the behavior modification program at the school is undefined and administrators and faculty at Richmond do not receive
any guidance or training about how to execute a successful program. It shows that in place of an undefined behavior modification program, administrators and faculty routinely rely on institutionalized racist beliefs and practices to evaluate the academic and behavioral standing of students at the center. Consequently, the African American students who attend Richmond, as one interviewee put it, get “pushed to the side and eventually fall in the cracks.”

“Learning as you go.”

Training is an essential component of working in the education system in order to deliver high quality instruction (Flower, McDaniel, and Jolivette 2011). Whether a traditional school or an alternative school, the future and education of numerous students lies in the hands of school employees (Canada N.d.). Students at Richmond suffer from drug use, insufficient academic progress, feel disengaged from learning, or have been involved with the juvenile justice system (No Child Left Behind Act of 2001) yet the administrators and faculty at Richmond are grossly unaware of how to instruct or guide their “at-risk” students. When asked how they prepare for work at Richmond, interviewees are frank about their limited expertise and training. The teacher who did not want me to know “the dirt,” noted:

Teachers don’t get taught a lot of stuff. Teachers don’t get taught how to break up a fight. Teachers don’t get taught how to counsel students. Teachers don’t get taught how to work [or] deal with parents. Teachers don’t get taught how to handle children in poverty. Teachers don’t get taught how to deal with children that [have] a lot of anger and emotional issues and most of the people that get sent to alternative schools got other issues going on. It’s either family issues or some drastic event happened that make people snap.

The teachers at Richmond express a general interest in learning how to teach and mentor “at-risk” students who face a lot of challenges, challenges that range from poverty to poor
educational opportunities and outcomes. They think the educational system could keep students from “snapping” but they are not prepared to do this job.

Many of my interviewees claim they use a model of “learning as you go.” Even those in roles as support staff suggest they have had to “learn as they go” at the alternative school. The Behavior Specialist, Ms. Washington, explains the lack of training that she receives as a new and viable member of the support staff. Her role is to write behavior plans, as well as work with students who exhibit behavioral issues. She also organizes functional behavior assessments, and conducts interviews with teachers, family members, and students in order to draw conclusions about why certain behaviors are occurring. One thing she speaks unfavorably of is the district’s protocol for individuals in her position as the Behavior Specialist, comparing it to her previous job as a mental health specialist.

What can I do versus not do? What does the [Mississippi] Department of Education say versus what the Department of Mental Health says? There are things that are allowed there that are not allowed here. I needed to know if you’re dealing with a student that becomes physically aggressive [what do you do,] because there are different ways of handling those things [. . .]. And none of that was ever really discussed, and to this day I’m still unsure how I would deal with that. So no, not a lot of training, and I sort of just did my own thing. [. . .] I just sort of jumped in there and that, come to find out, was the assumption from my supervisor. [. . .] I didn’t know things like, how long does a student stay on tier? When do you change it? When do you have to change it?7

Not only does Ms. Washington’s response expose the uncertainty of her duties when she first began, but it reveals the lack of direction given by her supervisor. The Mississippi Department of

7 Ms. Washington explained the tier system: “Tier one is what everybody’s on. That’s your basic behavior management behavior modification. Teachers have discipline plans for their classroom and that’s what that is. Tier two means that the basics are not working and the student needs some extra assistance with whatever and the teacher needs some extra assistance in ways to handle certain behaviors that they’re dealing with. Tier three comes into play when you have students with chronic behavior. Like they’ve got a referral today and then Tuesday they’re going to have a referral for the same type of behavior, and it’s gotta be disruptive behavior to the point that the teacher has to stop teaching in order to deal with that behavior or to call for help. That’s the kind of disruptive thing that we’re looking at. And if the students has like five of those referrals within, we were never really given a time period, I look and especially within a month. If you’ve got five referrals within a month for disruptive behavior that . . . the classroom, the environments disruptive to other students are affected, then that probably need to go to a tier three. And then we do the functional behavior assessment. We start taking data to get a base line, we do interviews, and observe, this kind of stuff it doesn’t happen over night, it doesn’t even happen in two weeks sometimes.”
Education (MDE) is responsible for making sure Ms. Washington’s job is performed according to institutional rules that benefit students. However, based on her statement, she is given neither direction nor instruction on how to perform her job as a Behavior Specialist. Instead, she is forced to learn as she works. Recognizing that Richmond is a broken system, several administrators and faculty point out that most of the students at Richmond are return students. Dedric, a young African American student at Richmond, informed me that he had attended Richmond almost every year since the 6th grade; he is now in the 11th grade.

According to some interviewees, the MDE prohibits staff from building rapport with students. Officials from MDE instruct Richmond’s staff not to “counsel” students, even the ones who are licensed counselors. Ms. Washington was frank about her frustration with the MDE: “How am I supposed to come up with a discipline plan if I don’t know the kids? You have to work with the students or you’re not going to get a plan that works.” This statement came moments after I walk into I.S.S., which doubles as her office, where Ben and Dedric are lying on the floor looking up at the ceiling. Ms. Washington sits calmly behind her desk, allowing the two African American boys to freely converse with one another. She later comments about it during her interview.

To anybody walking by [seeing them on the floor] they’re goofing off and you’re allowing it. But there’s a method to my madness and how I relate to them. In letting them talk about what they want to talk about and asking questions, I’m getting information that I need. That’s how I build rapport. These are two students who were standoffish when I first started and now they seek me out and now they want to hang out with me.

Ms. Washington has adopted a strategy that allows her to maneuver cautiously toward counseling and building a rapport with students. What other staff members of Richmond may see as “goofing off,” she uses as an opportunity that allow students to “talk about what they want to talk about.” This technique enables Ms. Washington to build a bond with students who were
initially “standoffish” but now “seek [her] out” and want to “hang out with” her. These exchanges help Ms. Washington see that Richmond students are more than willing to learn, but do not receive the help they need and deserve to be successful in school. Ms. Washington expresses her continued fight for students and explains that she frequently “butts heads” with administrators and faculty when she realizes they may not care for a particular student and base their call for discipline on their personal feelings. Unfortunately Ms. Washington’s duties as Behavior Specialist are split between Richmond and other schools in the district, and as a result, students are unable to receive 100 percent of her attention and time if and when needed.

“We’re not dealing with that kind of material.”

Some administrators and faculty of Richmond express a desire to advocate on the behalf of students. There are many others, however, who imply that African American students are incapable of academic success and therefore not worth the effort.

Administrators and faculty of Richmond often speak of success in colorblind racist ways of the inability of African American boys to perform well in school. During my very first day of observations I sit in on Mrs. Bradley’s English class, where students are expected to break down a poem entitled “The Journey” [see Appendix H] by Megan Oliver, as well as a short video entitled “Megan Lives by Her Motto, ‘Don’t Limit Me,’” [see Appendix I] by Megan Bomgaars, star of A&E’s Born This Way. The teacher feels that it will get students to “Wake Up!” and “quit making excuses” because they see the “color of their skin” and “that [is] their excuse.” “They’re limiting themselves in their minds. It’s frustrating,” says Mrs. Bradley, who is white, as she shields her mouth from students. She is sure they do not hear her intentions behind the exercise, saying, “I can’t say it like that [to students],” meaning it is too blunt, and as a result she knows
that students will take offense to her remarks\textsuperscript{8}. Essentially Mrs. Bradley is saying that race has nothing to do with their ability to succeed. If they want to do better it is up to them; no one is holding them back. However, this is colorblind racism, which sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2003) defines as individuals acting as if they do not “see” race, as though they are living in a post-racist society. Ironically, she and other staff members at Richmond do talk about race when talking about successful white students. When staff members are describing students who are white, administrators and faculty are sure to mention their race. Otherwise it is implied that they are describing African American students. Therefore, Mrs. Bradley is suggesting that African American students at Richmond are the opposite of “that kind of material”—or white.

Staff members at Richmond Learning Center continuously stigmatize African American boys as not being able to achieve academically which in part is the result of the institutionalized structure that perpetuates racist thinking and actions. As Mrs. Bradley and I talk about students’ academic achievement she insists that staff “want kids to graduate” and they “do want [the kids] to return to their home schools and be successful over there.” However, moments later she says, I don’t mean to diminish their attempt or anything, but we don’t have straight ‘A’ students over here. We’re not dealing with that kind of material. It’s hard, and it sounds ugly . . . If you don’t have the foundation before you come over here, just walking through our door isn’t going to make you a genius, you know. [You’re] not going to jump up 20 IQ points just because you’re over here. [. . .] But if you aren’t an ‘A’ student coming over here you’re not going to be an ‘A’ student over here. We don’t dumb stuff down, we just, we try to simplify, break it down so you can get the foundation.

Mrs. Bradley argues that there is no way for students to flourish beyond the academic standing that marked their entry at Richmond. They remain stagnant, and are only able to excel if they are familiar with excelling. She emphasizes the importance of having a strong “foundation” prior to

\textsuperscript{8} I was often invited into conversations to validate a point that a teacher was trying make for students. It was often a difficult position to be in because I could sense that administrators and faculty often thought I would agree with their assumptions, but I did not.
attending the learning center, which involves downgrading the level of the course material (i.e. white) in order to make it comprehensible for students. Goals that students have never accomplished cannot be accomplished at Richmond because they are not “that kind of material” that exceeds admirable academic standards. This idea gains clarity in the following comment she makes moments later:

I don’t think they see school as a stepping-stone to do better. It’s just somewhere they have to be until they’re 17 or their momma gets in trouble. It’s a place for them to come and socialize with [their] little homies and to get a free meal, and it’s heated and air-conditioned. It’s a safe place to be. Um, unfortunately I don't see, for most of them, getting an education being top priority. We do have some, don’t get me wrong . . . we’ve tried to reach them and save them and kind of open their eyes. But no, I think the outside life is more important than their school life.

Mrs. Bradley’s comment about African American boys relying on school as a safe haven not only targets the African American boys, but African American mothers who are often stigmatized as matriarchs and welfare queens who rely on government assistance to fill the void of the absent black father (Collins 2000). She blames the black family for the educational problems of their kids, rather than the alternative education system. Mrs. Bradley implies that these African American boys depend on the educational institution because they do not have parents who will work or provide necessitates such as food, heating, and electricity. Richmond is their babysitter. Mrs. Bradley is also implying that African American boys at Richmond do not see school as a place for education but as a place of refuge from “broken homes.” Furthermore, the word “homies” used in her comment is a slang term derived from the word “homeboy” used in predominately African American and Latino cultures (see also Ferguson 2001:120) and described as a close friend or fellow gang member.

Mrs. Bradley was not the only one who believes the African American boys view Richmond as a place of comfort and shelter. Mr. Burns, a white man who not only works as a
SRO to Richmond but also carries out routine police duties outside of school, claims that students get a free ride at Richmond. “We can go from the bottom up,” he says, “bus ride to school, free lunch, free breakfast, . . . really hands-on education. [. . .] Lot of opportunities that other students don’t get.” He believes that students in Richmond should be thankful because they are able to take advantage of an opportunity not awarded to other students in other schools. But Richmond, as I have shown, is not a place of privilege. It operates as a place of isolation that excludes students from the traditional school setting.

Richmond commonly renders its African American students as academically lazy and unsalvageable. But the teachers at Richmond seldom get students excited about school. There is very little interaction with students during class periods. Students sleep, listen to music, and play computer games during class; and some teachers spend the entire class period playing on their phones. The students who do attempt to do their work often struggle without instruction or guidance from teachers. One teacher who has worked at the school for four years states that “it’s the same type of students and they are the same every year,” so he does not put much into his teaching anymore. In light of this comment, he reminisces about a Calculus student, a white boy⁹, who was enrolled in Richmond at one point. He explains that this student “challenged” him and that it felt good because he rarely has students who are enrolled in Calculus. For the first time at Richmond, he was actually dealing with “that kind of material” that another teacher spoke of—the material that not only exemplified success behaviorally and academically, but the material that looked like success. This Calculus student was a white boy; his current students are African American boys that he is less interested in teaching.

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⁹ As previously mentioned, staff members were sure to identify the student by race and gender if they did not fit the predominate label. I observe this as an unspoken understanding wherein if the gender or race is not mentioned it is understood that administrators and faculty are referring to an African American boy.
At Richmond, African American students learn that the model of success is white. Indeed white students are talked about like the spare change you find in a dirty house; they are hidden gems. When white students are sent to Richmond they become the symbol of academic achievement and exceptional behavior. This is because of a corrupt alternative education culture that has allowed arbitrary practices to manifest within alternative schools. During my eight weeks of observations African American boys are compared to the ideal student of the program, a white girl who I call “the golden child.” Students describe her as “the truth,” or smart when she passes her test and finishes her work quickly saying, “She always do[es] good [on her assignments]!” Their ideas about the golden child come from their teachers who often publicly praise her for her academic achievements. This recognition comes with many rewards. The golden child is given the opportunity to freely roam in and out of classes and she often talks casually with faculty and staff in the halls of the school. She is not black; she is a “golden child.”

Even the “7 P’s” behavior modification assessment program is structured and assessed in highly racialized ways. Those 7 P’s are punctuality, politeness, proper dress, preparation, proper behavior and performance, and participation. Gaining points or being docked points begins as soon as students enter Richmond. Every morning students receive their daily feedback sheet [see Appendix F] to carry around during the entire school day. Students can receive up to two points in each “P” category during check-in/breakfast; first through seventh period; their lunch period, which falls between students’ fourth and fifth period; and during dismissal and the bus ride home to earn a total of 100 points, even though the minimum daily requirement is 90 points. The 7 P’s is an inconsistent method used to assess the behavior of students. Some staff members are aware of the inconsistencies of the 7 P’s program and admit that there are some personal biases at play in how and when students are rewarded. This conclusion about the 7 P’s becomes apparent one
Friday, a day when students are rewarded with pizza for getting 90 points on their weekly behavior sheets. One teacher, who is in charge of assessing the awards, enters the classroom and requests to see everyone’s behavior sheet. “You already know what it is,” says Ben, an African American boy as he hands in his behavior sheet. The teacher quickly glances at the sheet and then informs the class that only one student in this classroom made enough points for the pizza event. That student is “the golden child.” The interaction exemplifies how faculty implement and carry out the program in arbitrary ways. Ben, an African American boy, has a good week but he is not allowed to go to the pizza event. He, like other students at Richmond, cannot be certain about the behavioral expectations of the school; the rules can and do change without rhyme or reason. Once uncertain about the rules, students might find it useless to try to be like “the golden child.”

Many of the staff members are in favor of the 7 P’s, describing them as skills that “help [students] prepare for life” and it gives “structure” to a lot of the children who “don’t have the proper structure at home.” Others, however, think it can only work if it is “more consistent” and “if there’s some . . . real benefits and punishments for it.” One teacher explains,

I’m probably the least consistent person. [. . .] I tolerate more so I can hear more about what’s going on with them. [. . .] I can tolerate stuff without snapping more than anybody else in the building. The women, they get on [the students] fast to calm them down. [. . .] I try to be what they need me to be [. . .]. I always think [about] how late in the day it is. If it’s early in the day I have to tolerate more stuff. If it’s late in the day I look at the points, and all that determines how I handle stuff. I talk to them one on one or talk to the class. They say, “You should probably take all my points,” I say, “I’m not gone take all your points.”

This teacher admits his inconsistencies with the 7 P’s method. He praises himself for his high tolerance and explains that he bases his use of points on the other faculty who refuse to tolerate as much as he does. “Where do you draw the line? Do you tolerate enough so you can keep them in school so you can have an opportunity to educate them, at least maybe influence their
behavior or do you send them home [when they should be in school . . .], for the small stuff?”

For this teacher, alternative education settings be able to tolerate more and cannot have the same low levels of tolerance as teachers in the traditional school; besides low tolerance in light of zero-tolerance (Skiba and Patterson 1999) is what condemns the students to Richmond in the first place.

The Behavior Specialist recognizes that the inconsistent execution of the 7 P’s program can be confusing for students. In our interview, which was conducted in the narrow classroom that doubled as I.S.S., I ask her if the expectations are clear for the students and if they actually understand what needs to be done. “I don’t think so,” she replies,

I think some students don’t know what’s expected, especially from one teacher to the next. What’s allowed in one class may not be allowed in another. The rules that they have here, some of them are [long pause], like some things are okay for the females and not for the males. I don't understand some of that stuff. And then it’s like [. . .] at some times it’s like a push for what I feel to be perfection. You can have a successful day here and have a day count toward your time, if you have 90 points or above, yet, all of a sudden there have been a couple times where [students are] going to be rewarded but you have to have all 10’s [a perfect day], and I’m not okay with that. If your day can count with 90 points, then why do you have to have all 10’s for each period? If you don’t wear a belt to school they’re going to dock you a point . . . So they’re not docking points for behavior issues, they’re [not] docking points because you didn’t turn in your work, or you were not participating; it was because of a belt. And all of a sudden, it’s not good enough. I have a problem with that.

Students do not know what is expected of them in part because it has not been made clear by the institution of alternative education as a whole. Faculty members do not have an understanding of what the behavior modification program should do or how to organize it. In turn, students are not clear about what is expected of them, what it means to do good or bad or what to expect in return for good or bad behavior.

The one consistent message that students receive at Richmond is that they are criminals. I witness on several occasions comments from faculty and staff that place the African American
boys in a prison environment, as well as racist comments made about their dress and behavior.

One teacher, Mrs. Stewart, even goes so far as to suggest that her students are already behind bars.

Well, you know, does jail rehab actually work? You know you think about that in society. Does jail and imprisoning people actually work? Then you think, well, you’re separating these students from their population, from their school population so it’s kind of like jail. So does it actually work? I think there is yes and no because some students are judged too harshly and are over here for too long.

This teacher sees Richmond as a jail for the students, even though “some students are judged too harshly.” Richmond serves as an intervention from the traditional public school, as jail serves as the intervention from mainstream society. Notably, some administrators and faculty members are in favor of students wearing uniforms and want the setting to “be a bit more militaristic.” Administrators and faculty often make comments that place students in “orange jumpsuit” because of behaviors they exhibit while at Richmond. For example, one student makes paper guns and airplanes while he sits in class and some faculty suggest that he could end up in prison wearing an “orange jumpsuit.” It has also been suggested that Josh, an African American boy, should expect to have a gun or Taser pulled out on him because he accumulates a pile of rubber bands on his desk that he likes to pop towards the ceiling.

A dialogue between one teacher and Shaun, an African American student, exemplifies how teachers verbally link “bad” behavior with uncomfortable realities. He becomes ill and needs to visit the nurse at the Intermediate school up the hill. As Shaun is about to depart, the conversation goes as such:

Teacher: Smile! And pull your pants up and take [that] hoodie off so they don’t think [you’re] trying to rob them.

Shaun: [Does not pay teacher any attention]
Teacher: That’s true right? They may think he’s up to no good or something.

At this moment, this teacher places Shaun in the shoes of Trayvon Martin, a 17-year old African American boy who was shot and killed for looking “suspicious” as he walked from a 7-11 with a bag of Skittles and a canned juice in his hands, with his hoodie atop his head. Shaun is an African American boy who chooses to have his hood on, and because of that, this teacher implies that he would be perceived as a robber, or someone that is “up to no good.” Not only does this statement made by a teacher exhibit racial profiling, but the teacher also places themselves in George Zimmerman’s shoes and profiles Shaun as trouble. The comment faults unarmed African American boys who don hoodies for their own murders. Another staff member overheard this exchange but did not address the comments or intervene in the interaction. This shows how nonchalant staff members are to the institutionalized racial perceptions that are endorsed within alternative education settings.

A structured behavior modification program is absent at the Richmond Learning Center. As a result of not having official protocols and procedures, administrators and faculty use a colorblind racist frame to assess, evaluate, and monitor students’ behavioral and academic achievement while at Richmond. Perhaps to compensate for their lack of training, administrators and faculty belittle the abilities of their African American students. From comparing African American boys to prison inmates to justifying brutality by way of murder, racialized academic and behavior assessments do not modify or encourage students’ success. Instead these place students at Richmond on a path to prison.
When children attend schools that place a greater value on discipline and security than on knowledge and intellectual development, they are attending Prep schools for prison.

- Angela Davis

V. TRUST BUILDING AND SURVEILLANCE

Every morning my observations begin at the metal detector. I join three teachers and SRO Burns, as they prepare to let students into Richmond Learning Center, one at a time. Mrs. Stewart, the white SPED teacher, stands to the left of the entrance where the behavior sheets were filed away in a plastic carrying case on top of a table. I stand to the right of the door next to Mrs. Adams, the African American social studies teacher, who often sits in a chair outside of her doorway. Mr. Scott often stands directly next to me, playing the role of the doorkeeper, opening the door for students by pressing the green button and pushing down on the door handle simultaneously. SRO Burn stands almost three feet directly in front of the metal detector, paying close attention to the students as well as to the lights and buzzing sound that signals an unsuccessful pass through the metal detector.

Administrators and faculty greet students with a “Good Morning” as they enter. Most students’ walk in with their belts already off because they know that buckles
trigger the metal detector. The use of metal detectors in alternative education allows for an indisputable routine and acceptance of discipline and control techniques. With the exception of Richmond, none of the traditional public schools in the district require students to pass through a metal detector, making the levels of security all the more obvious between different schools. After entering Richmond, students remove their district-issued backpack, which is stored in a closet inside SRO Burns’s office during the school day. Students are to remove their earrings’, which were not allowed for any student, but “the golden child” is an exception to the rule. “Dress for success. You need to dress for success,” Mrs. Stewart reiterates daily as students walk in the school. She does not like students to wear their pants below their waist. One day, Ben, an African American boy around 17 years old, responds back, “This is success. Long as I show up.”

Jackets are permitted in the school but only after Mrs. Stewart swings them through the metal detector or checks it out to make sure there is nothing harmful inside. One morning in particular, Josh, one of the youngest African American boys at Richmond, maybe 13 years old, was given his jacket after the metal detector process. “Did you check it [the jacket]?” Josh asks as he walks away from Mrs. Stewart smiling. She then yanks his jacket and pulls him back in her direction. Mrs. Stewart explains that she needs to check his jacket to be sure he does not have “drugs, a weapon, or [a] bomb.” Josh then pulls out a small gift box and says that it is a gift from his mom. She then exclaims that she has to look
inside of the box to be sure that there was nothing bad or dangerous inside of it.

After hassling Josh for some time, he finally let Mrs. Stewart look inside of the box. She finds nothing dangerous or harmful.

The morning process at Richmond shows how administrators, faculty, and the use of metal detectors carry out rigorous levels of surveillance. For this reason I also noticed that students were hesitant about my presence at Richmond, wherein some believed that I am looking to deceive them as an undercover officer. As soon as I arrive on my second day, students call me “12.” Twelve is the name given to law enforcement officers. Ben, a student at Richmond, believed that I was there to spy on them. However I make it clear that my research focuses only on the administrators and faculty of Richmond. Following Ben’s statement Dedric immediately jumps to my defense explaining that I am not “12” but in fact “just like” them. Ben relaxes, as he seems to rethink my presence and welcome me back into their space, saying, “Oh, she smoke too?” “Man, chill,” Dedric says as the conversation fades and the bell alerts them to switch classes.

In the previous chapter, I explained how a disorganized, undeveloped behavior modification program pushes students closer to prison. In this chapter, I will take you through the complexities of how trust building and surveillance in Richmond function as a tricky duo that criminalizes students and pipelines them to prison.

**Trust Building**

Administrators and faculty at Richmond attempt to “build trust,” as they term it, with students in ways that often set students further down the path to prison. This trust is built through joking
with students about criminal behavior and avoiding conflict over minor offenses while in an institution that constantly monitors and records the actions and conversations of its students.

**Joking.** Joking with students about their questionable decisions, such as smoking marijuana before school, initiates a feeling of camaraderie that may be surprising to find in an alternative education setting. Often times the stench of marijuana follows students into Richmond, giving administrators and faculty the opportunity to joke with each other and even students about students’ marijuana use.

On one particular day I recall Shaun, an African American boy, receiving his behavior sheet with a cut out of a dwarf stapled to it. “Which [dwarf] is it?” the faculty members exclaim as they and students congregate in the hallway between classes. Some suspect that it is Sleepy because Shaun always slept in class and this particular dwarf is always tired. Others think it is Dopey, which references his drug use. Everyone laughs, even Shaun and his classmates. In this particular case, Shaun is being picked on by his superiors and laughed at by his classmates. It also shows that his behavior is closely monitored. Dopey as well as Sleepy illustrate his use of drugs and the side affects—sleeping. Although it is not explicitly mentioned what is going on with Shaun, using the dwarf cutout is a joke in itself. It is used as a way of getting others to realize his current state of inebriation without blatantly exposing him. Shaun’s marijuana use is exposed in a comical manner as the audience of administrators, faculty, and student partake in a guessing game to determine which dwarf he enacts. Shaun, as well as Dedric and Ben, are often identified and teased for how high on marijuana they are when they arrive to Richmond and eventually how high they will be after leaving Richmond at the end of the school day. The teasing and “sharing of gossip and innuendo[s]” (Weissman 2015:173) by administrators and
faculty “encourages profiling of students” (Weissman 2015:173) to expose their behavior that is deemed criminal.

Faculty use nonverbal cues to relax and joke with students about their drug use. What I call “looks” are commonly exchanged between students and the staff member that has been successful at building trust. These looks are followed by a smirk, then a laugh, and then a disappointing yet joking headshake. If this nonverbal communication were to be put into words it would say, “I see that you decided to smoke weed this morning because your eyes are really low and red” and in unison they both laugh. In this nonverbal interaction like these, the faculty present themselves as lenient about drugs. But this leniency is a guise for a more pervasive system of surveillance; in instances such as these, administrators and faculty can better assess which students may be under the influence of any drugs or alcohol.

Not only do administrators and faculty joke about drug use they tease students about bicycle theft. Dedric steals bikes and on many occasions administrators and other faculty will ask, “When are you going to steal a bike for me?” One day Dedric responds, “Man, I got you. I have to get there [the nearby University campus] to steal one.” This process shows how administrators and faculty initiate conversations about drug use and theft in a comical light-hearted way. Yet drug use and bike theft is not a joking matter at Richmond.

It is a Wednesday morning. Today I observe the main office where Ms. Thomas and SRO Burns reside in Richmond. I walk into the room, greeting Ms. Thomas who is no more than a foot away from the doorway behind a tall desk where she faces her Mac desktop. I make a left and in about four feet I sank into one of the two large brown leather chairs in the main office. I choose the chair farthest from the door in order to stay clear of the foot traffic by staff, visitors, and students.
The main office is very small. SRO Burns occupies the only private office in this room and there is also a “faculty only” restroom located in this space.

On today, SRO Burns decides to do some housecleaning. He is the newest member of Richmond and wants to make his office a bit “homey” as the administrators and faculty hope he will stay for a while. He removes items such as: a broken television, a handheld metal detector, only because he finds out that it does not work, an extra chair, and a printer. Once he comes to a point of contentment he stops. For a minute there is complete silence; with the exception of Ms. Thomas pecking away at her computer keys. I suspect SRO Burns is in his office reading one of his books that glorify the Old South until I hear him say, “Hello! This is Officer Burns from Richmond.” As the conversation continues, I realize that he was on the phone with a nearby university campus police department, possibly the Chief. SRO Burns asks the individual on the phone about a list of bikes that have been stolen from campus. Apparently the individual acknowledges that the campus does keep a list of bikes that have been reported stolen by students. SRO Burns invites the person to come to Richmond to take a look at the bikes that students ride to school and to bring the list of stolen bikes along with them. “Down here at Richmond Learning Center we have the not-so-good kids,” says SRO Burns as he enlightens the individual on the phone about the “type” of students they deal with. “These are pretty expensive bikes, no cheepos. [. . .] They already have a different set of bikes than what they had last week,” as he goes on to explain what he discovers based on his conversations.

10 Conversations with staff reveal that there has been two previous SRO’s since the start of the school year.
during “trust” building with the students. “They steal them either in the mornings or late at night and sell them. [. . .] These are good mountain bikes, about $1,000.”

At this moment, SRO Burns places students in a position that can essentially be the final phase of the school-to-prison pipeline. SRO Burns has not only pipelined African American students by calling the police about stolen bikes, he builds trust with students and then deceives them into thinking it is okay to steal the bikes in the first place. Recalling comments made to one student, “When are you going to steal me one [a bike]?” a comment that implies that staff members are not only aware of students’ involvement in stealing bikes, but can criminalize them when they so choose. Students’ involvement in stealing bikes, whether notated consciously or unconsciously, is the evidence needed to report this incident.

**Avoiding Conflict.** A lack of interest in students’ engagement sets the stage for a non-confrontational educational setting. While in class, it is evident that teachers totally detach themselves from students’ behavior in an effort to maintain order in the classroom. Students are rarely told to wake up if they are sleeping, told to remove their headphones from their ears, asked to get back to work, or given instruction on how to complete their work. This, I discover, is another way that administrators and faculty claim to “build trust” with students and find out which students are “up to no good” or doing things that merit punishment.

Examples of avoiding conflict are shown through teacher and student interaction at Richmond. When teachers attempt to get students back in focus, it can go one of two ways: 1) students listen and get back on task, or 2) the teacher is totally ignored by the student. I recall an event that occurs between a teacher and Mario, an African American student, about his total
disconnect from the class lesson.

Teacher: You’ve been out of focus today.

Mario: What I do? (Looking surprised)

Teacher: You’ve been just staring into space.

Mario: Man, watch out. (He fans the teacher off)

[Teacher lets it go.]

Weeks later during her interview this teacher explains:

You have to be really careful how you [call students out]; they don’t have the coping skills. They don’t have the skills [on] how to deal with life [when] things [are] not going their way, so you have to talk them off the shelf, talk them off the ledge sometimes. It’s like “Okay, let’s look at it and see what’s going on.”

I follow up by the teacher if they feel that students are discouraged or if they do not see anything positive happening in their lives. Their response, “Sometimes. [. . .] you see the frustration. You see the discouragement. ‘Why bother? My daddy’s in jail.’ That’s kind of what they expect.”

This sequence of events shows an attempt to challenge a student about his disengagement in class but the result leads to nothing. The teacher avoids conflict at all cost based on the reaction they receive from the student. The teacher blames the student for their inability to cope when things are not going their way; as though they build up frustration when challenged, and therefore they resort to walking out on the ledge, or the shelf, and erupt with frustration! In order to avoid that, the teacher feels you have to calm them down to keep them from acting out.

The SRO officer sees “trust” as an important factor in getting students to open up to him:

I’m not saying to turn a blind eye on certain little things, but you don’t want to nickel and dime them because when you do that it builds a distrust. Right now I’m trying to gain their trust. If I nitpick um, I’m never gonna gain their trust, what little trust I’m going to get. With that trust comes things where, maybe they’ll talk to me, maybe they’ll tell me about stuff that’s happening, maybe they’ll open up to me.
Mr. Burns’ use of the phrase, “I don’t want to nickel and dime them,” insinuates that he avoids the small errors or flaws of students like being defiant. His choice not to criticize students, even when he believes he should, shows the process he takes to “gain [students] trust” so that they “tell [him] about stuff that’s happening.” SRO Burns has adopted this process of being lenient in order to find out “stuff” and get them to “open up”; stuff that warrants concern and scrutiny, wherein staff are prompted to call the cops.

Surveillance

Surveillance at Richmond Learning Center involves administrators and faculty who constantly watch the behavior of students via live video cameras. Foucault’s (1977) concept of the panoptic structure is similar to the routine acted out by administrators and faculty at Richmond. This is a mechanism that constantly monitors the behavior of students, good or bad. During this constant surveillance, students are scrutinized based on assumptions of being involved in troublesome activities. In the event students are caught, they are placed in a position to be criminalized. On one particular occasion, three African American boys become victims of the practice of constant surveillance at Richmond.

SRO Burns walks into the main office and says, “They are bringing a Breathalyzer\textsuperscript{11} over.” Mrs. Jackson says that she saw three of the African American boys “passing a big cup on the porch” on this particular morning. They then proceed to organize a plan of action. “All I have to say is ‘I suspect that you are under the influence and we need to perform a Breathalyzer test on you.’ This is all you have to do to protect yourself,” says Mrs. Jackson to SRO Burns while

\textsuperscript{11} Using breath sample content to estimate blood alcohol content
standing in the main office. She is cautious in her approach to students, as she is certain that her prearranged script will do the trick to question students about this assumed intoxication. As Mrs. Jackson and SRO Burns wait for an officer to bring the Breathalyzer test, Mrs. Jackson excuses herself to her office to “freshen up on her code of conduct knowledge” just in case there is a positive test.

Moments later another officer, an African American boy, arrives in the main office with Breathalyzer equipment. SRO Burns, Mrs. Jackson, and the officer negotiate where they will perform the Breathalyzer test on the students. This depends on whether they want video footage on the surveillance system or not. If they want it on camera they will leave the office and go into Mrs. Jackson’s office down the hallway. They agree to conduct the Breathalyzer test on camera, out of my sight. They exit the main office to retrieve the suspected alcohol-consuming students from their classes and proceed to the principal’s office.

Moments later, Mrs. Jackson walks into the main office and announce the negative results of the Breathalyzer test. Later that day while standing in the hallway between classes, I find out that one of the accused students was Ben. I overhear him say to one of the other students, an African America boy, that SRO Burns was “racist” for assuming that he had been drinking and making them take a Breathalyzer test.
Little did Ben know he was still being watched because staff members suspect that he is high, and as a result they are instructed to keep a close eye on him through the computer surveillance system to see if he is falling asleep in class.\(^\text{12}\)

This sequence of events show that students are not only under constant surveillance by the administrators and faculty but also the cameras that assist the staff in their efforts of catching students who do and say the wrong things. If in the event students are heard, or seen doing something considered criminal, they face consequences predetermined by the student handbook.

Surveillance in alternative education is also done using canine dogs as a way to intimidate students. The day following the Breathalyzer incident at Richmond, the canine dog is brought in by another officer while the students are in class. SRO Burns removes every backpack that has been stored away in his closet and lines them up in the hallway. The dog sniffs every single backpack, his guide being careful that he does. In the end the canine dog finds nothing. Even though the students were in class, the officers felt the need to show off the dog to students. Students were totally unaware of the search, as some look surprised when the dog enters the classroom. This dog is not to be seen as adorable, or a cute pet. This is a dog that has been trained to intimidate and punish students if anything illegal is discovered. The show and tell of the dog is a nonverbal warning and signal to show students that at any moment the staff can initiate a life-changing situation. Some administrators and faculty support the process of dog searches because it keeps students alert and prepares them for the prison experience.

At this alternative school, joking with students and avoiding confrontation acts of surveillance of

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\(^{12}\) The surveillance system is in every classroom and hallway, and lines the parameter of the school, which can be monitored by SRO Burns, Ms. Thomas, and Mrs. Jackson. I am not certain if teachers can access this platform.
student behavior. This is a process that not only strengthens the alternative school-to-prison pipeline, but also shows how they use “trust” as a way of getting students to open up and expose their wrong doings. In the next chapter, I show that administrators and faculty do not acknowledge how they deceive and monitor students, and as a result “blame” students for their own shortcomings.
My son used to talk about young black men going to prison all the time in his music.

-Afeni Shakur (Political activist and mother of Tupac Shakur)

VI. THE BLAME GAME

The process of criminalizing African American boys at Richmond ends in blaming students for their own failures. This chapter shows how faculty members cover up their actions by pointing the finger at students. It reveals how several administrators and faulty members at Richmond attempt to blame students for their own downfall, suggesting that students “tell on themselves”—in other words, they do it to themselves.

“There’s only one side and it’s not yours.” Administrators and faculty members claim they do all they can to keep students from traveling down the pipeline to prison. If students do not take heed to their direction, they ultimately deserve to be punished. Mr. Scott, the African American science teacher, is very professional in his appearance. He is always in dress slacks, dress shirt, and a tie. Mr. Scott sees himself as being an example for the African American boys at Richmond Learning Center. Although the students will often hassle Mr. Scott about his attire, they value him as the only African American man at Richmond. Regrettably, this role puts him in a double bind.

Ben: Mr. Scott try to play both sides.
Mr. Scott: I’m not [trying to play both sides.] There’s only one side and it’s not yours

This brief exchange of words between Mr. Scott and Ben underscores how students see Mr. Scott’s attempt at playing both sides—being cool and showing himself as being trustworthy while also being held accountable for what he and other administrators and faculty members may see and hear in regards to students actions and behavior. During an interview, Mr. Scott says:

[. . .] halfway my job is to report stuff to [Mrs. Jackson and SRO Burns], but the other half of my job is to really take care of [the students]. [Mrs. Jackson] does say, “You’re my undercover snitch,” but “I snitch both ways.” I tell the kids “They gone be watching you.” I want them to fix it before somebody else gotta fix it. Usually a problem is a problem and eventually somebody has to solve the problem. So if I tell you they might be watching you and you don’t do anything about it, then do you want to fix the problem or are you trying to get caught?

Mr. Scott explains that he does his job by helping administrators catch students for bad behavior, but he also does what he can to look out for students. His narrative about his job at the school makes it seem like students could possibly win the battle some day. These students, Mr. Scott indicates, are at fault for their own destruction; if they know they are being watched, they should stop behaving badly. In an effort to look out for both the students while snitching for the principal, Mr. Scott says,

We want them to fix it themselves. [. . .] I want them to not be comfortable saying stuff. That’s my goal—to get them to stop talking so much. How can you stay out of jail if you telling on yourself in casual conversations? How can you stay out of trouble if you’re comfortable telling on yourself? [. . .] So I have a conversation every couple weeks. “Why y’all tell on yourself so much?” and they still comfortable doing it. I tell them you’re not going to be able to get away with everything.

Mr. Scott attempts to help students by hinting at the possibility of a drug test or canine sniffs. But when he has made an effort to “build trust” with the students, they feel comfortable to “talk” more in “casual conversations” with administrators and faculty. The comment “You’re not going to be able get away with everything” exemplifies the selectiveness in applying rules. It is as if
students are receiving strikes, and after a while administrators and faculty become fed up. Once this happens, they can decide how and when to punish students. Students are never aware of when to expect a change in the rules. Most of the time, the rules are flexible, if not nonexistent. Administrators and faculty decide their fates. Mr. Scott says:

[. . .] usually if I hear something I say ‘Make sure you be okay this week.’ Some of them listen, some of them don’t and I’m like if somebody try and keep you outta trouble and you not listening, then maybe you need to get in some type of trouble.

Mr. Scott believes that his hints are more than enough for students to make rational choices about their actions, but that is not enough. The students are already criminalized, and the plan is already in motion. Administrators and faculty are just waiting for the right time to act, just as Mrs. Jackson and SRO Burns did during the morning of the Breathalyzer test.

Other staff members argue that students “at some point . . . have to take ownership to their own lives” and “take some personal accountability” for things they have done to get them in trouble. Mrs. Bradley, a white English teacher, in particular says,

they think everything is unfair, and so you help them see that’s how the world works. And no it’s not necessarily unfair, ya know, [. . .] there [are] other situations . . . you can draw parallels with [and it] is not just people picking on you. That’s just how things are done. Your behavior is not acceptable, that’s why this happened. [. . .] You know and it’s like you got in trouble, it’s not the judges fault [she laughs], or it’s not the cops fault. [. . .] and so you try to help them see that. No people are not just picking on you. You know that there are rules and society has expectations and if you don’t follow them, you just have to go with their consequences.

This comment by Mrs. Bradley speaks to “rules” that “society has” based on “expectations,” something we have discovered that Richmond lacks. This “system” that Mrs. Bradley speaks of is not in favor of the African American boys at Richmond. These kids are scrutinized and forced out of society by punitive social control, which place them in the carceral system.
“They think they will be alright.”

Some administrators and faculty suggest that the pipeline to prison is hereditary. During my interview with the principal I mentioned Dedric, one of the African American boys that I would say latched on to me. He asked me numerous times to tutor him and even took my advice on asking for more help in his courses. Mrs. Jackson acknowledges that he is more than capable of performing well in school but his grades and behavior at Richmond and the traditional public school do not reflect it. Dedric’s father is currently incarcerated; he is serving a 33-year sentence. Mrs. Jackson explains that Dedric wants to be called “Dino”—his dad’s nickname. Dedric not only wants to be identified with the same name as his dad, but Mrs. Jackson implies that he may see prison as a viable option for himself as he becomes older. The Bureau of Justice Statistics show that “black children [are] seven and a half times more likely than white children to have a parent in prison” (Glaze and Maruschak 2008:2); therefore, African American boys are faced with a sense of inevitability of being just like their fathers (Weissman 2015).

The events that occur at Richmond Learning Center not only place the African American boys in the position to be pipelined to prison, they serve as a place that resembles prison culture for students that have been excluded from their traditional public schools because of zero-tolerance polices. While it may be troubling to fathom how these events perpetuate the school-to-prison pipeline, the following remark from Ms. Washington encapsulates my findings in their entirety.

I think the idea is that [the] majority of the students here are the bad seeds and this is where they come. And the majority of them don’t have [long pause] . . . that there’s no chance they’re going to be successful. They’re going to end up going down the wrong road. They’re going to end up in jail. And for some, they do have a mindset that you think they’re going to end up making wrong decisions. That’s where we come in and having to teach them better decision making. But with so many inconsistencies sometimes, I don’t know that that’s . . . I don’t know how the students are looking at that [when] they see it.
The inconsistencies that Ms. Washington speaks of could be many things: the lack of training for faculty and staff, uncertainty of duties carried out by administrators and faculty, and how students’ behavior and academic goals are being assessed. Although training, specified duties, and proper assessment should contribute to the positive lifestyle of Richmond, the apparent inability of administrators and faculty to provide these resources hamper students’ success.

The final stage in pipelining African American students at Richmond to prison is blaming. While African American boys at Richmond face a misguided and unfair education system, administrators and faculty members report that they have exhausted every possible option to help students. In the end, the flaws of the alternative education system are overlooked and ignored, leaving young African American boys to take an ‘L’ or a loss in the blame game.
VII. CONCLUSION

The Alternative Education system creates a racist template from which administrators and faculty draw on to measure, evaluate, and monitor its students. At Richmond Learning Center some administrators and faculty envision African American boys in orange jumpsuits, believing there is a spot for them in prison. Administrators and faculty see African American boys as yearning for candy and school lunch to hoard extras in their jacket pocket because they lack these foods at home. Administrators and faculty see the African American boys as the most deficient students in the district who are unable to accomplish anything. Unfortunately, administrators and faculty do not see that their African American students are battling a color-coded alternative education system that does not believe their success is possible.

In the absence of proper educational guidance or training, administrators and faculty are unable to meet the needs of students who need academic and behavioral guidance. The process of trust building and surveillance that results from an unstructured program is detrimental to African American boys at Richmond. By lowering the academic expectations of students, joking with students about drugs, and avoiding conflict with students in the classroom, administrators and faculty set students up for failure, whether they intend to or not. Once students have fallen victim to unofficial randomized rules, they become comfortable enough to expose matters that could merit punishment while at Richmond.

Although I never witnessed students at Richmond being handcuffed and escorted off the premises, administrators and faculty mention that it has and does happen at Richmond. The
spiral of criminalization that stigmatizes African American boys based on institutionalized racism stems from a poor educational system that does little to nothing to improve the students’ academic and behavior development. Richmond Learning Center is a dirty alternative school, and it is now apparent why the one teacher did not want me to see this dirty school. Richmond fails African American boys both in promoting academic mentorship and behavior modification and affectively places students in the school-to-prison pipeline.

Future Studies

I look to further examine alternative education in multifaceted ways. I am first interested in the historical context of alternative education settings, Freedom Schools. It is surprising to know that a school once used for liberation for African Americans is now a place of imprisonment for those same individuals. What caused this shift? Where did things go wrong and create an unethical program that convicts minority youth? I am also interested in conducting research on girls who occupy alternative education settings in the South. While my research was limited to African American boys, I found it important to mention one girl—“the golden child.” However, there were in fact three girls condemned to Richmond during my eight weeks of data collection: two white and one African American. Finally, I am interested in building a comparative study with other alternative schools that focus on behavior modification where rules and understanding of a behavior modification program is clearly understood by administrators and faculty.


LIST OF APPENDICES
APPENDIX A: VISITOR NAME BADGE (LOBBY GUARD)
What You Can Do:

This is your FREEDOM SUMMER. It will not work without your help.

COFO is asking you to:
- provide housing for the people who are coming to work here.
- look for buildings which can be used for Freedom Schools and Community Centers.
- get names of students who want to go to Freedom Schools.
- let us know when you have meetings or arrange meetings so we can come answer questions about the FREEDOM SUMMER.

Many people are coming here to work during our FREEDOM SUMMER. They want to learn about Mississippi. They feel that the problems here are the problems of people all over the country. Most of them will be college students, both Negro and white.

COFO is your organization. The things it is trying to do should be done by the state. The people who have been elected to run the state say that they do not have to do things for Negroes.

IT IS THE FAULT OF THE STATE that you cannot:
- find work
- read and write
- send your children to better schools.

If you work with COFO you will be working to get yourself the better conditions you deserve.

What Is COFO?

COFO is an organization made up of all the civil rights and local citizenship groups in Mississippi which decided they must work together to improve conditions in Mississippi.

For more information:

Write to - COFO STATE OFFICE
1017 Lynch Street
Jackson, Mississippi

Or call - 352-9605

Other offices near you:

CLARKSDALE - 213 4th Street
phone - 624-3813

COLUMBUS - 1323 6th Ave., North
phone - 328-8916

GREENWOOD - 708 Avenue N
phone - 453-1282

HATTIESBURG - 507 Mobile Street
phone - 584-7670

MERIDIAN - 2505 1/2 5th Street
phone - 485-9286

MISSISSIPPI FREEDOM SUMMER
Freedom Schools

Voter Registration

Community Centers

ARE YOU A REGISTERED VOTER?

If we were all voting then things would be better in Mississippi.

We would have:
- enough food
- more jobs
- better schools
- better houses
- paved sidewalks

People coming here this summer can work with you on VOTER REGISTRATION. They can knock on doors, teach the registration forms and drive people to the courthouse. They can help in any way you want them to.

A COMMUNITY CENTER is a place where everyone can do many different things. It will be mostly for adults and will offer many chances for them to learn things to help them live better.

COMMUNITY CENTERS will have:
- job training programs
- classes for people who cannot read or write
- classes on child care
- health programs
- adult education and Negro history classes
- music, drama, and arts and crafts workshops

If you have small children, they will be taken care of while you enjoy the COMMUNITY CENTER.

EVERYTHING AT THE COMMUNITY CENTER WILL BE FREE.

FREEDOM SCHOOLS will be during the summer. They are schools where high school students will be able to talk about things they can't talk about in regular school. They will learn about civil rights.

There will be classes for students who:
1. have trouble with their lessons in regular school and want to do better,
2. like to read and want to learn more than they are taught in regular school.

There will be singing, dancing, sports, hikes and many other things for all students.

Some of the FREEDOM SCHOOLS will be for people who spend 6 weeks away from home to live at them.

ALL OF THE FREEDOM SCHOOLS WILL BE FREE.
APPENDIX C: RICHMOND ADMINISTRATOR/FACULTY CONSENT FORM
Title: "Funneled Into Prison: Race and Behavior Modification at a Mississippi Alternative School"

Investigator
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Advisor
Amy McDowell, Ph.D.
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The University of Mississippi
(662) 915-1235

INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING ONLY IF YOU ARE COLLECTING DATA EXCLUSIVELY FROM ADULTS ☐ By checking this box I certify that I am 18 years of age or older.

Description
The purpose of this research project is to examine how administrators and faculty implement their vision of success in alternative education. I would like to ask you a few questions about your position as an administrator/faculty member in this program. You will not be required to identify yourself during this interview, nor will the Richmond Learning Center be identified as my research cite in my MA thesis; I will create a pseudonym.

Cost and Payments
It will take you approximately one hour to complete this interview, and it is completely voluntary. There will be no compensation associated with participation in this study.

Risks and Benefits
Although it may be difficult to express and openly discuss the nature of this ‘alternative’ school, this study could help in obtaining unique insights and experiences that will make a valuable contribution to this project. As a result, there will be no risk associated with participating in this study.

Confidentiality
All research participants can ensure confidentiality and anonymity with all responses and discussions during formal and informal interviews. Due to the depth of questions pertaining to an organized program, pseudonyms will be used in my write-up for research participants and the Center. There will be use of a tape recorder, and upon completion of the interview the data will be encrypted.

Right to Withdraw
Participants will be given the option to withdraw at any time during the interview if they feel uncomfortable. If there is any question that you prefer not to answer, you are permitted to do so by letting the investigator know.
Institutional Review Board Approval
This study has been reviewed by The University of Mississippi’s Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB has determined that this study fulfills the human research subject protections obligations required by state and federal law and University policies. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights or your child’s rights as a research participant, please contact the IRB at (662) 915-7482 or irb@olemiss.edu.

Statement of Consent
I have read and understand the above information, and by completing the interview I consent to participate in the study.
APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR RICHMOND ADMINISTRATORS/FACULTY
Interview Questions for the Richmond Learning Center Administrators/Faculty

Off Tape – Before the interview begins, participants will verify that they are over the age of 18.

Date:
Time:
Length of Interview:
Location of Interview:
Demographics (Age, Gender, Race):
Highest Level of Education/Degree:

On Tape

Your Training/Experiences
What is your role here?
What does it entail?
When did you start working in alternative education?
How did you get started here?
Did you have any teaching experience in public school before transferring to teach in alternative education?
Did you have to complete different training in order to work here?
What did you have to do?
Do you think it was helpful?
What did you expect before you started here?
What surprised you about alternative education that you may not have been expecting?
What do you wish the training had taught you?
What was emphasized the most in the training about teaching here?

About the School
If someone had no idea what alternative education at Richmond Learning Center was and what it was for, what would you tell them?
What are some of the reasons that students are sent here?
What does this school do for students?
What do children learn?
What are your thoughts on the 7 P’s (punctuality, politeness, proper dress, preparation, proper behavior and performance, and participation)?
Are there rewards/consequences for following or not following the 7 P’s?
What would you consider proper behavior and performance?

Teaching/Achievement/Success
What is this school trying to achieve?
How does it achieve this?
Are the goals for alternative education at Richmond Learning Center straightforward?
What are some of those goals?
In what ways are these goals achieved?
In what ways are they not achieved?
How would you define success?
How would you describe a successful school year?
How do you work towards promoting success in students in the alternative education program?
How do you know when you have been successful in that endeavor?
In what ways is the success of a student measured?
What are the values you aim to instill in students?
How do you instill these values?

**Programs/Policies**

What are your thoughts on Zero Tolerance/Get Tough policy?
   - Do you think it is a good policy? Why/why not?
   - Do you believe that because of this policy, most of the kids are here at the alternative school?

**Further Questions (if time permits)**

On a scale of 1 to 10, 1 being not at all stressful and 10 being stressful, is your job?

Does the learning cycle change during the school year or roughly stays the same?
   - Does the continuous change of students in and out of the program affect or conflict with your way of teaching or enacting success?

What do you like most about working here?
What do you like least about working here?

**Wrap-Up**

Is there anything else that you would like to share with me?

Do you have any questions?
APPENDIX E: PARTICIPATION OBSERVATION (SHADOWING TEMPLATE)
Participation Observation (Shadowing) Template

Setting
In what setting are you observing while shadowing administrators/faculty? (classroom, hallway, cafeteria, main office)
What usually happens in this setting?
How is this space set up?
What is the title held by the administrator/faculty being observed?
Length of observation: ____________

Verbal Behaviors and Social Interactions
How do the administrators and faculty interact with students?
How do faculty tell students what to do?
Does this differ depending on race or gender?
What are they told not to do/to do?
Does this differ depending on race or gender?
What things does the teacher say or do to establish the tone of the classroom?
What is the tone of their voice when they communicate?
What is the body language between the individuals in this conversation?
Are subjects usually near each other? Far apart?
What prompted this verbal exchange?
Who started it?
What is it about?
How long does it last?
What is the tone of this conversation? (angry, pleasant, neutral)
Does anyone get loud?
Is sexist language used?
Is racist language used?
How do students express how they feel about this exchange?
Did the interaction change? How?
Did the interaction escalate? How?
Is there a pattern to how administrators/faculty interact with females/males?
Is there a pattern to how administrators/faculty interact with a different racial/ethnic groups?

Evaluating Student Behavior
How do the faculty and administrators talk about ‘problem kids’?
How do they identify ‘problem kids’?
Who do they talk about ‘problem kids’ with? When?
Are there any racial biases when identifying and talking about ‘problem kids’?
Are there comments made that suggest gender-role stereotyping when talking about ‘problem kids’?
How do faculty and administrators talk about ‘good kids’?
How do they identify the ‘good kids’?
Who do they talk about the ‘good kids’ with?
Are there any racial biases when identifying and talking about ‘good kids’?
Are there comments made that suggest gender-role stereotyping when talking about ‘good kids’?

What is seen as good behavior?
   How do assessments of good behavior vary from student to student (if at all)?
   How are students acknowledged for good behavior?

What is seen as bad behavior?
   How do assessments of behavior vary from student to student (if at all)?
   How are students acknowledged for bad behavior?

**Discipline**

What techniques are used to correct problem behavior?
   What positive reinforcements are used?
   What negative reinforcements are used?

If an event occurs (fight, altercation, disruption, etc.)— How does it develop?
   Who is involved? Male/female? Race/ethnicity?
   What does administrators/faculty do?
   What do students do?

**Attire**

What are students wearing?
   Are the uniforms being worn properly?
   If not, what happens?

Do they wear identification badges?
What school materials do they carry?

What are administrators/faculty wearing?
Do they wear identification badges?
What items do they carry? (keys, walkie-talkie, clipboard, etc.)
Daily Feedback Sheet

Student: __________________________ Date: __________________________

Goals for Today:

Total Cumulative Days Required for Exit from

Anticipated Date of Exit from

Overall Student’s Performance (Academic & Behavior):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Punctuality (in class prior to tardy bell &amp; did not leave class without permission)</th>
<th>Proper Dress (respectful &amp; in compliance with dress code)</th>
<th>Prepared (has pencil, paper, &amp; necessary materials)</th>
<th>Behavior (exhibits polite &amp; respectful behavior, language, tone, &amp; attitude)</th>
<th>Performance/Participation (completed all work, assignments, &amp; requests)</th>
<th>Total Points</th>
<th>Teacher’s Initials</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 Points</td>
<td>2 Points</td>
<td>2 Points</td>
<td>2 Points</td>
<td>2 Points</td>
<td>Total Points</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Point</td>
<td>1 Point</td>
<td>1 Point</td>
<td>1 Point</td>
<td>0 Points</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 Points</td>
<td>0 Points</td>
<td>0 Points</td>
<td>0 Points</td>
<td>0 Points</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1st Period

| 2 Points | 2 Points | 2 Points | 2 Points | 2 Points | Total Points |
| 1 Point | 1 Point | 1 Point | 1 Point | 1 Point | |
| 0 Points | 0 Points | 0 Points | 0 Points | 0 Points | |

2nd Period

| 2 Points | 2 Points | 2 Points | 2 Points | 2 Points | Total Points |
| 1 Point | 1 Point | 1 Point | 1 Point | 1 Point | |
| 0 Points | 0 Points | 0 Points | 0 Points | 0 Points | |

3rd Period

| 2 Points | 2 Points | 2 Points | 2 Points | 2 Points | Total Points |
| 1 Point | 1 Point | 1 Point | 1 Point | 1 Point | |
| 0 Points | 0 Points | 0 Points | 0 Points | 0 Points | |

4th Period

| 2 Points | 2 Points | 2 Points | 2 Points | 2 Points | Total Points |
| 1 Point | 1 Point | 1 Point | 1 Point | 1 Point | |
| 0 Points | 0 Points | 0 Points | 0 Points | 0 Points | |

Lunch

| 2 Points | 2 Points | 2 Points | 2 Points | 2 Points | Total Points |
| 1 Point | 1 Point | 1 Point | 1 Point | 1 Point | |
| 0 Points | 0 Points | 0 Points | 0 Points | 0 Points | |

5th Period

| 2 Points | 2 Points | 2 Points | 2 Points | 2 Points | Total Points |
| 1 Point | 1 Point | 1 Point | 1 Point | 1 Point | |
| 0 Points | 0 Points | 0 Points | 0 Points | 0 Points | |

6th Period

| 2 Points | 2 Points | 2 Points | 2 Points | 2 Points | Total Points |
| 1 Point | 1 Point | 1 Point | 1 Point | 1 Point | |
| 0 Points | 0 Points | 0 Points | 0 Points | 0 Points | |

7th Period

| 2 Points | 2 Points | 2 Points | 2 Points | 2 Points | Total Points |
| 1 Point | 1 Point | 1 Point | 1 Point | 1 Point | |
| 0 Points | 0 Points | 0 Points | 0 Points | 0 Points | |

Bus/Dismissal

| 2 Points | 2 Points | 2 Points | 2 Points | 2 Points | Total Points |
| 1 Point | 1 Point | 1 Point | 1 Point | 1 Point | |
| 0 Points | 0 Points | 0 Points | 0 Points | 0 Points | |

Total Points

Today’s Daily Performance Grade: __________________________

Total Cumulative Successful Working Days:

Comments:

**Daily performance grade & numbers of cumulative successful working days will be recorded by student’s 7th period teacher at the end of each school day.**
APPENDIX G: CITY CELL INTRODUCTION ACTIVITY
**CELL CITY INTRODUCTION!**

Floating around in the cytoplasm are small structures called **organelles**. Like the organs in your own body, each one carries out a specific function necessary for the cell to survive. Imagine the cells as a miniature city. The organelles might represent companies, places, or parts of the city because they each have similar jobs.

Below are the descriptions of important parts of the Cell City:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City Part</th>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Cell Part</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>City Limits</td>
<td>Controls what goes in and out of the city</td>
<td>-cell membrane</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old Construction Building</td>
<td>Helps make constructions vehicles. Rough appearance.</td>
<td>-Rough endoplasmic reticulum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private contractors</td>
<td>Contains special construction equipment for the city limits and taking out trash.</td>
<td>-Smooth endoplasmic reticulum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roads</td>
<td>Define city boundaries and used for transportation.</td>
<td>-Microtubules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City Hall</td>
<td>Controls all the activities in of the city</td>
<td>-Nucleus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parks, grass, trees</td>
<td>fills the space between structures in a city and gives a city its shape</td>
<td>-Cytoplasm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction Company</td>
<td>Builds construction vehicles for the city</td>
<td>-Ribosomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delivery Van</td>
<td>Delivers products made at the construction company to other locations in the city</td>
<td>-Vesicle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food Processing Plant</td>
<td>Processes large quantities of food entering the city into smaller packages that can be used more easily</td>
<td>-Lysosomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warehouse</td>
<td>Stores materials needed by the city</td>
<td>-Vacuole</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power Company</td>
<td>Produces energy for the city</td>
<td>-Mitochondrion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solar Power Plant</td>
<td>Uses the sun’s energy to produce power for the city</td>
<td>-Chloroplast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customization Shop</td>
<td>Changes and puts the finishing touches on vehicles.</td>
<td>-Golgi Apparatus</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As you move through this worksheet, see if you can match the important parts of the city listed above to the specific organelles found in cells. Be sure to write neatly, and in complete sentences.

As you move through this worksheet, see if you can match the important parts of the city listed above to the specific organelles found in cells. Be sure to write neatly, and in complete sentences.
1. The **nucleus** is a large, round/oval structure usually located near the center of the cell. It is the control center for all the activities of the cell.
   a. What company or place does the **nucleus** resemble in a Cell City?

   **City Hall**

   b. Why do you think so (How is the organelle like that company or place)?

   The nucleus controls all of the activities of the cell as city hall controls all the activities in a city.

2. The **cell membrane** is a thin, flexible envelope that surrounds the cell. It allows the cell to change shape and controls what goes into and out of the cell.
   a. What company or place does the **cell membrane** resemble in a Cell City?

   **City Limits**

   b. Why do you think so (How is the organelle like that company or place)?

   The cell membrane controls what goes into and out of the cell as the city limits control what goes in and out of the city.

3. The **smooth endoplasmic reticulum** contains enzymes for making materials for the cell membrane along with getting rid of toxins in the cell.
   a. What company or place does **smooth endoplasmic reticulum** resemble in a Cell City?

   **Private Contractors**

   b. Why do you think so (How is the organelle like that company or place)?

   The smooth endoplasmic reticulum consists of enzymes for specific tasks like the private contractors specific tools for the city limits and trash.

4. The **ribosomes** are where proteins are constructed.
   a. What company or place do the **ribosomes** resemble in a Cell City?

   **Construction Company**

   b. Why do you think so (How is the organelle like that company or place)?

   Proteins which are building blocks of cells are constructed at the ribosomes as are structures for the city are built by a construction company.

5. The jelly-like area between the nucleus and the cell membrane is called the **cytoplasm**. It helps organelles move throughout the cell and fills the space between the nucleus and the cell membrane.
   a. What company or place does the **cytoplasm** resemble in a Cell City?
6. The **mitochondria** are tiny bean-shaped structures in the cytoplasm with a smooth outer membrane, and a greatly folded inner membrane. They supply the energy for the cell by transforming sugars into energy.
   a. What company or place do the **mitochondria** resemble in a Cell City?
      
      **Power Company**
      
      b. Why do you think so (How is the organelle like that company or place)?
      
      The mitochondria supply the energy for the cell by transforming sugars into energy, as does a power company produce energy for the city.

7. **Microtubules** are used for support and structure. They help form the cytoskeleton, giving it its shape, and they are also used for transportation, moving things within the cell.
   a. What company or place do the **chromosomes** resemble in a Cell City?
      
      **Road**
      
      b. Why do you think so (How is the organelle like that company or place)?
      
      Microtubules provide structure through the cytoskeleton and are used for transportation, much like roads are used to define boundaries and also transport things.

8. The **chloroplast** is an oval, green structure found in the cytoplasm. It contains chlorophyll. It captures the sun’s energy and uses it to produce sugars in a process called photosynthesis.
   a. What company or place does the **chloroplast** resemble in a Cell City?
      
      **Solar Power Plant**
      
      b. Why do you think so (How is the organelle like that company or place)?
      
      The chloroplast captures the sun’s energy and uses it to produce sugars which is used to power a cell as a solar power plant uses the sun’s energy to produce power for the city.

9. The **lysosomes** are small round structures found in the cytoplasm. They contain digestive enzymes that break down large food particles into sugars and other simple substances.
   a. What company or place do the **lysosomes** resemble in a Cell City?
      
      **Food Processing Plant**
      
      b. Why do you think so (How is the organelle like that company or place)?
The lysosomes contain digestive enzymes that break down large food particles into sugars and other simple substances that can be used more easily as does a food processing plant that processes large quantities of food entering the city into smaller packages that can be used more easily.

10. The **golgi apparatus** modifies proteins and other materials before they are sent out to other parts of the cell or out of the cell.

   a. What company or place do the **lysosomes** resemble in a Cell City?

      **Customization Shop**

   b. Why do you think so (How is the organelle like that company or place)?

      The golgi apparatus modifies proteins before they are sent out, much like a customization shop puts the finishing touches on a vehicle before it leaves.

11. The **vacuole** is a large, round sac found in the cytoplasm. It stores water, food, wastes, or other materials needed by the cell.

   a. What company or place does the **vacuole** resemble in a Cell City?

      **Warehouse**

   b. Why do you think so (How is the organelle like that company or place)?

      The vacuole stores water, food, and other materials needed by the cell like a warehouse stores materials needed by the city.

12. The **rough endoplasmic reticulum** is the part of the ER that helps make proteins and has a rough look to it because of the ribosomes found on its surface.

   a. What company or place does the **vacuole** resemble in a Cell City?

      **Old Construction Company**

   b. Why do you think so (How is the organelle like that company or place)?

      The Rough ER helps build proteins like the old construction company helps make new construction vehicles.

13. **Vesicles** move materials throughout the cell, like moving proteins made at the ribosomes to other parts of the cell.

   a. What company or place does the **vesicle** resemble in a Cell City?

      **Delivery Van**

   b. Why do you think so (How is the organelle like that company or place)?
Vesicles move materials throughout a cell, much like a delivery van moves materials throughout a city.

14. Now that you made the comparison between the parts of a city and the organelles of a cell, **draw out your cell**!

a. Make sure to label all 13 parts you identified in the cell, as well as which city part they resemble.

APPENDIX H: POEM: THE JOURNEY BY MARY OLIVER
The Journey

by Mary Oliver

One day you finally knew
what you had to do, and began,
though the voices around you
kept shouting
their bad advice—
though the whole house
began to tremble
and you felt the old tug
at your ankles.
‘Mend my life!’
each voice cried.
But you didn’t stop.
You knew what you had to do,
though the wind pried
with its stiff fingers
at the very foundations,
though their melancholy
was terrible.
It was already late
enough, and a wild night,
and the road full of fallen
branches and stones.
But little by little,
as you left their voices behind,
the stars began to burn
through the sheets of clouds,
and there was a new voice
which you slowly
recognized as your own,
that kept you company
as you strode deeper and deeper
into the world,
determined to do
the only thing you could do—
determined to save
the only life you could save.
APPENDIX I: VIDEO TRANSCRIPTION – DON’T LIMIT ME BY MEGAN B.
MEGAN LIVES BY HER MOTTO, "DON'T LIMIT ME.
DON'T LIMIT ME BY MEGAN BOMGAARS

Hi teachers in the Douglas County School District
My name is Megan Bomgaars, and I am here to help you with your kids in your classrooms with a disability or without a disability.
I am going to show you how to teach your students the right way.
I am a special person.
When I was in school I made a lot of friends.
I was in regular classes with a para for support.
I learned with the other students in the regular classroom.
I became a cheerleader in high school.
I was the first cheerleader in the state with Down Syndrome.
My cheerleading team went on to state and we went on to nationals where we won our national sportsmanship award in Washington D.C.
Since I have been out of high school, I was a fashion model in a Global Down Syndrome Foundation fashion show and I used to work at the Mile High Down Syndrome Association where I helped them with events.
I now go to the Bridge Program in Highlands Ranch where I am learning how to be a public speaker.
I have a lot of skills.
I have a lot of dreams.
What I want to say to you is:
DON'T LIMIT ME!
DON'T LIMIT ME by thinking that I can't learn in your classroom.
DON'T LIMIT ME by thinking that I will always need someone to help me.
DON'T LIMIT ME by having low expectations for me.
Include me, and all of your students, in your circle of learning while you are planning for my World Class Education.
Think about how I have the same needs as all students.
We all need life skills, we all need work skills.
I need for you to teach me skills beyond reading and math.
Teach me how to learn. Teach me how to act.
Think about what I need to know and be able to do when I leave school.
Help me to learn to be independent in class.
Help me to learn to be independent with friends.
Help me to learn to be independent, and safe, moving around our school.
[Teach me to be independent so I can become an independent adult.]
I need to work independently.
I need to speak up for myself.
DON'T LIMIT ME by teaching me to depend on others.
Teach me respect, because respect is give and take.
Hold me to the same behavior expectations as others in your classroom.
Teach me how to behave and excel in your class.
DON'T LIMIT ME by making me your class mascot!
Teach me what you expect from me.
Set high expectations, not impossible expectations.
There is a difference, you know.
You will learn alot from me.
Good teachers teach and learn from their students.
I will teach you alot about yourself.
I will teach your students about people with disabilities.
If you DON'T LIMIT ME
we will teach our school how to be an inclusive community.
You, my teacher, are the person who is going to teach me power, passion, love and independence.
And, I will become a powerful, passionate, loving, and independent adult.
So please....DON'T LIMIT ME!
My name is Megan Bomgaars. Thank you for your time today.
Have a wonderful school year!
VITA

EDUCATION
University of Florida, Gainesville, FL
B.A. in Sociology, May 2012

RESEARCH INTEREST
Education, Crime, law, and deviance, Children and youth

TEACHING EXPERIENCE
Graduate Assistant, University of Mississippi, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, University, MS, August 2014 - May 2016
Permanent Substitute, Kelly Educational Staffing, Jacksonville, FL, August 2013 - June 2014

AWARDS AND FUNDING
Larry W. DeBord Award Recipient for Most Outstanding Sociology M.A. Student, 2016
2015 Summer Graduate Research Assistantship Recipient ($1,000)

CONFERENCES AND PRESENTATIONS
79th Annual Meeting of the Southern Sociological Society, Buckhead/Atlanta, GA, April 2016
“The Politics of Marriage: From Intimacy to Public Policy”
Round Table, Session: Race and School Discipline

Annual Graduate Symposium, Tulane University, New Orleans, LA, March 2016
“Social Justice and the City: Implications for Race and Equity”
Panel Presenter, Session: Justice and Policing

Alabama-Mississippi Sociological Association Annual Conference, February 2016, Jackson State University, Jackson, MS
“The Status of Sociology in Alabama and Mississippi”
Panel Moderator and Presenter, Session: Sociology of Education II

University of Mississippi 3MT (Three Minute Thesis) Competition - Finalist, November 2015

SERVICE AND OTHER RELEVANT EXPERIENCE
University of Mississippi
Gamma Beta Phi, January 2015 - May 2016
Graduate Student Council Senate, Student Affairs Committee, September 2015 - May 2016
University of Florida
Women’s Track and Field, July 2007 - May 2012

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS
Alabama-Mississippi Sociological Association
The Southern Sociological Society