

INTEGRATING NATURAL COPING AND SURVIVAL STRATEGIES OF
AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN INTO SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE:
LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE WORKS OF
NANNIE HELEN BURROUGHS

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the historical coping and survival strategies of African American women – as reflected through the works of Nannie Helen Burroughs- that can be integrated into current social work practice. This research is important because it describes, explores and analyzes culturally relevant helping traditions, among African American women that have historically promoted their emotional and psychological well-being. An analysis of methods used by Burroughs was derived from articles, letters, speeches and minutes from various convention meetings. Also, a variety of secondary sources were also used during the research process.

Results from the study are important in that they support the impact of Black women's experiences as a central component to their psychological health particularly in four distinct areas: understanding and appreciation historical oppression in reform efforts; developing and exploring critical awareness/critical consciousness; promoting collective resistance through faith and demonstrating group problem solving through community art and dialogue.

Recommendations from this study include the need for social work profession to validate and disseminate the importance of using non-traditional practice methods when working with oppressed groups. This also includes the professions' employment of Black religious practice/Black church institutions in promoting social and economic reform.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Overview

This study also explores ways in which Black women promoted their own positive mental health by counteracting negative influences they received from society. It also builds on the historical works of Nannie Burroughs as a basis for the development of culturally appropriate methods that can be integrated into social work practice with African American women. These efforts, rooted in the survival strategies learned during slavery, helped Black women take control of their lives. They created their own reality and fought for justice and equality, and as a result promoted their own self-work, value and dignity. Their experiences have laid the foundation for the integration of African-centered and Womanist paradigms into social work practice that is culturally relevant in promoting overall well being among Black women.

Additionally, it suggest that lessons learned from Burroughs' work show elements of Womanist and Afrocentric practices that empower Black women to place their lives and experiences at a center standpoint, even when they are marginalized by their places in the modern social order. Furthermore, the study serves an important function in connecting past coping and survival practices with modern methods of helping that can inform mental health practitioners about culturally relevant approaches that are unique to the Black female experience in the current dialogue on mental health practice in their own communities.

Background

The social work profession has a long history of providing services for people in need (Jansson, 1997; Karger and Stoesz, 1990). Since its inception, the field has developed skills to help various groups of people, including immigrants, the poor and the destitute. By 1920, the social work profession emerged as a leading institution for training

individuals in this area. (Jansson, 1997). Yet, as the profession provided programs to help the poor—women, children and immigrants—there were only minimal services for Black individuals and families. For this reason, organized social welfare services for African Americans were left, primarily, to the Black community. As a result, Black extended families, the Black church and key institutions such as the National Urban League provided both social and mental support within the Black community (Martin and Martin, 1985, 1995). This oversight within the profession of social work continued for many years until the passage of Civil Rights legislation in the 1960s, when the creation of social programs finally were designed to benefit African-Americans. It was also during this period that African-American social workers organized to promote the positive aspects of Black life as a part of the helping tradition. The National Association of Black Social Workers (NABSW) was established in 1968, to promote the welfare and delivery of services specifically to the community of African-Americans (University of North Carolina School of Social Work, 2003). By 1971, the NABSW had developed a Code of Ethics which included a commitment to collective action and service and the promotion of social change for the betterment of the Black community. In 1996, the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) revised its code of ethics and committed the national organization to addressing the needs of disadvantaged groups to encourage sensitivity to cultural and ethnic diversity. This commitment to reaching oppressed groups “requires a reevaluation of the usefulness of normative client system assessment processes and those normative intervention strategies whether targeting the individual, the family, the small group, the community, the social welfare agency, as well as those designed to bring about cultural and societal transformation” (Appleby, Colon and Hamilton, 2001, p. xiv.). The NASW proclamation stated that social workers would be committed to ending social injustices such as oppression, discrimination, and poverty

(NASW Code of Ethics, 1996). Yet, despite the commitment of the NASW to promote justice and fight multiple forms of oppression, social work educators and practitioners have been slow to embrace the use of natural coping and survival strategies as legitimate and applicable practice methods in when working with African American women (Martin and Martin, 1985). This lack of culturally relevant approaches to positive emotional wellbeing can have a negative effect on positive mental health outcomes among African Americans women.

Factors that Influence the Disparity in Mental Health Quality and Access

According to a recent comprehensive scientific review of mental health, the United States Department of Health and Human Services (DHSS) found a greater disparity in mental health rates among minorities. The DHSS averred that, “disparities in mental health services exist for racial and ethnic minorities, and thus, mental illness exacts a greater toll on their overall health and productivity” (Thompson, 2001, p. v). This is due in part to several key factors. These factors include racism, lack of accessible services, poverty, clinician bias, and personal attitudes towards the mental health system, which can influence an individual’s decision to receive treatment for problems. (DHHS, 2001). It should be noted however, that this list is not exhaustive, but provides a basic framework in describing the breadth of the problem many African Americans face in seeking and obtaining help for mental health problems.

Racism and Discrimination

It has been documented that racism (perceived and actual) and discrimination may affect the psychological well-being of minorities, including African Americans (DHHS, 1999; DHHS, 2001; Krieger, et al., 1999). For instance, despite Affirmative Action gains

made from the Civil Rights Movement, together with increased educational and business opportunities, many African Americans still feel distressed and isolated from our experiences within these same institutions. (Cose, 1993). Ellis Cose (1993), a journalist, articulates these feelings in his book, *The Rage of a Privileged Class*, when he writes that:

Despite its very evident prosperity, much of America's Black middle class is in excruciating pain. And that distress—although most of the country does not see it—illuminates a serious American problem: the problem of the broken covenant of the pact ensuring that if you work hard, get a good education, and play by the rules, you will be allowed to advance and achieve to the limits of your ability (Cose, 1993, p.1)

The daily experiences of oppression may also cause increased stress and future mental health problems (Mitchem, 2002). Moreover, in a supplemental report on the effects of culture, race and ethnicity on mental health, former Surgeon General David Satcher (DHHS, 2001) reported that “racism and discrimination Adversely affect health and mental health, and they place minorities at risk for mental disorders such as depression and anxiety.” (p. 38). Subsequently, the internalization of racist beliefs can lead to negative self-evaluation that affects the psychological well-being of Blacks in America (Williams and Harns-Reid, 1999).

A national study conducted by Kessler, et al. (1999), found that 50% of African Americans (as opposed to 31% of Caucasians) associated major discrimination (*i.e.*, hassled by policies, fired from job, etc.) as being linked to major depression and psychological distress. In other studies, perceived discrimination was associated with psychological distress, well being, and self-reported illness (Williams et. al., 1997; Ren et. al., 1999).

Additionally, in the context of collective identity, African Americans have experienced great loss in this society. According to Hamilton (2001), “I am speaking of the countless losses caused by slavery, migration, war, abject poverty, and racial terrorism and the myriad ways contemporary U.S. society still finds to inflict loss on Blacks and other people of color” (p. 63).

Lack of Health Services

Lack of access to available services has prevented many African Americans from receiving appropriate mental health services; the absence of proper service has also prevented many African-Americans from seeking treatment. According to the DHHS (2001), many African Americans are employed in marginal jobs that lack basic health and mental health coverage for employees. Moreover, Brown et al. (2000), found that approximately one-fourth of African Americans are uninsured. This rate is 1.5 times higher than that of Whites. Subsequently, many African-Americans receive mental health treatment through the public insurance program, Medicaid. Although Medicaid covers 21% of African Americans (DHHS, 20001), many more are considered to be the working poor, and are not covered by either private or public insurance programs. Yet, the Medicaid program has been effective in eliminating some of the disparities in mental health treatment between Black and White Americans. (Snowden and Thomas, 2000).

Poverty

Another barrier preventing accessibility of services is poverty (Adler et. al, 1994.; Eaton and Muntaner, 1999). According to the U.S. Census Bureau (1999), 24% of African-American families live below the poverty line. This is compared to 12% of all families reported. The U.S. Census Bureau (1999) population reports state that the average income per capita for African Americans was \$14,397, compared to \$24,109 for

White Americans. These figures are significant in that poverty has been identified as a high risk factor for poor health and mental health. People of color are disproportionately poor; their frequent lack of proper funding places people of color in general, and African Americans in particular, at risk for mental health problems and mental illness. This trend is especially prevalent in the South, where 54% of African Americans currently reside (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).

Clinical Cultural Bias

Clinician cultural bias prevents many African Americans from seeking appropriate mental health treatment. The social work profession is rooted in the Western worldview of medicine. This perspective is based on biological psychology and psychotherapy. (Shorter, 1997). The biological approach to the helping uses drug therapy for mental illness and talk therapy based on cognitive approaches to problem solving. Combined, these approaches create what is known as multi-model therapy, based upon the concepts of scientific objectivity and professional distance. These two concepts are consistent with Western hegemony, but may be ineffective in working with individuals whose worldviews are vastly different.

Finally, distrust of formal systems has caused many African Americans to seek alternative means to deal with mental health problems. For example, in a study by LaVeist et al., 2000, 43% of African Americans reported being mistreated because of their race as opposed to 5% of White Americans. Additionally, the stigma of mental illness may also prevent many African Americans from accessing the few available services. African Americans are less likely to use mental health labels in describing personal psychological problems experienced during their lifetimes. Due to the adversity experienced by their African American forefathers, many African Americans often cope

networks, such as faith-based organizations (Franklin, 1980; DuBois, 1969). As a result of past experiences of racism and discrimination in healthcare, many African-Americans decline to trust their emotional well being to the care of traditional mental health agencies.

African American Helping Networks: Culturally Relevant Ways of Surviving and Thriving

African American Coping Strategies

Despite various factors that prevent African Americans from seeking formal mental health treatment, Blacks have historically used natural coping and survival strategies to promote their own emotional wellbeing. These attempts were also helping in fighting the negative effects of racism, oppression and discrimination. This result was evident in our seemingly innate ability to recover from adversity experienced as a part of the U.S. women of the Diaspora. African American families and communities became resilient as they found ways to promote mental health despite racial adversity and oppression. African American resilience was achieved primarily through racial pride, spirituality, community connectedness and resourcefulness. Yet, contemporary mental health models, developed from a Eurocentric worldview, ignore the unique cultural values of African-Americans. This absence of knowledge leaves a gap in appropriate ways to meet the needs of Black individuals during the helping process of social work.

The DHHS (2001) observes that despite 20th Century increases made through the indicators of social well-being, African Americans continue to be at risk for mental health problems and mental illness. Yet, in dealing with these problems, they contend that “African American communities must be engaged, their traditions supported and built upon, and their trust gained in attempts to reduce mental illness and increase mental health” (p. 69). The social work profession may become a key player in the development

of intervention models to meet the emotional and psychological needs of African Americans by building upon the work of past pioneers whose alternative methods effectively carried African Americans through slavery, disenfranchisement and the Civil Rights Movement. In addition, some of models give special attention to the interaction between privilege, power and racism (Pinderhughes, 1989; Swigonski, 1996), and cultural coping skills among Black people (Daly et. al., 1995; Martin and Martin, 1985, 1995; Sheile, 1996, 2000).

Several studies on mental health among African Americans have noted that informal support networks are a major source of support during times of crisis (Daly et. al, 1995; Taylor, Hardison and Chatters, 1996; Taylor, Neighbors and Broman, 1996; Verof, Douvan and Kulka, 1981). These studies found that African Americans search for “active attempts to provide alternatives to a stressful situation” (Broman, 1996, p. 119). Another effective coping strategy during times of crisis is the use of informal support networks which include friends, families, neighbors and church members (Taylor, Hardison and Chatters, 1996). Furthermore, this appears to be true among parents (McAdoo, 1980), senior adults (Taylor and Chatters, 1986), and among African Americans in general (Taylor, Hardison and Chatters, 1996). In their study, Taylor, Hardison and Chatters (1996) found that social networks significantly influenced individuals’ decisions to seek professional help.

McAdoo and Crawford (1991) noted that within the African American community, the church has been viewed as a major source of strength and support for those in need. This concept was also noted by the research of Caldwell, Green and Billingsley, 1994; Lincoln, and Mamiya, 1990; Martin and Martin, 1985, 1995; and Moore, 1991. Religion also has been documented in promoting health (Levin and Chatters, 1998). Researchers found that religion and spirituality promoted well being in

several ways, inclusive of the perception of illness, the promotion of the healing process, and a positive lifestyle (Levin and Chatters, 1998). Additionally, Veroff, Douvan and Kulka (1981) found that African Americans were more likely than Whites to use prayer as a coping strategy.

Today, more than ever, the social work profession is pressed to find new ways to deal with the massive social problems experienced by Black Americans in the United States. Moreover, these models should be based on natural community resources that provide resiliency and protect community members from internal (*i.e.*, low self-esteem and internalized racism) and external (institutionalized and other forms of discrimination) forces that can affect the emotional and psychological well being of individuals.

Afrocentric Social Work Practice: An Alternative Model

Because of this chronic exclusion within the profession, African Americans have had to develop unique and creative ways of providing for the social and emotional needs of the Black community. This goal was primarily achieved by creating a helping tradition to reflect the cultural values that were consistent with their African heritage. These values included the importance of the elements of spirituality, collective identity, and effective knowledge in promoting the development of institutions that would promote social change in the face of oppression, discrimination, and in some cases, exploitation (Daly et. al., 1995; Martin and Martin, 1985, 1995; Sheile, 1996, 2000). In fact, the importance of history and culture in understanding health, mental health and the development of interventions to meet these needs have been echoed by the Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy G. Thompson (U.S. DHHS, 2001).

Unfortunately, although the profession has publicly purported to help people solve their own problems, aid for African Americans—particularly African American women—has been lacking. The profession has failed to recognize the positive impact of

therapeutic models rooted in the Black experience as a solution providing legitimate and appropriate ways to provide support. Mohan (2000) notes that this process, described here, includes social transformation as a goal for human emancipation. The omission of these models within the normative professional discussions has been detrimental by the failure to help African Americans effectively cope with mental health problems. Such a lack of effectiveness with mental health may be exacerbated by experiences of racism, poor self-identity, and cultural alienation. Thus, it is impossible to create a positive atmosphere were transformation can take place. There are, however, a few exceptions: Solomon (1974) introduced a groundbreaking approach to working with Black communities; and Martin and Martin (1985, 1995) offered a detailed historical exploration of the helping tradition within Black communities. Sheile (1996, 2000) provided an Afrocentric perspective for social work practice.

Some social work researchers have discussed the importance of Afrocentric practice as a part of the healing process among African-Americans (Carlton LaNey, 1997; Daly, et. al., 1995; Harvey (2001); Martin and Martin, 1995; Sheile, 1996, 2000). Jerome Sheile (1996) and others (Myers, 1988; Nobles, 1980) have developed an African-centered paradigm for social work that is rooted in: (1) collective identity; (2) spirituality; and (3) the importance of affective (experience-based) knowledge. Through Afrocentric social work, the practitioner promotes the helping process by “assisting clients in gaining cultural knowledge, appreciation, and identity” (Harvey, 2001, p. 231).

Other social work scholars have supported the use of an African-centered perspective in working with Black families. Freeman (1990) contends that when working with Black families, it is important to take group history and oppression into account. Logan (1996) and Smith (1996) both assert that the strength perspective, which builds on self-help and empowerment, is key to a positive functioning within this population.

Gutierrez's (1990) empowerment practice model seeks to give power to women of color individually and as part of a group collectively (Gutierrez, 1990). For African American women, an inclusion of the effects of powerlessness and oppression might aid in the therapeutic process (Gutierrez, 1990; Swignoski, 1996). Harvey (2001) contends that the Afrocentric paradigm is a combination of the person-in-environment, strengths (Saleebey, 1992), and empowerment (Gutierrez, 1990) perspectives. Therefore, in addition to an African-centered perspective, Womanist practice incorporate the unique experiences of Black women in the dialogue on relevant and appropriate social work practice.

Womanist Practice

The above-mentioned myriad of social work practices clearly shows that there have been attempts within the profession to address the needs of people of color. What is lacking, however, is a dynamic emerging approach that focuses specifically on working with African-American women (as well as women of the African Diaspora), one that is rooted in the uniquely American situation where gender, race and oftentimes class, intersect. A Womanist perspective addresses the special situation in which Black women find themselves. Alice Walker (1983) first coined the term "womanism" in her book, *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens*. In the book, Walker defines womanism as a term describing a Black Feminist or Feminist of Color. The primary difference between a Womanist/Black Feminist and a White Feminist is the intersection of race and gender. These factors work interchangeably rather than independent of each other. Thus, Womanism moves Afrocentricity to the inimitable world of being both Black and female. Although Womanism has not been explored widely in social work practice, it has been cited in the literature as a much needed approach to group work with women of color (Saulnier, 2000).

White women, for example, often are unaware of their own experience of race or the privileges accorded to them as members of the dominant group; thus, it sometimes is difficult for white women to understand the importance that many Black women put on race, or the relative constancy of the effects of social perception of racial differences. But race cannot be separated from gender since both are experienced simultaneously. Because of this, Black women who work toward feminist goals tend to focus their efforts at the intersections of sex and race, and usually on class struggles as well” (Saulnier, 2000, p. 16-17).

Womanism, in essence, brings value to the experiences of African-American women in this society. It also causes Black women to define our own standards, rather than use the ones given to us by others. There are two assumptions underlying the Womanist approach. These assumptions are racial consciousness (Ogunyemi, 1985) and self-healing (Brown, 1990). Racial consciousness and self-healing represent key values that reflect the African American culture; they are African-centered, and thereby empower Black women. These principles form the basis for individual and collective healing through the understanding of the Black historical experience in America, and the importance of collective identity and spirituality in the therapeutic process. From this knowledge, Black women’s natural helping, and coping and survival strategies need to be studied. The exploration of these methods is useful since they were created by African American women who have transcended gender and racial barriers, and whose works offer important lessons.

Problem Statement and Discussion

Statement of the Problem

It has been documented that the use of culturally relevant approaches to collective self-healing may serve as protective factors that promote mental health and psychological wellbeing among African Americans (DHHS, 2001). Yet, despite this growing body of

knowledge, the social work profession has been slow to embrace informal ways in which African Americans-particularly Black women- use natural coping and survival strategies to promote our own well being. These methods are especially important since many African Americans credit racism, discrimination and stigma as major causes of stress, anxiety and depression (DHHS, 2001). Moreover, despite the commitment of the NASW to provide culturally relevant services and promote diversity, social work practitioners and educators continue to educate their students on normative social work practice models that do not take into account the unique circumstances of African Americans within society. This failure to take a proactive stance has marginalized the profession. Thus, a major problem within the social work profession has been its failure to actively work to develop, test and endorse culturally relevant social work practice methods that can be used in meeting the emotional and psychological needs of African American women.

Discussion of the Problem

Historically, normative models of social work practice represent derivatives from the works of Freud (psychotherapy), Erickson (stages of psychosocial development) and Maslow (self-actualization); as models, they were designed from a Eurocentric perspective that was elitist in nature, and even racist at times. (Hamilton, 2001). This is not to say that these models could not be adapted to meet the need of Black individuals; rather, it is an observation that professional practice becomes intertwined with values that may not be consistent with oppressed populations. Some social workers have modified their work to become applicable to people of color. Therapeutic practice models, designed to work specifically with minority clients, have been gaining attention in the field since the 1970s. Lum (2000) provides an excellent overview of the movement within the profession to address the unique needs of minority and ethnic groups. Barbara Solomon (1976) argued in her book, *Black Empowerment: Social work in Oppressed*

Communities, that there were unique themes (*i.e.*, oppression, powerlessness and empowerment) in ethnic-based social work practices that had not been previously addressed. Lum (2000) noted that “for the first time social work educators began to analyze clinical and community cases from a powerlessness perspective and offered an empowerment intervention strategy as the solution” (p. 21).

As a result of this groundbreaking work, other scholars began to explore the concept of culturally sensitive social work practice with various minority groups. Hopps (1982) introduced the concept of ethnic-based social work practice, which reflected diversity among minority groups while acknowledging their shared experience as people of color. Lum (1986), building on Hopp’s work, operationalized practice with ethnic minorities, based on the distinctive cultural realities of people of color. During the 1980s, social work researchers (Devore and Shlesinger; 1981; Green, 1987) also conceptualized ethnic-based practice in terms of a “generalist” perspective, addressing ethnic sensitivity and cultural awareness among the four largest ethnic groups in the United States (African, Asian, Latino and Native Americans). Sheile (1996) observed that most contemporary ethnic-centered social work practice concepts (Devore and Schlesinger, 1987; Lum, 1996;) merely adapted existing models to work with people of color. Sheile (1996) contended that while these attempts were laudable, “the failure to use the cultural values of people of color in developing new models can be viewed as an implicit expression of Western Ethnocentrism can be defined as the belief that Eurocentric values are the only values that can explain behavior, should be the basis for solving people’s problems” (p. 284).

By the 1990s, the profession began to move from ethnic-based social work practice to a multicultural perspective. According to Lum (2000), this move was rooted in an attempt to promote human diversity and recognize the uniqueness of all individuals.

Yet, as the term became the center of much controversy in academia during the “political correctness” backlash, new models began to emerge addressing cultural diversity (Lum, 2000). During this movement, social workers began to understand that culture counted, and could serve as a source of strength within the helping process.

Expanding on the themes mentioned above, there has been a growing momentum to provide culturally competent social work practice with people of color (Lum, 1999; DHHS, 1999, 2001). The Surgeon’s General Report on Mental Health: Culture, Race and Ethnicity, former Surgeon General David Satcher observed that:

A hallmark of this Supplement is its emphasis on the role that cultural factors play in mental health. The cultures from which people hail affect all aspects of mental health and illness, including the types of stresses they may confront, whether they seek help, what types of help they seek, what symptoms and concerns they bring to clinical attention, and what type of coping types and social supports they possess” (Preface) (DHHS, 2001).

Despite advancements that have been made to address the need for culturally relevant mental health models within behavioral sciences, the social work profession has been slow to address the lack of culturally relevant models that build on the strengths of the African American women’s involvement in religious organizations as a key social support system and network for group and community-based practice. Additionally, creation of new and appropriate models place Black women’s experiences from marginality to a center standpoint. Subsequently, in an attempt to promote positive mental health among African Americans, particularly Black women, it is important for the social work profession to integrate natural helping traditions of coping and survival into current social work practice. Yet, in order to do this, it is important to identify, describe and explore culturally relevant and appropriate practice methods that were devised by Black women for Black women. A case analysis of the works of Nannie

Helen Burroughs offers a good preliminary study of informal practice methods that were used with African American women during a time when their needs, voices and concerns went unheard. Yet, despite these limitations, thousands of Black women were able to survive and thrive within their own spheres of influences.

Burroughs' methods and practices drew on Black self-identity from a uniquely Black Female perspective to promote and empower African-American women individually and collectively. This uniquely Womanist standpoint promotes health, healing and emotional well-being among African-American women. Her ideals and works offer much needed lessons in the conceptualization of alternative intervention approaches that reflect the importance of Black women's experiences within our society.

Goals of the Study

There are two goals of this study. The first goal is to describe and analyze historical ways in which African American women used coping and survival strategies, as drawn from the ideals and works of Nannie Helen Burroughs, to promote their own psychological well being despite the harsh reality of racial and gender oppression in a segregated society. The second goal is to explore ways in which lessons learned from the works of Nannie Helen Burroughs can be integrated in current social work practice that provides culturally relevant approaches to the therapeutic process.

Guiding Research Questions

This research project was guided by the following key questions: (1) What were the major themes in Burroughs' work that provided social support for psychological well being among Black women? (2) What lessons may be construed from Burroughs' ancestral voice in exploring natural coping and survival strategies that can be integrated into culturally relevant social work practices that promote mental health and

psychological well being among African American women? (3) What knowledge from this study can be used to contribute to the body of knowledge on Afro-Womanist practices within social work practice, research and education?

Importance of the Study and Contribution to Social Work Practice

This study is important for several reasons. First, it informs social work about resiliency practice within African American communities. The history of African Americans shows a certain resiliency among African Americans in protecting themselves from the negative psychological effects of racism. This has been due in part to the development of protective factors that are rooted in a strong interconnectedness to family, fictive kin, the church, and local communities. In this vein, this study contributes to the social work literature in several ways.

Second, the study documents social reform practices that benefit African American women. These methods are rooted in the African American woman's cultural traditions of spirituality, collective consciousness, and mutual aid. Through this study, new and innovative solutions to old problems may be found. Additionally, social workers may gain knowledge about the importance of therapeutic practices that reflect the worldview of their clients, which can be empowering and promote liberation and freedom. This knowledge offers the opportunity to improve group/community practice with African-Americans, because it would address our problems in a specifically personal way. Additionally, these indigenous practices could be preferable to past practices of comparing the behaviors of African Americans by a Eurocentric worldview; such comparisons have tended to create a deficit model in dealing with Black clients (Daly et. al., 1995; Swigonski, 1996), thereby causing the Black clients to be viewed frequently as dysfunctional and oppositional to treatment.

Third, the study documents the story of one Black woman who sought to promote the emotional health of African American women empowering them to take action against forces that sought to make their voices invisible. More specifically, it describes and analyzes the social reform efforts presented in the works of Nannie Helen Burroughs. Burroughs formulated solutions to problems of the day, and then applying existing resources to solve the problems faced by multitudes of Black women. Her work gave voice to the thousands of Black women who demonstrated their resilience. Their resilience resulted in protecting their own mental health in the face of stolid disenfranchisement that existed in the forms of slavery, colonialism and disenfranchisement.

Finally, this study is important to the social work profession because it builds upon knowledge of coping and survival strategies of African American women. Particularly, dramatizes the role of collective identity, spirituality and liberation as central to the health and well being among African American women through a unique combination of Afro-Womanist perspectives (Cannon, 1996; Martin and Martin, 1995; Saulnier, 2000; Sheile, 1996, 2000). This study reveals that the African-American Black Baptist religious experience is pivotal as a therapeutic system toward promoting and strengthening the Black church and community. The Black church may be a central force to positive social work results in Black communities, serving as a natural mechanism for direct and indirect community-based practice. Through the apparent accomplishments of one Black woman's efforts, an effective intervention model for the African American woman may be formed for innovative and successful results. In this manner, the African-American community may be acknowledged as having unique characteristics that must be addressed.

Glossary of Key Terms

- African Diaspora - The dispersion of African people throughout the world. This dispersion includes the disquieting relocation from West Africa to the United States, encompassing the experience of North American slavery and racial oppression.
- African American Woman - An American woman of African descent who identifies with the African-American experience. The terms “African-American” and “Black” are used interchangeably.
- Afrocentricity (Afrocentric , African-Centered or Africentric) - Terms used interchangeably to refer to an interpretive worldview that is taken from key values and principles. The interpretive worldview is derived from Africa and maintained, to a certain extent, in the African Diaspora.
- Black Community - “Set of institutions, communication networks, and practices that help African Americans respond to social, economic, and political challenges confronting them. Also known as the Black public sphere or Black civil society” (Collins, 1991, p. 298). This would include the institution of the Black Church, which serves as an entity independent of control outside of the community. It is also a social institution that provides for the spiritual, social and emotional needs of its individual members and the larger community.
- Eurocentrism - An ideology that presents the ideas and experiences of Whites as normal, normative, and ideal” (Collins, 1991 p. 299).
- Oppression - “[A]n unjust situation where, systematically and over a long period of time, one group denies another group access to the resources of society. Race, gender, class, sexuality, nation, age and ethnicity constitute major forms of oppression” (Collins, 1991 p. 299).

- Racial Uplift - “Dating from the antislavery folk religion of the slaves, speaks of the personal or collective spiritual-and potential social-transcendence of worldly oppression and misery.” (Gaines, 1996, p.1). Racial uplift can also be described as an attempt to combat “the racist notion of fixed biological racial differences with an evolutionary view of cultural assimilation. “(Gaines, 1996, p. 3).
- Racism - “A system of unequal power and privilege where humans are divided into groups or ‘races,’ with social rewards unevenly distributed to groups based on the racial classification. Variations of racism include institutionalized racism, scientific racism, and everyday racism” (Collins, 1991 p. 300).
- Womanist Perspective - Culmination of the Black women’s experiences where race, gender and class intersect (Walker, 1983).
- Womanist Theology - A form of liberation theology that is “the systematic, faith-based exploration of the many facets of African American women’s religiosity... based on the complex realities of Black women’s lives.” (Mitchem, 2002, p. ix).

Scope and Methodology

Scope of the Study

The goal of social welfare history is to explore the development of social phenomena and its impact on society, particularly as it relates to the practice of professional social work. To this end, historical inquiry in the field of social work is advanced when critical analysis of social history is used to understand modern occurrences. Historical inquiry provides insight for contemporary and future conceptual concepts and models of practice. To be concise, the use of historical methods in social work research provides the profession with key insights gained from past events. In turn,

the insights gained through historical methodology may improve service delivery and empower oppressed groups that have been marginalized and virtually silenced by the professional domain.

Carlton-LeNay (2001) notes “the exclusion of African-American social welfare pioneers from our historical record is a part of that conspiracy of silence” (p. xii). Allen-Meares and Burman (1995) and Johnson (1991) have also supported this idea.

Unfortunately, this silence has robbed the profession of valuable contributions from African Americans who not only influence the development of the profession, but also provide alternative practice models in meeting the human needs of African Americans and other people of color. For this reason, the author’s research focused on a historical biographical analysis of the methodology of Nannie Helen Burroughs, whose works strongly promoted the mental health of African American women through various methods of racial and social uplift.

The study of the racial and social uplift methodology of Nannie Helen Burroughs, in addressing the issues of her time, may be orchestrated to promote and protect the mental health of African American women. This process is important to the social work profession for three reasons. First, it documents the contributions of African-American women to social welfare history, and gives a voice to countless women whose experiences have not been regarded or appreciated. Second, it explores ways in which African-American women were obliged to promote their own psychological well being by incorporating an African-centered psychology. Finally, it offers conceptual models that may be implemented to fight oppression and injustices among African-American women and other people of color.

Methodological Framework

In conducting biographies in social welfare, there are three main types of life histories: complete, topical, and edited versions (Carlton-LaNey, 1990). This research project employed the use of the topical biography to convey the manner in which Burroughs' work promoted positive mental health, thus providing a guide for current outreach in this field of endeavor. The research presents several phases of Burroughs' life works that create a pattern for modern interventions to address the issue of emotional well being among African-American women. Therefore, the framework of the study consisted of a critical analysis of historical information on the life work of Nannie Burroughs.

This methodology uses thematic (or topical) approach for organization of the research material. This approach created a fluid flow within the narrative while embracing the topic under discussion during each theme. Moreover, the method was chosen to achieve what McDowell (2002) describes as "both the patterns and the detail of historical events" (p. 136).

Despite the benefits and contributions of historical research, it has been marginalized within the social work profession (Fisher and Dubicz, 1999). Although historical research within social work reached an apex in the 1950s, it began to decline as more and more researchers adapted a positivist approach to research. Yet, as the profession maintains its integrity, it is important for researchers to embrace methodological pluralism, and a balanced approach to research options within the profession (Rubin and Babbie, 1997).

With this in mind, the author chose to use historical research as the most effective way to document the development of a new social work paradigm for Afrocentric social work practice; it expands the social work knowledge base, and becomes a social work

imperative toward eliminating cultural oppression by “codifying the cultural values of people of African descent into a paradigm for explaining human behavior and solving societal problems” (Sheile, 2000, p. 14).

Data Collection and Description of Archival Sites

The data was gathered by reviewing primary data sources such as personal letters, bulletins, minutes, personal notes, letters, correspondences, speeches, writings, and other historical records of Nannie Burroughs. The collection, entitled the Nannie Helen Burroughs Papers, may be found at the nation’s Library of Congress.

The Una Robert Lawrence Papers are located at the Archives and Historical Library of the Southern Baptist Convention. The collection contains minutes of the Annual Reports meetings of the National Baptist Convention’s Woman’s Convention. The archives also contain correspondence between Nannie Helen Burroughs and Una Roberts Lawrence as well as bulletins and other printed material.

Finally, secondary resources from articles, books, pamphlets and other printed material have been used to provide supportive information about events surrounding the times in which Burroughs lived. This information was gathered from books and articles written about Burroughs found at Louisiana State University, The Nannie Helen Burroughs School, Inc., and the Internet.

The Nannie Helen Burroughs Collection

The majority of the author’s research was conducted at the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., in a review of the Nannie Helen Burroughs Papers. The Nannie Helen Burroughs Papers cover a time span from 1900 to 1979, with most of the material pertaining to the years from 1928 to 1960. The collection consists of correspondence, speeches, writings, subscription orders, financial reports, student records, memoranda, and other printed material.

Burroughs's papers are divided into 342 containers, which consist of 134.4 linear feet. In the interest of research focus, the author reviewed those files that were related to the research topic. A majority of data was gathered from the Administrative files, which provided an informative and diverse sampling of Burroughs' papers.

In addition, the I reviewed and collected material from the General Correspondence Series. There were several letters to and from extended family members, but there were no letters relating to her private life. The majority of Burroughs' correspondence consisted of letters promoting her work with the National Training School or her efforts in regard to the Woman's Convention of which she was the Corresponding Secretary (1900-1948) and President (1948-1960). Other areas of interests included letters reflecting her worldview in regard to the church, as well as economic, social and political positions of African Americans at that time. Some of her concerns were emphasized in correspondence relating to political interests, such as the National League of Republican Colored Women; economic interests, such as The National Association of Wage Earners; and her involvement in various national committees, such as the 1932 Committee on Negro Housing of the President's Conference on Home Building and Home Ownership. Other correspondence reflected her social activism to uplift the race and Black Women; these letters include messages to President Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Federal Emergency Relief Agency Secretary Harry Hopkins. Burroughs also had ongoing correspondence with Civil Rights leaders Martin L. King, Jr., Thurgood Marshall, Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., and Black historian Carter G. Woodson.

Other correspondence reviewed and collected bore a relation to Burroughs' invitations to speak before various social, religious and political organizations. It should be noted that some of the above-mentioned letters were carbon copies on newsprint and

had deteriorated and were brittle. The author photocopied material when possible and took handwritten notes if the document was too fragile to be photocopied, or if the material was not approved for copying by the staff of the Library of Congress Manuscript Division.

Burroughs contributed articles that were vital to Black interests for leading African-American newspapers and magazines, such as the NAACP-sponsored *Crisis* and *The Southern Workman*, but only a few of these articles have survived. The author reviewed these articles to identify areas that Burroughs felt were important enough to document.

Known as a great orator, Burroughs gave many speeches during her lifetime, in the United States and Europe. Accounts describing her ability to move a crowd were found in the General Correspondence file. Yet, like her articles, only a few of those speeches survived. However, the author managed to copy and review addresses given in support of Republican candidates in the election campaigns of 1928 and 1932. In addition to articles and speeches, Burroughs wrote several plays. One of these plays, *Slabtown District Convention*, provided a social commentary on Burroughs' view of denominational politics.

The Administrative File was the most diverse of Burroughs' papers. The author reviewed this file to critique the financial records of the Women's Convention and the National Trade and Professional School. In addition, the author collected (with particular interest) information relating to the Cooperative Industries, a self-help cooperative that Burroughs founded and operated. In addition, she also reviewed fragmented documents concerning the National Association of Wage Earners and the National League of Republican Colored Women. Also located in the Administrative File was an extensive amount of information relating to the National Training School. Information consisted of

documentation from the cashbooks, contributions, disbursements and student expenditures. The series also included expense and financial reports.

I also reviewed information from the Subscription and Literature file, consisting of subscription orders from *The Worker*, a missionary magazine and teaching tool for Black Christian women. The author reviewed the Miscellany Series, which contained personal tributes, awards and certificates to Burroughs, as well as programs featuring Burroughs. These files provided insight into programs and affiliations that were close to Burroughs' heart, including achievements of former students, bulletins, programs and newsletters, as well as a variety of other printed matter.

The Una Roberts Lawrence Papers

The Una Roberts Lawrence Papers were housed at the Historical Library and Archives at the Southern Baptist Convention in Nashville, Tennessee. The papers cover 25 linear feet of material. Material researched for this project consisted of 11 files of Nannie Helen Burroughs' correspondence. Information consisted of biographical information, booklets, printed material, articles and photographs. Correspondence between Burroughs, Lawrence, and others who worked with the Southern Baptist Convention were divided from the years 1936 to 1939 and from 1942 to 1944. However, the bulk of Lawrence's correspondence with Burroughs centered on the duo's interracial collaboration in missionary efforts targeted for African-American women.

Annual minutes of the Woman's Convention, an auxiliary of the National Baptist Convention, were housed on microfilm reels at the Historical Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention in Nashville, TN.

Data Analysis

The historical research in this study has been conducted in qualitative methodology. Thus, throughout the research process, the author was continually involved

in a process of examining, analyzing and re-examining the focus of research, and synthesizing information from a review of historical documents. This process is considered a normal part of historical analysis (Rubin and Babbie, 1997). Since historical analysis is more fluid than traditional quantitative research, the process of analysis does not follow a stringent guideline. Rubin and Babbie (1997) noted that the process of historical analysis involved a process of understanding, synthesizing and interpreting researched information. They argued that historical research was similar to what Max Weber described as *verstehen*, the German word for understanding. They also adopted the concept of *hermeneutics*: “Originally a Christian theological term referring to the interpretation of spiritual truth in the Bible, hermeneutics has been secularized to mean the art, science, or skill of interpretation” (p. 446). In short, Rubin and Babbie (1997) stated that historical research involved a subjective process of identifying and interpreting patterns of conduct that fit into a specific “theoretic structure” that would shed light on past events that could shape modern times.

The selection of primary sources was based on a logical process of identifying material related to the guiding research questions (McDowell, 2002; Rubin Babbie, 1997; Grinnell, 1988). Material gathered was indexed by content and time line. Information then was reviewed and re-divided by emerging themes/trends found during the research process. Documents were reviewed again, and key source material was taken from the information based on research questions listed earlier. As the author researched information, conceptualization of the information changed. At this point, primary source material was reviewed again in light of new insights gained during the research process. Source material data was documented and then input into the computer, using Format Ease program.

A major part of the data analysis included the synthesis of information to determine what the information meant. Information gathered during the data collection process was reviewed in the framework of theory and research questions. A part of the process of synthesizing Burroughs' work, as related to theoretical framework, afforded me an opportunity to develop an active relationship with the source. As I began to pose questions about the information under investigation, this consideration led to consultation of additional resources to gain further insight into the questions asked. After synthesizing research information, the author applied the acquired knowledge to explain past events, guided by research questions. Finally, after identifying key themes from the research, I analyzed the information and constructed a natural helping tradition that can be integrated into current social work with people of color particularly African American women. These traditional approaches synthesized elements of Afrocentric (Sheile, 1996, 2000) and Womanist Theological (Cannon, 1995; Gilkes, 2001) methods that have helped African Americans cope and survive the effects of historical and cultural trauma that can negatively impact our psychological well being.

Limitations of Data

There are primarily three major limitations of the data gathered and analyzed in the study. First, Burroughs' personal reports and articles may be incomplete, because her personal view of certain issues was provided without alternative opinions. To address this need, the researcher obtained letters and articles from other sources to present the information in a balanced context, in order to provide a balanced account of her work.

Frequently, there is the danger of presentism in historical investigation (Grinell, 1988). Presentism is the process of interpreting the past in light of modern concerns and characteristics. Therefore, the thrust of the research should be to apply historical

investigation to “paint the background” of social welfare history, thereby providing an alternative framework for modern social work education and practice with women of color. To address this issue, the author focused on evaluating Burroughs’ life work in the context of those social times in which Burroughs lived, and with regard to relevant issues during that historical period.

In historical research, there is also an alternate danger of antiquarianism (Grinnell, 1988). Antiquarianism is the opposite of presentism. It focuses interest on historical events with no concern for framing these historical lessons for understanding modern times. To address this issue, part of the research goal was to identify ways in which information learned from past events might be used in a modern context.

Finally, the problem of fragmentary evidence may become a problem in the research process (Grinnell, 1988). Gaps in source information may cause difficulty in assessing pertinent information. For example, documents may be destroyed or lost, or may not be housed in a public or private facility designed to preserve historical documents. Therefore, in order to solve this problem, Grinnell (1988) suggests that historical researchers attempt to fill the gaps in documentation, making sure that research reports are consistent with known available facts. For this reason, the author evaluated the historical information for research purposes, in light of the socio-historical context in which Burroughs lived.

Tests for Validity and Reliability

In conducting sound research, the author applied a test for internal and external validity to ensure that the written document was internally consistent. This was done by examining the degree to which data in the document remained consistent with information known about past events, thus testing external validity. The performances of these tests increased the accuracy and significance of the research. Test for reliability was

achieved by examining primary source information for bias, while cross-documenting information with other accounts of events during the identified time period. It should be noted that throughout the research process, the author used the following questions to analyze the reliability of the research as outlined by McDowell (2002).

- Were the author's objectives honest, unbiased, and intelligent?
- Was the document completed soon enough after the event?
- Would the meanings of words used at that time have different meanings today?

Comments on Historical Research Methodology

A historical research method was used to describe, investigate and analyze events about the work of Nannie Helen Burroughs, in relation to her efforts to psychologically empower African-American women through racial and social uplift. Primary and secondary sources were considered in gathering information to answer the research questions. This material was gathered, indexed and analyzed to identify trends that would provide insight into the topic under discussion.

Although historical research is not widely used in doctorate research, it is best used in documenting the contributions of African-American social reforms and providing insights on past models that might be effectual in modern social work practice. Additionally, this historical research is important to the field, because it promotes the concept of pluralism within social work research and provides a wealth of historical information that enriches the profession.

In addition to analysis based on historical method, I chose to also analyze the research material from the lens of Wolcott's (1999) three-phased approach to transforming qualitative data. These steps in this process, which are interrelated, are description, analysis and interpretation. First, the *description process* illustrates "what is

going on here?” Through historical construction, the research provides a framework for understanding key elements there were in play in shaping Burroughs’ ideology and worldview that led her to empower women and girls through racial and social uplift efforts. Second, the *analysis* process evaluates “how things work.” In analyzing the data, I began to review how Burroughs articulated an Afra-Womanist perspective through her works from several key themes that emerged during the research process. Third, the *interpretation* process involves understanding “what does all of this mean?” In this section, I fuse the themes analyzed earlier to reflect the key tenets of Burroughs’ work that places Black women at the center standpoint based on an Afra-Womanist perspective. Finally, I used the themes identified in the analysis section to develop lessons learned that can be integrated into current social work practice that is rooted in Black women’s experiences and standpoints within society.

As a historical study, the research shed light on ways in which African-American women used the indigenous churches as havens in which to heal from the devastating effects of racial and gender oppression caused by slavery, legal and otherwise, perpetuated through the Black experience in America. This study provides lessons from the past that may be employed in meeting the unique needs of the Black Woman of Today from an African-Centered perspective. The viewpoint is uniquely African American, and defined by distinct personal and cultural values. The research will exhibit important lessons learned from the past that will prove to be of enduring value in the development of current and future models of social work practice. The footprints of the past will lead to new pathways for the future in the formulation of these dynamic models for the 21st Century—a means to elevate the overall mental and emotional well being of African American women in the years to come.

Organization of Subsequent Chapters

Chapter 2 explains the theoretical framework and assumptions of the study. It also provides the framework for analyzing the research material in context of the historical role of the African-American Baptist experience. It also discusses ways in which the Black Baptist religious experience may be effective in supporting a framework for creating a network system where Black women can find social support and empowerment.

Chapter 3 provides a case analysis of the life and works of Nannie Helen Burroughs as experienced through her work within the Black Baptist religious tradition. The chapter describes and analyzes ways in which Burroughs used national helping and coping strategies to promote the overall psychological well being among African American women. Additionally, this chapter also explores the lessons learned from the essential themes that emerged during the research study.

Chapter 4 provides a summary and conclusions about the research study. I also offer my personal reflections on the research study.

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS AND ASSUMPTIONS

Afrocentric and Womanist Theoretical Frameworks

Theories may become efficacious tools to shape the worldview and beliefs of a group of people who share common realities. The theoretical underpinnings of this study are based on African-centered and Womanist paradigms. The term “Afrocentricity” represents a perspective that is African-centered and is a response to the lack of development in psychological theories specifically for Black people. This perspective is also relative to the African-American experience. (Karenga, 1984, 1990, 1993; Asante, 1988; Mikel, 1995). Contemporary scholars of this worldview have posited that an African-centered paradigm approach, fashioned to meet the psychological needs of Black people, should be based on a collective experience based on commonality and cultural identity, originating in Africa and surviving, to a certain degree, in America. This worldview supported the idea of the collective “I am, because we are” approach for the promotion of positive mental health in African-American communities.

Traditional western psychological theories supported the ability of the individual to solve personal problems with the help of a therapist as an expert, and with a common cognitive approach termed “talk therapy.” Although such theories provided a scientific basis for their assumptions, many of them supported racism as an economic and social policy in the United States. Even at the present time (although not as obvious as in the past), modern social science theories continue to marginalize African Americans as dysfunctional, discordant, and destructive. Yet, these same theories fail to factor in the psychological impact of racism as a contributing factor for the emotional problems often experienced by African Americans. Nor do the theories attempt to provide mental health services for African Americans from a culturally relevant approach that has been created by Black people for Black people.

Afrocentricity in Social Work Practice

The philosophical concepts of contemporary African Americans, as well as those rooted in the traditions of Africa, are embedded in an African-centered perspective that survived the Middle-passage transport to this country from Africa, and subsequent slavery, racism and disenfranchisement. Through sheer survival and in the face of debilitating odds, African Americans have maintained many traditional values and cultural legacies derived from Africa (Franklin, 1980; Martin and Martin, 1985, 1995; Nobles, 1980). These values and legacies are important in adapting social work practice methods that reflect the values and culture of Black women of the Diaspora.

Within the social work literature, however, there are only a handful of articles that suggest the use of an African-centered paradigm in social work practice. These articles included a discussion of the development of effective coping skills of African Americans (Daly et al., 1996); an Afrocentric-paradigm in social work practice (Sheile, 1996); the impact of privilege and the need for Africentric social work practice (Swigonski, 1996); the role of Blacks in social welfare history and the value of Afrocentricity (Carlton-LeNay, 1999); and the use of an African-centered worldview in working with people of African descent in Great Britain (Graham, 1999).

Jerome Sheile, a leading African-American social work scholar, developed an Afrocentric paradigm for social work practice. Sheile (1996) stated that there were several main goals in promoting an Afrocentric paradigm within social work practice. They were as follows: (1) To promote an alternative social science paradigm that is more reflective of the cultural and political reality of African Americans as well as seek to dispel negative distortions about people of African ancestry by legitimizing and disseminating a worldview that acknowledges the collective psyche of people of African descent. (2) To promote a worldview that will facilitate spiritual, moral and humanistic

Values; and (3) To provide people of different cultural and ethnic groups with a shared sense of mutual interests and values.

To achieve the goals listed above, Sheile (1996) noted that the Afrocentric paradigm differed from the Eurocentric one in specific ways; First, Sheile suggests that human identity could be found within the collective experience of the African-centered paradigm. This view is also supported by Asante (1988), and Karanga (1993). Sheile (1996) argues that, “the Afrocentric paradigm conceives of individual identity as a fluid and interconnected way of uniquely expressing a collective of group ethos” (p. 287). Within this scenario, individuals meet the needs of the group and by doing so, were able to meet their own needs as well. Daly et al (1995) noted that in most traditional African cultures, the concepts of “alone” and “ownership” were not recorded, because they were foreign to the collective experience. On the other hand, however, Sheile (1996) contended that traditional Western models supported the autonomy of the individual as a primary cultural value.

Second, Sheile affirms that spirituality is fundamental to the vitality and growth of African Diaspora survivors within the African-centered worldview. In addition, the spiritual aspect of life was equal to the physical aspect. (Karanga, 1993; Mbiti, 1970; Myers, 1988). Nevertheless, the social work profession’s predominant European worldview considered spirituality to be marginal in a successful helping process. In contrast to this view, Sheile (1996) argued that spirituality not only was a source of strength, but also offered solutions to human suffering and oppression. A few theorists recently have explored the role of the spirituality in social work practice (Bullis, 1996; Canda and Furman, 1999; Van Hook et. al., 2001; Neighbors et. al., 1983). Others such as Billingsly, 1992; Grant, 2001; Levin, Taylor & Chatters, 1995; Martin and Martin, 1985 have specifically focused on the impact of spirituality and religion among Blacks in

America. Yet, generally speaking, however, the majority of practitioners and educators gave little attention to the impact of African American spirituality as a key coping mechanism.

Nevertheless, spirituality continues to importantly shape the worldview of African Americans, particularly Black women (Mattis, 2000; Billingsley and Caldwell, 1991), and has impacted the psychological well being of African Americans (McAdoo, 1995). This suggests a significant opportunity for the integration of Black religious experiences as a part of the therapeutic process in working with African-American women, particularly since Black women have been found more likely to participate in formal worship services, where spirituality is a primary component of the experience (Levin, Taylor & Chatters, 1995; Mattis, 1997; Neighbors et. al., 1983).

Third, Sheile argues that intuitive and affective “ways of knowing” are as critical and important as rational methods in problem solving. Traditional Eurocentric thought suggests that problem solving is based on rational objectivity through scientific inquiry. Yet, within the African-centered framework, solutions to problems were based on individual processes that were influenced by a shared collective identity, experience-based knowledge, and a sense of spirituality about the surrounding world. Martin and Martin (1995) have documented the significance of an understanding of historical oppression and its impact on modern problems as a part of the therapeutic process.

Why an Afrocentric Approach?

The Afrocentric theoretical framework was chosen for this study because it best reflected the values, norms and worldview of the people and concepts analyzed. It is commonly known that norms differed from culture to culture. Although the social work profession had endeavored to help African Americans as a part of the therapeutic process,

the use of normative practice models, without the consideration of natural coping and survival strategies, are inadequate are often biased to a hegemony of Eurocentric values. Thus, by not exploring appropriate alternatives, the social work profession encouraged the subtle exclusion of effective social work practice methods for African Americans, particularly Black women.

In contrast, this research study provides an important alternative worldview towards the practice of social work; the results of the study reflect the need for inclusion within the social work profession of a broad-based philosophy with differing thoughts and values. Inclusiveness and fluidity would enable the profession to develop new theories, concepts and practices, which can then be cultivated and tested within the social work profession.

Finally, the use of an alternative philosophical worldview was significant because of its potential to create opportunities for the integration of new practice methods, designed to meet the unique needs of African Americans and other people of color. The traditional concept of universalism in social theory failed to celebrate the unique contributions and principles of people of the African Diaspora. Within an Afrocentric framework, rather than being a detached observer, the researcher or theorist may then become a participant in the process through the shared values and culture of the group.

The Womanist Perspective

A Womanist perspective has also been used in framing this study. Although the African-centered paradigm captures the importance of cultural and ethnic values in the development of social work practice, it fails to address the unique role of Black women, who must contend with oppressiveness from the perspectives of race, gender and class. Collins (1998) and others (Cannon, 1995; Gilkes, 2001; Mitchem, 2002) observed that it

is pivotal to realize that in the search for justice, a Womanist perspective connected the intersection of all aspects in shaping the Black woman's viewpoint (Collins, 1991; 1998).

Alice Walker (1983) coined the term "womanism" in her book, *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens*. As a writer, essayist, and social critic, Walker defined a Womanist as "a [B]lack feminist or a feminist of color." According to Walker, Black feminists differ from White feminists in the traditional goal of feminism, which is to rid women of the oppressive protection of men. For Black feminists, the struggle was not to rid women of the protective stance of Black men—for Black women have never enjoyed that luxury. Rather, the goal of Black Feminism or Womanism is to offer a unique methodological framework for understanding the struggle of women of the African Diaspora, a flashpoint where race, gender and class intersect. Walker (1983) averred, "Womanist is to feminist as purple to lavender" (p.xi). The power of Womanism may well force the issues of equality and social justice for women of color to a higher level of healthy assertiveness.

According to Solomon (1976), the Womanist paradigm was rooted in the empowerment tradition of social work practice. Therefore, this research study will also include an empowerment perspective for women of color (Gutierrez, 1990; Gutierrez and Lewis 1999), specifically group empowerment concepts, which would be based on an understanding of the history of oppression (Lewis, 1994; Martin and Martin, 1995); developing critical awareness about the social forces that have shaped Black women's standpoints (Freire, 1972; Gutierrez, 1990; Gutierrez and Lewis, 1999; and promoting collective resistance through faith (Cannon, 1995; Gilkes, 2001). There remains a necessity for investigation and research into implementing an African-centered paradigm for effective social work practice for African Americans. The result would be the development of an alternative social service paradigm that would reflect the cultural and political reality of African Americans.

Theoretical Assumptions

Womanist Theology and The Black Religious Experience

In order to develop an inclusive conceptual framework for exploring the experiences of Black women in America, a Womanist theology approach has been employed. Womanist paradigm is rooted in the Black Church experience and provides context for Womanist perspectives within the African American religious experience.

Linda Thomas (1998), a Womanist theologian, notes that,

Ideally, the [W]omanist scholar is an indigenous anthropologist—that is, one who reflects critically upon her own community of origin and brings a sensitivity to the political, economic and cultural systems which impact poor and working class [B]lack women being studied. At the same time she gives priority to the life story of the subject in a way that underscores the narratives of a long line of subjugated voices from the past to the present (p. 496).

Womanist theology draws from multiple sources; they are inclusive of Black fiction, poetry, and the ancestral voices of leading Black women in history. More importantly, the Womanist theology gave voice to the spirituality of Black women, an essence discovered within their homes, families, churches and communities. The Womanist theology proceeded from the core of individual and group empowerment among African Americans. That theology brought to light the experiences of Black women, including their spirituality. The concept developed emancipatory historiography as a basis for a cultural and gender-appropriate approach, with the result being a renewal of this self-esteem, together with a social transformation for Black women. That transformation would build on the strength of the shared experiences, spirituality, and personal experiences of Black women. Black communal sharedness, then, has the efficacy to overcome the subtle effects of racial and gender oppression within American society. Nannie Burroughs tapped into a hidden power within the Black community; her foresight

implemented great progress among the Black women of her time. Subsequently, the I researched the works of Nannie Burroughs through a series of themes that emerged, which articulate both Afrocentric and Womanist empowerment paradigms.

The Black Religious Experience as a Healing Balm

Both African-centered social work and Womanist theological practice have viewed the Black religious experience as a source for liberation . The Black Church has a long history of providing social support and protection against the realities of spiritual sickness, emotional and mental anguish. It has also been a place where Black women have historically had the opportunity to develop their leadership and organization skills. Thus, the Black religious experience (as seen through the social network of the Black church) assumes the role of a network system from which an Afra-Womanist practice methods can be developed, tested, applied and modified.

*There is a balm in Gilead
To make the wounded whole,
There is a balm in Gilead
To heal the sin-sick soul.
-Traditional African American Spiritual
(Songs of Zion, 1981, No. 123)*

The lyrics in this African American spiritual reflect the role of the Black church as a place for spiritual and emotional healing. The context of this shared suffering is taken from the Jeremiah 8:22 of the Old Testament from the of the Bible (New King James Version, 1996). As a point of reference, it should be noted that the “Black church” refers to the development of the communal Church life of African Americans. The “Black church,” the African American spiritual center, was concentrated primarily in the South, since a majority of the parishioners in Black churches have evolved from the slave experience. These indigenous churches were the direct result of the reality of Black

oppression in America. Although there was no unified “Black church,” there was a Black church that extended beyond the walls of religion to become a symbol for Black unity, as well as a center for social and emotional justice.

Emergence of the Slave Church

Historically, the Black church has been a major agent for delivering mental health services within the African-American community. Mental health, in this context, was primarily achieved through the provision of informal social support that eased the effects of racism and oppression. The Black church also provided a primary source of social support to families and children (Lincoln and Mamiya, 1990; Caldwell et al, 1994). From a strengths perspective (Saleeby, 1992), the Black church was primarily a social network in local communities (McAdoo, 1991). Grant (2001) observed that the institution of the Black church served a spiritual and social role unique to Black people—one of protection, survival and healing. In short, during slavery, the Black church emerged from a desperate need to preserve the dignity of African Americans and to provide for the emotional and social needs of the slave community. Moreover, it developed and expanded in direct response to the inhuman harshness of American slavery, which resulted in the disenfranchisement of Blacks from American society. Slave religious worship was an example of faith, as well as a tool to mentally defy the inhumanity of slavery. In fact, according to Gaines (1996), the Black religious experiences provided a framework for racial uplift. He comments that, “one popular understanding of uplift, dating from the antislavery folk religion of the slaves, speaks of a personal or collective spiritual-and potentially social-transcendence of worldly oppression and misery.” (p. 1).

In addition to providing a safe haven to regain one’s sense of humanity, the Church provided spiritual and emotional support through individual outreach efforts

among church members. This form of self-help gave slaves a sense of personal accomplishment that connected them with others who shared an identical life experience. W. E. B. DuBois commented on the role of the Black church, in 1909, when he observed that “the Negro church is the only social institution of the Negroes which started in the forest (of Africa) and survived slavery. It is natural therefore, that charitable and rescue work among Negroes should first be found in the churches and reach there its greatest development.” (p.16). In short, DuBois saw the potential of the Black Church for reaching its own community and promoting social and emotional well being in that community.

Despite the harsh conditions of slavery, the ante-bellum Black church provided social support and cohesion. Later, the slave church gave way to more autonomous Black churches that served as the centers of social welfare and overall well being within the Black communities throughout the South. W. E. B. Dubois (1909) was almost prophetic when he observed the unique role of the Black church: “The Negro church of today is the social center of Negro life in the United States and the most characteristic expression of African Character” (p. 142). Dubois further described the expansive function of the church when he stated that in the Black church, “considerable sums of money are collected and expended here, employment is found for the idle, strangers are introduced, news is disseminated and charity distributed. At the same time, their social, intellectual, and economic center is a religious center of great power.” (p. 143).

It was this energizing power of the Black church that supported African Americans through segregation. The mental well being of its members was sustained through religious worship that reflected—and continues to reflect—its African heritage. For example, church sermons set the stage for encouraging African Americans to take a stand for what was right, and to fight for social justice and peace of mind. Prayers encouraged

worshippers to endure despite the sorrows they had experienced. The spiritual songs of the Black church provided an outlet for emotional release and allowed members to share in the Black collective experience. Since many slaves were denied formal educational training, they had no access to theories and treatment practices that addressed mental health issues. Despite such limitations, slaves created a system of mental health care that was engrained in their mode of self preservation and self help. Therefore, the context of community in the slave experience was initially developed through the slave church, and enlarged by the growth of the Black church.

Segregation and the Black Church

Following the end of the Civil War, many Blacks attempted—often for the first time—to free themselves from the subordination of Whites by providing for the holistic needs of people in local communities. Mental health during this time was achieved by providing slaves with an uplifting experience that defied the lack of freedom they experienced as slaves. During reconstruction, the Black church burgeoned, becoming the center of Black life in America. It provided a primary social function by serving as a shelter from White society. In addition, the Black church promoted communal ties that initiated the development of leadership skills and self-help. It was during this time that the Black church fought dogmatically to counteract the effects of disenfranchisement. By the turn of the century, the Black church was well-established in providing for the social needs of its members and the African American community at large. Similar to their white counterparts, African-American women became involved in the club movement and integrated club activities into their church life. Through the club movement on a national level, and mutual-aid societies on a local level, African Americans continued to provide self-help and support for members of their communities in an effort to uplift the race. In addition, funding for this work was often provided from state and local religious

associations that were affiliated with Black churches. Bray (1986) observed that the institution of the Black church has served a spiritual and social role that is unique to Black people. Other works (i.e. Frazier, 1974) have traced this development of the Black church in response to the harsh realities of slave life and disenfranchisement during segregation (Foner, 1988).

The Black church, in addition to spiritual uplift, also promoted a sense of individual and collective worth and human dignity that was contrary to the racial discrimination practiced by many Whites. Franklin (1980) noted that since the 1920s, the Black church has provided many social service functions. Through the Black church, this system developed what Hine (1984) described as a “distinct Black infrastructure” independent of White society. Moreover, the Church was instrumental in bringing Black women together, based on their collective experiences while developing their spirituality, and later their social activism. This work was particularly evident from the ancestral voices of great women of faith such as Sojourner Truth and Harriet Tubman.

Brooks-Higginbotham observed in *Righteous Discontent* (1993), that women’s historians tend to focus on the secular club movement. It should be noted, however, that “clubwomen themselves readily admitted to the precedent of church work in fostering both woman’s consciousness and a racial understanding of the common good” (p. 16). Nannie Burroughs was one woman who took advantage of the growing trend of women’s associations to become a national figure among the Black Baptist Women. Burroughs’ role evolved through the development of the Woman’s Convention, an auxiliary of the National Baptist Convention, U.S.A. Inc. Through her affiliation with the convention, she was able to address the negative effect racism had on the Black psyche by promoting spirituality, collective consciousness and experienced-based action. Her work provides resourceful lessons from the past that may be used in the development of a modern,

Afrocentric, social work practice model that incorporates the strengths of the African American women's spirituality and collective consciousness as lived through the Black experience in America.

Just like any other group of people, African Americans needed a system (rather informal or not) to help them cope with the realities of displacement and disillusionment in the American social system. Although there was no formal provision for the delivery of mental health services in the early Black church, informal social supports alleviated the mental anguish and psychological scars inflicted on a segment of society forced to be subservient to the larger society. Black women worked as leaders in the development of spiritual and social programs that promoted racial and social uplift. The contribution of Black women as leaders, such as Ella Baker, Septima Clark and Fannie Lou Hammer, in the new societal frontiers paved the way for others to follow. Their intuitive inspiration was fresh, new, and powerful.

The Transitional Black Church

As the Civil Rights movement paved the way for social advancements and new opportunities for some African Americans, many others remain trapped in a cycle of poverty that had worsened for 40 years. Unfortunately, as poverty rates increased—especially in blighted urban areas—many traditionally Black churches struggled to meet the holistic needs of the oppressed and disenfranchised in their communities. Increasingly, an individual had to deal with a sense of despair, hopelessness and depression. Subsequently, traditional Black churches have been faced with the challenge of being able to provide counseling services at their churches as well as link individuals with formal mental health services.

Several major studies (Levin, 1984; Taylor, 1986; Taylor and Chatters, 1988; Thomas, et. al, 1994) have shown that faith institutions in African-American

communities provide a variety of services, including health education, children's programs, food and clothing programs, and financial assistance. Historically, Black churches provided social services that had become inaccessible to Blacks (Frazier, 1974; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990) at that time. Few studies, however, have examined the role of the Black church in providing mental health services for the congregations or for their local communities. In a study of 635 African-American congregations in the northeastern United States, survey findings noted that Black churches provided a variety of congregational programs. The studies (Billingsley & Caldwell, 1991; Caldwell et. al., 1995; Caldwell, et. al., 1994; Thomas et. al., 1994) discovered that these churches provided over 1,700 outreach programs. Of these programs, 18% of the congregations did offer counseling and intervention programs. Furthermore, the Billingsley and Caldwell study (1991) noted that 50% of the faith-based institutions stated that they had made referrals to formal mental health service delivery systems.

Throughout the country, many individual Black churches continue to provide social support services for local community and members of their congregation. These services have been able to expand, particularly with the passing of President Bush's Faith-Based Initiatives Program. Subsequently, as Federal resources continue to give aid to state and local community agencies, it will be important for the Black church to emerge as a leader in promoting the overall mental health of African Americans- particularly women. Therefore, the Black Church has emerged as an institution that provides spiritual and physical support for African Americans through a collective identity based on a commonly shared experience.

Reflections on the Black Religious Experience and the Psychological Needs of African Americans

Traditional Black churches may serve an important social and spiritual network for creating a positive environment in which Black women can address issues of cultural trauma, experienced through racism and oppression. Subsequently, Black churches have the potential to serve as a community base for the provision of group and community social work practice with African American women.

In view of the fact, that many African Americans do not access formal mental health services, until a crisis erupts, Black churches can serve as a safe haven for emotional well being. This sense of holistic health can be especially useful for people who may normally fall between the cracks within more traditional settings that fail to address the cultural realities and strengths of Black life in America. The Church serves as a special network for African American women. According to a study by Lincoln and Mamiya (1990) African American women make up 70% of the top Black denominations. Thus, it can serve as an excellent resource for supporting and attending to the needs of Black women.

As the Federal government continues to decrease funding for mental health services, Black churches can position themselves to benefit from opportunities within President Bush's *Faith Based Initiatives* program; such benefits would provide an array of services that are culturally relevant, while promoting self-esteem, wholeness and well being for African-Americans. Congregations may serve as a feasible and viable alternative to State and Federal programs that traditionally have been disjointed and ineffective in dealing with the total needs of African Americans. Black religious congregations have historically been viewed, by many, African Americans, as a community (as well as a spiritual) asset. Within this setting, social networks may be

formed and nurtured. Black women can use church/community associations and networks to mobilize themselves as they work for social justice among members of the African Diaspora. This may help community members, who do not belong to a local Black congregation, feel comfortable about collectively working with others to achieve common goals. Finally, the Black church is in the position to provide quality and culturally relevant services at little or no cost to individuals. Outreach is considered a primary mission of most religious organizations, and churches are primarily funded through the weekly tithes and offerings of members.

Yet, in order to ensure the availability and continuity of social support services, it is important for social workers to develop collaborative relationships with local ministers as key stakeholders in the provision of mutual aid, self-esteem and mentoring groups at Black churches. Historically, the minister has played a primary role in the Black community. (Taylor, et al., 2000). The minister is also well respected and his support of specific programs will determine, for the most part, the success of any type of outreach program. Ministers also function as pastoral counselors, and are often involved in programs that promote the overall well being of its members. Finally, the minister's support of outreach programs for women are important because ministers have historically served as the link between the Black community and larger social systems, which may be particularly related to political mobilization and social action.

It is this power of the Black church that has supported African Americans from slavery to freedom, through segregation and racial uplift, to the liberating actions of the Civil Rights movement. Moreover, the Black worship experience serves as a therapeutic group experience. For example, church services on Sunday mornings set the stage for encouraging African Americans to take a stand for what is right. As a group, members

know by affective knowledge that God will make a way out of 'no way.' This hope is reflected in songs, prayers and sermons. Despite the gains made by the Civil Rights Movement toward dissolution of inequality, economic slowdowns and injustice for Black individuals, many are turning back to traditional Black religious institutions as places of healing, from the cultural trauma and humiliation often experienced by Blacks in America. In many ways, the Black religious experience is an important social network in the lives of many African Americans. The practices, rituals and traditions of the Black Church experience reflect the stage for an integration of an Afrocentric paradigm that also reflects Womanist theological practice. Within this context the Black Church is an important agent in moving the experiences of Black women from the margin to the center by expressing their faith in their everyday experiences.

CHAPTER 3: A CULTURAL CASE ANALYSIS OF THE WORKS OF NANNIE HELEN BURROUGHS

Overview

This chapter explores ways in which 19th and early 20th century Black female activists, as seen through the ancestral voice of Nannie Helen Burroughs, devised indigenous ways to cope, survive and even thrive within a society where they experienced constant and persistent racism and discrimination. These methods can offer important lessons in the integration of culturally relevant social work methods, which are rooted in the Black experience, and promote African-centered and Womanist values and practices. These attempts can go a long way in closing the discrepancy in mental health access and treatment between African Americans and Whites (as discussed in chapter 1). Additionally, this chapter offers a case topical biography of survival practices that Burroughs employed as a part of her goal to uplift the race and improve the status of African American women in society.

Background on Nannie Burroughs

Nannie Burroughs was born in Orange, Virginia in 1879. She grew up in a time when many freed slaves continued to struggle to find their identity after Reconstruction during the late 19th Century. In addition, Burroughs' own experiences had taught her how the negative effects of racism and discrimination could effect the Black psyche, since her memories were rift with personal setbacks during her life due to her race and gender. Although the setbacks ultimately affected her view of the world, Burroughs chose to dedicate her life to orchestrating a racial and gender uplifting for the Black females of America. As a result, her work can offer lessons on natural coping and survival strategies used by African American women provide to promote emotional well being and self-esteem that can heal the negative valuations experienced by a myriad of Black women in today's society. Moreover, research has shown that that there is a great disparity between

positive mental health outcomes between African Americans and the dominant society in the United States (IOM, 1994). Racism, discrimination and stigma (DHHS, 2001; NIMH, 2003) have been identified as primary factors that prevent access and utilization of mental health services by African Americans. In an effort to promote mental health and prevent mental illness, it is important to explore natural coping methods and survival practices that have buffered African Americans from the psychological impact of racism on the Black psyche. Burroughs' work serves as a foundation to build upon in the creation of new approaches to social work practices with African American women that actively incorporate African-centered and Womanist practice methods that engage spiritual practices as a method of coping and survival.

Nannie Burroughs came into the public forum at the close of the 19th Century. Her life represents a time in history fashioned by the effects of slavery, together with its demise. Her experiences also mirror the hope of a people who believed that equality was attainable, yet just beyond their reach. For these reasons, Burroughs' life and her works provide important lessons on coping and survival strategies that can be used in contemporary social work practice

Cultural Case Analysis

Burroughs' work represented a unique blend of community-based practice that builds on natural support networks, which promotes empowerment among women of color (Gil, 1998; Gutierrez, 1990; 1999; Gutierrez and Lewis, 1994; Lewis, 1994; Solomon, 1976). Her work is analyzed in the context of three identified and interrelated processes that occurred within the framework of the Black Baptist religious tradition. It was the Black Baptist religious tradition, (through the organization of the Woman's



Figure 1: Picture of a young Nannie Helen Burroughs (n.d.), principle leader of the Woman's Convention, an Auxiliary of the National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., Inc., and Founder of the National Training School for Women and Girls.
Courtesy of the Nannie Helen Burroughs School, Washington, D.C.

Convention, an auxiliary of the National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc.), which created a safe environment for Burroughs and other women to empower themselves and the larger community. These processes are: (1) understanding the impact of historical oppression of African Americans within North America (Martin and Martin, 1995); (2) developing critical awareness/critical consciousness for social reform in shaping Black women's position in society (Freire, 1972; Gil, 1998; Gutierrez, 1990; Gutierrez and Lewis, 1994; Gutierrez, 1990; Parsons and Cox, 1998); and (3) promoting collective resistance based on faith (Cannon, 1995; Gilkes, 2001; Ross, 1989); and (4) demonstrating collective problem solving through community art and dialogue (Gilkes, 2001; Mitchem, 2002).

Understanding and Using Historical Oppression in Reform Efforts

History plays an important role in promoting racial pride, acceptance and self-esteem among African Americans (Quote). It grounds individuals in values and goals that are unique to their African heritage and serves as a buffer against the negative effects of racism and discrimination (Quote). Nannie Burroughs' works captured the importance of using historical oppression in reform efforts. She was able to understand and connect historical oppression to current and future goals for survival and liberation. This theme was articulated as she (1) employed Black religious practice; (2) managed her personal disappointments, which were the result of social forces that promoted segregation and discrimination; (3) honored Black historical figures who fought for equality and justice for African Americans; and (4) uplifted the race as a means to defy negative stereotypes placed on African Americans by the dominant society.

First, Burroughs employed Black religious practice as a freeing force, which was a critical in understanding her practice methods with groups, communities and organizations. The Black Church structure on local and national levels afforded Burroughs the opportunity to develop public speaking, leadership and organizational skills that were

important in helping her articulate her goals and ideas to other women. For example, Burroughs was a lifelong member of the Nineteenth Street Baptist Church in Washington, D.C. (NHB Papers, LOC). Nineteenth Street Baptist Church, like many other Black congregations, provided a safe place where Burroughs was able to articulate her religious convictions through church rituals such as prayer, praise and worship, scripture reading and missionary service. (NHB Papers, LOC).

This adaptation of traditional approaches the missions and ministry was not lost on Burroughs. The Black church was important in Burroughs' development as it also provided an outlet for protest and action, particularly as reflected in the social gospel movement. Martin and Martin (1995) observe that several leading Black Baptist Ministers, including Walter Brooks and Francis J. Grimke, and Adam Clayton Powell, Sr., were influenced by the Social Gospel movement. "The Social Gospel movement sought to apply the teaching of Jesus Christ to the changing problems of an increasingly industrialized and urbanized nation." (p. 155). They sought to achieve these goals by promoting self-help and racial understanding within the framework of Judeo-Christian ethics. Also, as noted in chapter two, the Black church provided a safe haven for Blacks where they could mourn their losses of freedom and heal through cultural rituals such as singing gospel music, and conducting informal services where they shared their personal experiences and sought comfort from other members. Throughout her work and writings she consistently preached the doctrine of service as a sign of one's faith. Cross (1989) notes that Burroughs believed that Christian living was the key to a just society. This philosophy was carried out during the Civil Rights Movement. Martin Luther King, Jr., was influenced by the teachings of the Social Gospel movement during his seminary education. (Branch, 1989).

Second, Burroughs managed her own personal disappointments, which her about the effects of slavery and oppression on the social position of African Americans, particularly Black women. Burroughs developed her own critical awareness/critical consciousness about her own social position as a single African American woman. Burroughs graduated from the Colored High School in Washington, D.C. (later called M Street High and Dunbar High) in 1896. There, Black female teachers and reformers, such as Anna J. Cooper and Mary Church Terrell, who served as role models and mentors as Burroughs' commitment to the Black women's reform movement increased, influenced her. Through their influence, Burroughs became aware of the struggles of African American women as they used club movements, public speeches and printed media to articulate their message of racial uplift, particularly through institution building. From their work, Burroughs was able understand the importance of education in creating a life that was not defined by her sex and gender. Yet, despite being influenced by her mentors, Burroughs endured disappointment early in her career. For example, after graduating from the Colored High School, Burroughs was promised a teaching position. Then she found that she did not get the position because it was fashionable for the school system to hire only light-skinned Black graduates. The year of 1896 may have carried additional significance for Burroughs. Plessy v. Ferguson legalized the separate but equal principle, re-enforcing racial apartheid in America in that year. However, Burroughs would live to see this unconstitutional decision overturned in the landmark decision of *Brown v. Board of Education* some 58 years later.

Despite her early setbacks, Burroughs hoped to settle into the good life of Washington's Black middle class. Harrison (1956) quotes Burroughs as she mused about her first job search: "It broke me up at first. I had my life all planned out, to settle down in

Washington with my mother, do that pleasant work, draw a good salary and become comfortable the rest of my life” (p. 9). Then:

An idea struck out of the suffering of that disappointment that I would some day have a school here in Washington that school politics had nothing to do with, and that would give all sorts of girls a fair chance, without political pull, to help them overcome whatever handicaps they might have. It came to me like a flash of light, and I knew I was to do that thing when the time came. But, I couldn't do it yet, so I just put the idea away in the back of my head and left it there (Harrison, 1956 p. 10).

Around 1897, instead of teaching, Burroughs briefly worked in Philadelphia as associate editor of a Baptist newspaper called *The Christian Banner*. She later returned to Washington, seeking a position as a clerk when she attained a high score on a civil service examination. To her dismay, she was informed that there were no available positions for a colored clerk. She ultimately found a job as a bookkeeper for a manufacturing house and as a Janitress (NHP Papers, LOC; URL Papers, Historical Commission).

Despite the early disappointments in her career, Burroughs found support and opportunities for leadership and service through her participation in the Woman's Convention (WC), an auxiliary of the National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., Inc. (NBC). The NBC was the largest organization of Blacks in the United States. Burroughs leadership as corresponding secretary and later as president of the WC, enabled her to support and inspire hundreds of women by her powerful example as a one-woman change agent to promote social reform.

Third, Burroughs paid homage to Black historical figures their mothers whose names had not been written in the annuals of history books. For example, in a July, 1934, letter to Una Roberts Lawrence, a worker with Southern Baptist Convention, Burroughs asked Lawrence if she would help her write a chapter on “Unsung Heroines Among Negro

Women.” Burroughs said she wanted to write a tribute to the mothers of educated leaders of the first generation of Blacks born after slavery. She wanted the chapter to pay homage to “these women who made rich sacrifices by washing, ironing, cooking and doing all sorts of hard labor to send their sons and daughters to school, to prepare them for leadership among their people.” She wrote that she specifically wanted to tell the stories of mothers of great African America leaders, such as Booker T. Washington, Frederick Douglas, and Paul Lawrence Dunbar. Perhaps she may have even wanted to pay tribute to her own mother who made sacrifices to allow Burroughs the opportunity to receive a good education. Regardless of her personal motivation, Burroughs’ request to Lawrence reveals her commitment and belief in the importance of understanding and appreciating one’s own history as a one part in the equation of racial uplift. Likewise, Burroughs knew all too well that many Blacks adopted a view of their identity from their oppressors those who kept them in bondage through economic and legal systems that culturally humiliated them. Her goal was to fight these negative images with portrayals of individuals who served as inspiring models of the strength of character and determination within the Black race.

Finally, Burroughs committed herself to a lifetime of uplifting the race because of the negative effects of historical oppression on psyche of Black people. She achieved this goal through group-based action and community mobilizing activities for social change. A key avenue to achieve this goal was through the creation of the National Training School (NTS). It is possible that because of the limitation of job opportunities for African-American women, particularly those of a darker hue, Burroughs’ creation of a national training school provided a major attempt to improve the situation of Black women. Burroughs’ focus was on the domestic service profession, perhaps because such a large majority of women were employed in this field. Burroughs believed that the professionalization of domestic work would bring respectability and competition against

the tide of an immigrant labor force that grew during the early part of the 20th century. Yet, as immigrants came to America, they eventually acquired jobs in factories and plants, while Black women remained at work in domestic service. Although domestic science did not become professionalized, Burroughs used institutional building as a means to educate hundreds of women and to instill racial pride in their role in society and work. In addition, Burroughs school was a valiant psychological approach toward fighting class and race division between Black domestic laborers and their White employers. In a promotional brochure (n.d), Burroughs informs potential students that:

The Training School represents a courageous effort at self-help on the part of Negroes in the field of education. They have laid a splendid foundation. The property is valuable, the school is nationally known and is looked upon with great pride, and now it offers a supreme challenge to those who believe in helping people who help themselves.”
(Promotional Brochure, n.d.) (NHB Papers, LOC).

Though correspondences, speeches, and other printed material Burroughs documented her belief that racism at the hands of Whites was the cause of the “Negro problem” in America. Ironically, her staunch conviction was that, despite negative valuations by Whites, Blacks had a responsibility to demonstrate their worth and dignity to Whites. Burroughs felt this would be achieved through improvements made in conduct, appearance and personal environment. After hundreds of years of subjugation, Burroughs’ conviction was that many Blacks had resigned themselves to the oppressive influences of the dominant society and because of this, Blacks needed to work to reshape the prevalent perceptions of the time. Unfortunately, Burroughs often blamed African Americans for the despair and apathy they often experienced, which was due in a large part to societal oppression. Committed to the concept of self-help, Burroughs remained faithful to her cause of racial uplift and wrote a commentary on “Twelve Things the Negro Must Do for Himself” (Burroughs, n.d). For example, in that article, Burroughs notes that “Negro leaders must highly resolve to wipe out mass ignorance. Teach! (p. 32). She argued that education was the key to advancement and noted that “ignorance, satisfied

ignorance, is a millstone about the neck of the race. It is democracy's greatest burden." (p. 32). Burroughs continues her call for Black leaders (those who had achieved some status in society through education and/or wealth) to work with the masses of Blacks who continued to struggle for independence and dignity in light of the negative forces of segregation and Jim Crow legislation preventing them from enjoying equal access to education, health facilities and other basic civil liberties. To emphasize her point, Burroughs states that,

The educated Negro must get used to having a little book knowledge to peddle to his own race... The educated Negro needs an experience similar to that Ezekiel had (Ezekiel 3:24-19) and he should do what Ezekiel did. His learning must go from his head to his heart. A Race transforms itself through its own leaders. It rises on its own wings, or is held down by its own weight. True leaders never set themselves apart. They are with the masses in their struggles. They simply go to the front first. Their only business at the front is to inspire the masses by hard work and [their] noble example. (p. 34).

Towards the dusk of her life, however, Burroughs increasingly affirmed that, in addition to racial uplift, it would take Federal legislation to force change and improvement in the lives of Blacks in America. However, this contrast represents the dichotomy in which Burroughs operated. Her efforts were a product of the era in which social scientists tried to legitimize racism through theories of African-American biological inferiority. Burroughs fought to encourage Blacks to take control of their lives and to portray themselves in a manner worthy of approval in White estimation. Within her understanding of historical oppression of her people, Burroughs also had personal experience with racial, gender and class discrimination. These types of experiences helped her define her own reality of her standpoint in society and positioned her to become critically aware of the forces beyond her control that attempted to devalue her status as an African American woman. Yet, through her understanding of the historical effects of oppression on Blacks in America, Burroughs was able to buffer the negative effects of racism by leaning on the ancestral voices of such women as Sojourner Truth and Harriet Tubman as well as others

who paved the way for her in her fight for freedom and equality for African Americans in general, and Black women in particular.

Developing and Exploring Critical Awareness/Critical Consciousness

Freirean philosophy (Freire, 1972) focuses on the task of using education and knowledge to promote liberation. This liberation, according to Freire (1972) was only effective when achieved through the group process; within this context, group members gained strength through their collective identity and, thereby, shared power. Gill (1996) also discusses the importance of critical consciousness in social work practice with oppressed groups. Burroughs applied various tools of education to promote liberation among African-American women.

Burroughs understood the limitations Blacks experienced because of living within the confines of racial Apartheid. For instance, Burroughs' mother, Jennie Poindexter Burroughs, like many African American women, worked as a domestic servant to support her family. Despite the limited social position of domestic service, in a describes her mother as a woman who was "the independent type, proud, sweet, kindly, and industrious and a marvelous cook." Yet, because of her husband's inability to financially support the family, Burroughs' mother left Richmond, Virginia with her two daughters. Burroughs' younger sister would die in childhood at a later time and moved to Washington, D.C. There, her mother was able to would find steady work (as a domestic servant) and adequate schools for her children (URL Papers, HCSBC). Here early in life, Burroughs became aware that Black women were limited to certain social positions. Through her work with various organizations, Burroughs was able to help and inspire hundreds of Black women gain a critical awareness about their unique role in society by reconstructing negative stereotypes placed upon them, and then reframing these images into a new vision that would promote social justice for African Americans. Burroughs understood the subtle connections between race, gender and class, which subjugated Black women's voices. Thus, through her life work, Burroughs promoted critical awareness/critical consciousness among as she examined societal causes of marginal social locations and educated everyday intellectuals for social reform.

The Creation of the Woman's Convention

Burroughs promoted critical awareness/critical consciousness through her work with Black women of the Woman's Convention (WC), an auxiliary of the National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc. She attained the position of corresponding secretary from 1900 to 1947, and later served as president of the WC from 1948 until her death in 1961. During her tenure in the auxiliary group, Burroughs maintained her position as a leading force, in promoting critical awareness and critical consciousness among members of the organization. Subsequently, because of these efforts, the WC became an impressive organization on the political front of the nation. The organization achieved giving Black women, regardless of class or status, an opportunity to participate in alternative areas of self-government. In addition, it created a separate women's congress, which consisted of delegates from local churches, district and state associations that convened to discuss issues of concern to Black Baptist women. These poignant issues included such subjects as anti-lynching, segregation, and the suffrage movement, and were related to racial and social uplifting efforts for Black individuals. The discussion of issues edified women regarding the leading sociological methods of the time, such as the use of casework methods and utilizing the expertise of trained professionals to help lay Christian women address current social problems and uplift the race.

Burroughs often used educational panels and workshops to educate and inform WC delegates about leading social and political issues that affected African Americans. For instance, in an August 19, 1954 letter, Burroughs invited Thurgood Marshall to speak at the annual Woman's Convention as a member of a panel composed of other speakers; the speakers included a Mrs. Frank C. Wigginton of Pennsylvania and Rev. R. E. L. Hardmond, of New York, the National Baptist Convention Representative to the United Nations (NHB Papers, LOC). At the time, Thurgood Marshall served as the chief council for the NAACP and was working diligently to overturn the *Plessy* decision within educational institutions throughout the South. Burroughs, who was committed to keeping Black Baptist women updated on current social issues told Marshall that, "Nothing would give me greater pleasure than to have you share this very important hour with us and to

have you challenge us to take our responsibility in the business of making this a Christian democracy most seriously.” (NHB Papers, LOC).

In a follow-up letter to Burroughs, dated August 27, 1954 Marshall stated that, “whatever you tell me to do, I am going to do it. I will try to fit into the program and will try to do the job you expect of me.” (NHB Papers, LOC). In that same letter, it is clear that Marshall had great respect for Burroughs and her work to uplift the race:

I know that you know that all of us are forever indebted to you for the long hard fight you have made for our people. You will forever be an inspiration to all of us. These are just two of the hundreds of reasons I have for being so delighted to help out on this occasion (NHB Papers, LOC).

This form of education was particularly significant, because many Woman’s Convention delegates would pass on information learned during the convention to members of state and local Baptist associations and congregations. Through attendance at various institutes and convention meetings, Black women became educated on the methods of practice; in turn, they also shared these practices with women within their local churches. Through this process, thousands of women who had little or no formal education were able to combine their day-to-day experiences with formal knowledge. This model reshaped their perceptions of the world; they thought of innovative means to cope with the recurrent social problems that plagued them due to social inequalities and oppression. Moreover, through these webs of affiliation, hundreds of Black women were able to place their life experiences from being marginalized by Whites to a center standpoint within their own communities.

Burroughs efforts to educate Black Baptist women through various methods used to promote critical awareness among Woman’s Convention delegates created a sense of shared identity and common goals as reflected throughout the Black community, especially the Black Church. Through these means, Burroughs used an existing social network to inform and educate women toward liberating themselves from oppressive forces; the purpose and meaning in their lives was firmly based on Christian commitment to social justice and the exercise of their faith in the everyday world-and a reflection of

Womanist theological practice. Through such interconnectedness, Burroughs was able to defend the race and legitimize the Black experience within a social and cultural macrocosm.

The National Association of Wage Earners

Burroughs also promoted critical awareness and critical consciousness through her efforts to empower working class Black domestic servants, who often found themselves at the bottom of the labor pool. Within this social location, they experienced the perspective of being an “outsider within” as noted by Collins (1991). Collins describes the unique perspective of Black domestic workers as being exploited for their cheap labor and removed from the experience of a life of ease. Yet, on the other hand, they resisted the “outsider within” roles given to them by the dominant society, and developed a counter role-one that placed Black women at the center- within Black civil society. A key example of her efforts is found in her work with the National Association of Wage Earners (NAWE), which was founded in 1920. The goal of the organization was attempt to improve the working and living conditions of domestic workers. With the creation of the NAWE, Burroughs served as the president, Mary McCleod Bethune served as the vice-president, and Mary Talbert served as Chairman of the Advisory Council. The organization created a 9-point manifesto detailing the purpose of the organization (NHB Papers, LOC). They were:

1. To develop and encourage efficient workers.
2. To assist women in finding the kind of work for which they seem best qualified.
3. To elevate the migrant class of workers and incorporate them permanently in service of some kind.
4. To standardize living conditions.
5. To secure a wage that will enable women to live decently.



Figure 2: Picture of the National Association of Wage Earners Headquarter Office. Office was located at 1115 Rhode Island Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C.

Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

6. To assemble the multitudes of grievances of employers and employees into a set of common demands and strive, mutually, to adjust them.
7. To enlighten women as to the value of organization
8. To make and supply appropriate uniforms for working women. This shall be done through profit sharing enterprise operated by the Association.
9. To influence just legislation affecting women wage earners.

Brooks-Barnet (1979) suggests that the organization was formed to provide a an educational forum and dialogue with employers on the unacceptable working conditions of Black women rather than formally organizing to improve the plight of employed African-American women. More specifically the organization was not only dedicated to the improvement of working conditions, but also the creation of a process whereby domestic service workers and employers worked together to negotiate workable demands.

Through her efforts, Burroughs asserts that domestic service workers are professions who are being paid to provide a valuable service and should be treated as equals within this process. In addition, Burroughs promotes the use of political organizing and lobbying as a means to improve the economic conditions of working Black women. Burroughs' use of community organizing techniques to shed light on this issue at a time when many African Americans were disenfranchised and Black women's voices were virtually invisible, Burroughs makes a gallant attempt to bring voice to the plight of thousands of Black women throughout the United States.

It appears that the organization was not successful in unionizing Black female domestic workers and became defunct by the late 1920s. Yet, despite not being able to formally change the economic inequalities among Black domestic workers, Burroughs was effective in organizing women to protest these conditions. Her work with the NAWE served as a catalyst to raise public awareness on the conditions under which many Black women were forced to work.

Promoting Collective Resistance through Faith

A primary act of resistance for Burroughs, as well as for contemporary African-American women, has been an unswerving dependence on spirituality to guide those who are willing to go through the journey of survival, uplift, and liberation and ultimately to social justice (Cannon, 1995; Gilkes, 2001; Ross, 1989). Within this context, Black women have instilled the concepts of testimony and witnessing as a means to express sacredness in our daily struggle for justice; in our collectiveness, we come together in a therapeutic group process that promotes cultural healing and individual well-being.

During the early part of the 20th century, Black women came together because their voices were unheard individually. Therefore, as a collective group, they were empowered to fight society's intent on silencing their declarations of righteous discontent for the perceptions and treatment of African-American women. Burroughs' acts of collective resistance through her faith was manifested achieved through the rituals of giving testimony and witnessing.

Burroughs' speeches rallied masses of Black women to mobilize and organize in order to fight the multiple oppressions they experienced. Burroughs work promoted collective resistance through multiple activities among various women's groups and organizations. These kinds of acts of resistance were based on her own understanding of her faith and the power of a God, who supported her cause. This sense of spiritual destiny was crucial in her efforts to testify and witness to the fact that divine intervention would help Blacks survive the residual effects of slavery and oppression, and bring them to freedom and social transformation. Resistance was seen throughout her works, particularly organizing women for individual and group empowerment. Just as important is the fact that most of her efforts to resist the negative valuations placed on Black women

were guided by her spirituality as she promoted collective resistance through their faith in the religious practices of testifying and witnessing.

Testifying

Testifying within the Black religious experience is and has been a form of recounting to fellow sufferers of how God solves the problem by *making a way out of no way*. Oftentimes testimonies reflect a problem-solving process by sharing the problematic situation, then exulting in God's move to overcome it. Testifying also incorporates narration, as the person testifying tells of divine intervention. Ross (1989) noted that "Testifying occurs both as an interpersonal narration of divine interaction with everyday life and as a formal portion of worship wherein believers share in the community what God has done in their lives" (p. 14). In the same fashion, Burroughs, throughout her life, testified of how God had opened doors that no man could open in her life. For example, Burroughs made it clear that she believed that God had called her to a position of leadership within the Woman's Convention of the National Baptist Convention, as an answer to the prayer of women who believed that their voices should be heard.

In her interpretation of her faith, Burroughs also believed that it was God's divine will to help Blacks become a liberated people in the United States. With this goal, Burroughs committed herself to working to fight structures that prevented full enfranchisement of African American women into mainstream society. She testified to God's divine intervention in acts of resistance through the: (1) creation of the National Training School for Women and Girls (NTS); (2) suffrage club movement among African American women; and (3) support of the Civil Rights Movement.

First, Burroughs' primary goal for the National Training School was to provide Black women with a competitive edge in the job market through domestic science education and thus resist efforts by Whites to continue to marginalize African American

women in positions of subjugation. The rationale behind the professionalizing domestic service may have been rooted in her desire to add value to the work being done by Black women. In this attempt to help black women, she established the National Training School for Women and Girls (NTS), located in Washington, D.C., would satisfy that desire. Convinced of the moral righteousness of industrial training and shored by her Baptist faith, Burroughs advocated that the convention should support “a national institution in which we could preach every gospel, from that of soap and water freely applied to the body to that of the grace of God bounteously bestowed upon the soul would hasten the dawn of a brighter day for us.” (Minutes of the 3rd Annual Meeting of the WC, 1902 p. 29). It is within the framework of the Black Church, through the Woman’s Convention that Burroughs’ NTS formed a model of protest, collective resistance and social action among African American women during the early part of the 20th Century.

By 1920, 200 students had graduated from the NTS. Eighty diplomas and 84 certificates were awarded. Yet, there were still social inequities. Unlike their White counterparts, Black women who graduated from the NTS (later renamed the National Trades School for Women and Girls) applied their skills as homemakers and servants in other people’s homes. In contrast, White domestic science students, who were trained to become good homemakers and managers of servants, would acquire jobs as teachers or dieticians. Nevertheless, Burroughs believed that the professionalizing domestic work would bring respectability to the field and position Blacks economically against the tide of immigrant labor force that grew during the early part of the 20th century.

Second, Burroughs staunchly believed that women’s suffrage would advance the cause of the Black race and provide another act of collective resistance against Jim Crow and other acts of discrimination. In 1924, Burroughs, together with other clubwomen,

founded the National League of Republican Colored Women (NLRCW) in 1924. She was elected as the League's president with Daisy Lampkin, chairman of the executive committee; Mary Church Terrell, treasurer; and Elizabeth Ross Haynes, parliamentarian. That same year, a conference on legislative issues was held under the direction of the legislative department of the NLRCW. (NHB Papers, LOC.).

The goal was to educate Black women on national politics and the political welfare of African Americans (NHB Papers, LOC) so that they would then go and use their political power to fight for Civil Rights of African Americans. In 1928, with a commitment to suffrage for Black women, Burroughs traveled the nation to advocate suffrage clubs that promoted an uplifting of the Black race and Black women, to be accomplished through political support of the Republican ticket. Burroughs urged Blacks to vote, and tirelessly promoted the development of political club manuals. She felt the manuals would encourage the development of suffrage clubs designed to organize, educate and vote for the Hoover-Curtis ticket (NHB Papers, LOC). However, her specific goal was to promote Hoover as a candidate to all Black persons who were eligible to vote; this was inclusive of first-time voters, undecided voters, stay-at-home voters, and others. Burroughs' unrelenting commitment to suffrage and her fight for political power among African-American women demonstrated her understanding of the forceful impact of politics in shaping society.

Third, Burroughs' participation in the Civil Rights movement was another act of resistance. For example, Burroughs financially and morally supported the work of Martin Luther King, Jr. In a September 18, 1956 letter written on Dexter Avenue Baptist Church letterhead, King noted,

It was a real pleasure seeing you in Denver. Your remarks after my address were magnificent. You said in a few words more than most people could say in hours. It is always a real inspiration to listen to you. Let me thank you once more for

the interest which you have taken in our struggle. I can assure that your moral support and financial contributions have given me renewed courage and vigor to carry on (NHB Papers, LOC).

As the Civil Rights movement gained momentum, Martin Luther King and Ralph Abernathy, Chairman of the Program Committee of the Montgomery Improvement Association, asked Burroughs in a November 2, 1956, telegram to speak public ally at the organizations' first year anniversary a week long celebration. They noted that Burroughs would be among "some of the outstanding thinkers and personalities of the Nation." They also informed her that the events would not be considered a victory celebration; rather, they wanted to "rededicate the community and the nation to the principles of non-violence in the struggle of freedom and justice." (NHB Papers, LOC). When Burroughs failed to respond to the first telegram, King and Abernathy sent a second telegram on November 12, 1956, to encourage her to participate in the activities.

As the first leader of Negro women in America, it is imperative that you come to give hope to the thousands of women who are paying the price of sacrifice in our struggle. Your position as a leader among Baptists also increases the tremendous contribution you will make. (NHB Papers, LOC).

Burroughs heeded the call to give hope to thousands of Black women.

On a broader level, through her leadership among Black women, Burroughs emerged as a testament of hope for women who followed her, becoming leaders within the Civil Rights Movement. They gained strength in realizing that just as God had protected and guided Burroughs through her racial uplift efforts, as well as the survivors of enslavement who came before her, so He would also guide them in liberating Black people in America.

Witnessing

Witnessing, within the Black religious tradition, indicated a fulfillment of an expectation of God-intervention in everyday life (Ross, 1989). In addition to anticipation of divine presence in everyday living, witnessing also involves an affirmation of

understanding among Black women, as a collective group, that God had and would work in the lives of church women. On a community level in religious services, church members may take time to give a testimony of how God has moved in their lives. Then, after telling their story, the speaker engages the audience by stating, "Can I get a witness? Within this context, the speaker is asking if anyone has experienced the move of divine intervention similar to her own experiences. In turn, members within the audience express affirmation through hand clapping and shout of "Amen!"

Burroughs was able to witness to the fact that she believed God called her to help Black women mobilize for full participation and enfranchisement. Employing powerful feminist rhetoric, Burroughs doggedly contended that African-American women, with the right to vote, would assume a strong and decisive stand against segregation, sexual discrimination, and job discrimination. In 1928, with a commitment to suffrage for Black women, Burroughs traveled the nation to advocate suffrage clubs that promoted an uplifting of the Black race and Black women, to be accomplished through political support of the Republican ticket. Burroughs' unrelenting commitment to suffrage and her fight for political power among African-American women demonstrated her understanding of the forceful impact of politics in shaping society.

From the perspective of Black empowerment, Burroughs' involvement in multiple movements improved the status of Black women, uplifted the race and fought for Civil Rights. These actions, although not uncommon today, exhibited an attempt to defy societal standards and push for social change and action within African American communities. Moreover, within the context of the Church, therapeutic groups or small groups served as "witnesses" to affirm the experiences shared by other group members. These same principles were articulated through the racial uplift efforts of Nannie Burroughs. By, "bearing witness" to God's work, Burroughs assumed the role of caregiver and nurturer. "To the extent that Black religious women activists affirm and talk with others about divine interaction with their racial uplift and social responsibility activities, include the assertion that God requires or enables their activism; they are participating in the Black religious practices of witnessing and testifying." (Ross, p. 15).

For example, in her 1958 annual address to women of the Convention, Burroughs admonished leaders of the National Baptist Convention for being comfortably complacent with their own positions, rather than working to free the race from the oppressive forces of Jim Crow and disenfranchisement. This was evident when she passionately declared, “The only hope in this crisis is that there shall arise a quality and stature of leadership that shall bring in a spiritual social renaissance, in which the blind shall see, the deaf, hear and the poor have the Gospel preached to them.” (Minutes of the 58th Annual Woman’s Convention, 1958, p. 361, HCSBC).

In a prophetic sense, one might have thought that Burroughs spoke of Martin Luther King, Jr., because of King’s charismatic leadership and commitment to social justice through methods of nonviolence. In turn, King shared Burroughs belief in valuing the social gospel as part of man’s struggle to reconcile his spiritual and psychological need for freedom. In tune with King spiritually, Burroughs contended that African Americans must actively become partners with God in order to find solutions to our social problems that would ultimately lead to enfranchisement, liberation and social transformation.

She analogized from the Bible to make her case. In that same address, Burroughs explained that,

God, alone, is not going to deliver us. He did not do it for Israel. He raised up a leader, but the children of Israel had to trudge through the wilderness and even after they reached the Red Sea, they had to put their feet in the water and God did the dividing. God does not work miracles for people. He works miracles with people with something that people have or have done for themselves. Today, under stalwart, God-inspired, God-led leadership, Negro people must do their own trudging and putting and God will do the parting of the waters (Minutes of the 58th Annual Woman's Convention, 1958, p. 361, URL Papers, HCSBC).

Here Burroughs was able to testify her belief that God would bring someone to lead African Americans to freedom and liberation within society. But she also contended that all African Americans had to work individually to resist forces that attempted to

assuage the psychological well being of her people. In addition, Burroughs' audacity and defiance of the conventional standard of a woman's place within the religious politick was clearly throughout her career as an activist for racial and gender equality. Throughout her life, Burroughs believed that it was important for Black Baptist Women to critically analyze systems and institutions that prevented the advancement of the race within the larger society, as well as take action against those agents. (Higginbotham, 1993).

Burroughs served as a role model and trailblazer for the following generation of Black women. The religious convictions of new pioneers such as fiery civil rights activists Septima Clark, Ella Baker, and Fannie Lou Hammer who sustained them during the long road for freedom and equality for African-Americans. Born near the turn of the century, these African American women continued Burroughs' legacy of racial uplifting by challenging the social structures that had for so long prevented Blacks from full participation as citizens (Ross, 1989). Their religious beliefs were resolute and dynamic in commitment to human freedom; their efforts subsequently led to the social transformation of Blacks within American society.

Demonstrating Collective Problem Solving through Community Art and Dialogue

As a creative social activist, Burroughs used creative means to promote social reform among African American women. She achieved this goal using community art, such as plays and music as forums for dialogue around issues important to the Black community. One example is found in Burroughs' play, the *Slabtown District Convention*. The play was written during the early part of the 20th century. The play is portrayed as a musical comedy and offers Burroughs critique of Black religious life and the role of African American women, within the context of the Black Baptist experience, in promoting social change through collective action (Burroughs, 1974). For example, items of concern on the agenda includes, "What are we Doing in our Community?" "What We Have Done For Africa" and, "The Training of Children." Within these topics, Burroughs

expresses her ideas about the importance of Black women in supporting local communities especially through survival strategies of racial uplift. Gilkes (2001) notes that through her play,

Burroughs includes carefully crafted discourse on the most prominent issues facing [B]lack Americans and her observation of the most effective solutions to their problems. In this discourse on social issues, Burroughs represents not only her own views, but presents for public understanding an explicitly [B]lack feminist or Womanist ideology on leadership and achievement. (p. 150).

A second example of Burroughs use of creative means to promote collective awareness and informal problem solving is found in her use of music as a tool for group problem solving. In an attempt to promote the commitment of social justice among WC delegates, Burroughs (n.d.) wrote *The Integration Song*, which is set to the tune of the hymn “When We all Get to Heaven” and consisted of a chorus and three stanzas:

Sing the wondrous love of justice,
Sing its mercy and its grace,
Let all nations know its power
To bring hope to every face

When we all know justice
What a day of rejoicing that will be,
When we all have justice,
We'll live in peace and harmony.

The world knows the blessed story
Of the loyalty of the race
How in war gave its devotion
To defend Old Glory's Place.

Justice is the nation's promise,
It has made in works that burn,
Nothing less will save our country
Never from her promise turn.

In 1956, at the annual meeting of the National Baptist Convention, delegates voted unanimously to urge Christians to make this song their national anthem. Members also voted to dedicate the song to the cause of justice on May 17, 1957. It is not clear why

that day was chosen, but that action shows the national effort of Black Baptists to organize and protest for a better day from the troubles of this world. Here, she used gospel music, which is a powerful medium within the Black church to promote her belief of interracial collaboration for social justice.

Case Interpretation: Lessons Learned from the Works of Nannie Helen Burroughs

Burroughs' work provided important lessons in exploring and understanding ways in which social work professionals can integrate natural helping and coping strategies, used by African American women in the helping process. Within this context, the three key principles of Afrocentric social work practice (affective or knowledge based on experience; collective identity and spirituality) as well as Womanist Theological practices (Cannon, 1995; Gilkes, 2001) were evident in Burroughs' work.

Lesson 1: Understanding and Using Historical Oppression in Reform Efforts

First, in exploring the research, it is important for social workers who work with African American clients to understand the importance of historical oppression in shaping our reality of the world in which we live. It is also important for social workers to appreciate the importance of culture in the healing process. The importance of cultural history has been identified by the Federal government as a key component in the promotion of positive mental health (DHHS, 2001). Understanding and, ultimately, appreciating the Black experience in America is important in connecting our current struggles with those of our ancestors, a principle that is valued within the African worldview.

Martin and Martin (1995) noted that “the most serious malady in the contemporary Black experience is that many Black people have severed all ties with their histories.” (p. 206). In social work practice, a similar malady is created African American clients feel that they must conform to Western ways of knowing in order to avoid racial stigma and

discrimination. On the other hand, since African-centered social work practice methods have not mainstreamed into modern therapeutic treatment environments, many African Americans may be reluctant to seek help, which may exacerbate and compromise their mental health and emotional well being.

By looking back at the ancestral voice of Nannie Burroughs, social workers may gain insight on past practices that were effective in promoting cultural wellness among Black women and, through that knowledge, find solutions to difficult circumstances. Positive appreciation of Black culture and history are important factors in promoting racial and cultural self-esteem. Additionally, knowledge of the historical trauma of slavery as well as adaptive coping and survival strategies can help clients view themselves in a positive light. Instead of being seen as maladaptive, resistant or indifferent, to the therapeutic process, they can become engaged and active participants in their own self-healing.

To omit the importance of Black history from the helping process could be detrimental. Martin and Martin (1995) note that ignoring the importance of history in the helping process can cause what they call *historical amnesia*, which inhibits the use of problem-solving and coping methods that have effectively protected African Americans throughout the history in the United States. Burroughs' work provides a path for the promotion of cultural self-esteem among African American women, but it also offers an ancestral voice and connection to the Black heritage from a cultural worldview, mirroring that heritage.

Through a shared history of slavery, segregation and discrimination, African American women have share a collective identity that have helped reshape and understand the world from the perspective of our Black heritage. Burroughs, through her work in promoting racial uplift (particularly through institution building) and fighting for racial

justice for African Americans, was able to bring women from varied social and economic backgrounds to unite as Black women in a group collective. This sense of shared history and cultural values were important in mobilizing these women to resist the negative messages they constantly encountered in a segregated society. In addition, this same sense of collective identity encouraged Black women to forge friendships and associations with other women that promoted resiliency and racial pride. Through these alliances, Black women united, particularly within the Black church, and organized for social action and racial justice.

Lesson 2: Developing and Exploring Critical Awareness/ Critical Consciousness

There are lessons from Burroughs' work toward promoting critical awareness through group-based methods. Burroughs used formal and informal methods of educating women about the forces that prevented them from advancing; the process also serves as an alternative means for promoting group empowerment and self-esteem. Knowledge was used as a tool for liberation; it gave women the opportunity to understand their social position, and then redefine their positions based on their own personal standards, rather than succumb to a daily bombardment of negative valuations. Likewise, social workers must learn to use education as a tool to sharpen awareness in Black women of situations that prevent prosperity. Education provides a means to define culturally relevant ways of addressing these challenges.

Burroughs avidly used the Afrocentric principle of experienced-based knowledge to advance her agenda of racial and economic justice. She was fully aware of the power of experience in shaping the realities and viewpoints of African American women, as well as the race. Burroughs used that knowledge as a motivating factor to encourage individuals to continue striving not only for group survival, but also for group emancipation. Additionally, to express these sentiments, Burroughs used creative tools

such as plays, music, speeches and other printed matter to promote her cause, thus creating an environment where Black women developed critical awareness about their devalued social status, and took steps to improve that status.

In addition to reflecting key elements of Afrocentric perspectives, Burroughs' work may also be interpreted from a Womanist theological perspective. Burroughs' work exemplified three characteristics of a theological perspective in that it was rooted in ways of knowing and daily life experiences. Through Womanist theological methods, Burroughs brought Black women's perspectives and experiences to the center stage. For example, her commitment to educating and empowering domestic servants was a key example of this goal. Domestic service, by its very nature, utilizes cheap economic labor and chiefly exploits women, especially Black women, who found themselves on the outside looking at the inside (Collins, 1991). Women as domestic laborers provided a service within the homes of their employers, and served as confidants and nannies, Yet their personal voices and social realities were invisible, often ignored by the very people they served in such an intimate capacity.

Today, many African American, continue are employed in low-wage service jobs such as hotel housekeepers and office janitors. Similar to previous roles as household servants, many Black women continue to cast in a role of invisibility and obscurity. A key role of the social work profession is to empower these individuals so that they will be able to make critical decisions about their lives in an informed manner. Through critical awareness, individuals actively work to find solutions to their own problems. Through this lens, the role of the social worker is complementary. Within this framework, the social worker serves as a facilitator and co-participant in the struggle to help the oppressed become aware of forces that limited their freedom and plan for social action. Additionally, this process will also help social workers guard against oppressing clients through professional haughtiness and egotism.

Lesson 3: Promoting Collective Resistance Through Faith

A key component of collective resistance, through the work of Nannie Helen Burroughs, was her faith in God (and herself) to create change that would be favorable for

African American women. This faith was rooted, in part, in Black religious rituals such as giving testimony and witnessing.

Moreover, Burroughs' acts of resistance were rooted in her faith and personal spirituality, which is a key principle of Afrocentricity (Sheile, 1996). Burroughs and other women leaders depended on their individual and collective faith to sustain them through the difficult time they experienced to survive and to fight for liberation. It has been well documented that Burroughs' racial uplift efforts, and later her commitment to the Civil Rights movement, were rooted in her faith that God was a God of the oppressed and downtrodden. Moreover, Burroughs was often known to use Biblical scripture to support her viewpoints. Burroughs, like women before and after her, depended on their own interpretations of spirituality and faith to sustain them during difficult times. This same hope in divine intervention in the everyday affairs of women propelled Burroughs to actively insist that the discourse on human liberation was a moral imperative.

Social workers may gain great insight from the use of collective resistance as a protective factor against the effects of racism and discrimination experienced by African Americans within our society. The use of this technique within group and community-based contexts, are appropriate, especially when implemented within the context of Black religious institutions. As with Burroughs' efforts and at present, Black Churches offer a strong base for community-wide empowerment among African-American women. The Black Church consists of indigenous social networks that traditionally have served as refuges and spiritual havens in the face of the cultural trauma and humiliation often experienced by Blacks. Additionally, through participation in church rituals, African-American women may find emotional healing and group connectedness by participating in the worship experience as a therapeutic group process.

In her efforts to resist the social stance placed on African American women, Burroughs' life work represented a transition from individual and group community work to macro practice. For example, as a young woman, Burroughs fought diligently to prove to herself and others that she had the right to set her personal goals above the normal expectations for most Black women. Yet, with determination and a faith in God, she became a leader in the Black Baptist women's movement.

Burroughs' works reflected Womanist theological consciousness through her efforts to enhance the survival of Black women through collective resistance grounded in the Black religious traditions. Throughout her work, Burroughs depended on her faith in God to support racial uplift and the fight for Civil Rights. This was particularly evident in her use of Christ's Biblical text to support her moral positions. Through her multi-focused work with women, children, Whites and others, Burroughs remained grounded in her belief that the Black church should serve as a center for empowering Black women to use personal experience to fight for social change.

Womanist theological practices were evident through Burroughs' work in the collaboration between Black women and God, and within the context of the religious experience as an indigenous means for survival and promoting emotional well being. Her participation in religious rituals such as prayer, song and worship attendance as well as the participation in testifying and witnessing collectively provided a therapeutic experience for Black women by connecting the Black Church/Black community support experience.

Lesson 4: Demonstrating Collective Problem Solving through Community Art and Dialogue

Burroughs' use of cultural productions such as a play and music to promote collective problem solving is important because they provide an easy forum to articulate her Womanist agenda within the context of the Black Baptist experience. Within this framework, Burroughs was able to promote her own agenda without influence from

societal forces that sought to silence her voice; she was able to empower thousands of women to not only cope with their life situations, but also survive and thrive despite the oppressive impact of living in a racialized society.

Social work practice with African Americans should utilize indigenous cultural productions such as plays and musicals to promote collective problem solving – particularly within Black Churches. Gilkes (2001) observes that “plays, pageants, and oratorical programs have been an important source of motivation and public affirmation of groups values, particularly for young people.” (p. 144) Black congregations can provide an excellent location for collective problem solving and group expression that can be effective in promoting positive emotional well being and group resistance against social inequality.

CHAPTER 4: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary

The disconnect between the social work profession and culturally relevant practice has negatively influenced mental health outcomes among African Americans. This disconnect is particularly important since many African American define racism, discrimination and stigma as key causes for stress, anxiety and depression. In an attempt to address this issue, this research focuses on identifying and discussing ways in which Black women have attended own emotional and psychological well being through natural coping and survival strategies. Within this framework, this section of the chapter applies lessons learned from the case analysis to social work practice, research and education. The implications discussed offer suggestions for culturally relevant (Afrocentric and Womanist) methods of practice, research and education with African American women.

Knowledge gained from this research may be used to understand the everyday experiences of Black women in terms of survival and liberation. This information may then be articulated in practice by integrating lessons learned into the therapeutic process utilizing an Afra-Womanist perspective. First, methods based on an Afra-Womanist theoretical approach are holistic and take into account the affective experiences of individuals with whom social workers are engaged. Second, these methods can be based on the three principles, which emerged from the research; understanding historical oppression, developing critical awareness about dominant forces that shape one's own social standpoint, and promoting collective resistance and action. Attempts to integrate an Afra-Womanist perspective into social work practice should include specific goals a culturally relevant theoretical, value and practice framework.

Implications for Social Work Practice

First, social work practice should integrate Afrocentric and Womanist frameworks that include the importance of collective identity, affective knowledge, and spirituality in shaping Black women's reality. This framework also places the everyday experiences of Black women to a center standpoint. This knowledge can be used in the development of a social work epistemology and creation of culturally appropriate practice models.

Additionally, the value base for culturally relevant social work practice should be embedded in culturally relevant services based on group strengths. These strengths (such as social support, religious association and mutual aid) can serve as protective factors that promote emotional well being. This value perspective also promotes self-determination of Black women and a group collective and respects our ability to develop models of practice that are consistent with our group values. Values are not oppressive and defined by outside groups.

Second, social workers should employ Black religious practice/Black Church institutions in fighting for economic and social change. This practice framework can best be achieved within small group settings preferably at local congregations as well as in larger groups organized for social action. In addition, social work practice methods should include the three themes identified in the research study as a process helping clients promote their own well being and racial self-identity. For example, group members can be encouraged utilize the three themes discussed in chapter three. Social workers can help members develop a sense of historical identity and ancestral connectedness through immersion in Black identity and Womanist ideology. This phase involves the process of assisting group members in assessing historical factors that are shared by Black women as well as articulate negative psychologies that prevent them from confronting their problems. These objectives are achieved with bibliotherapy, cinema Therapy and Group interaction.

Third, social workers can assist clients in developing critical awareness/critical conscience by building on Burroughs' methods to develop leadership strategies among African American women. This process involves helping clients identify oppressive forces that shape their social realities and educate them for liberation by facilitating the dissemination of knowledge for social justice and transformation. Narrative stories and biographies can be used to in supporting this process.

Finally, Social workers can promote collective resistance through faith by drawing upon traditional rituals of the Black religious experience. For example, social workers can promote resistance of negative valuations by encouraging clients to celebrate their collective

identity, and tap into their own spirituality for group empowerment. Members can be encouraged to participate in informal and formal religious practices. Within the group setting this goal is achieved by having group members present their personal life narratives with use of creative expressions (song, dance, music poetry, prayers etc.). Through this collective process, members can feel as if they are co-laborers in the healing process.

Implications for Social Work Research

Social work research must examine the role of multi-oppressive influencing that prevents/limits overall well being among African-American women. First, researchers should use Womanist methods to conduct research about the everyday experiences of Black women in personal testimony. This gathered information can be used in the development of Womanist epistemologies. Research may be implemented using ethnographic methods such as narratives and histories to describe analyze and interpret survival methods that help women to gain self-esteem while fighting cultural trauma in the societal arena.

Second, there is a need to increase research on the Black experience as a source of liberation, action, reflection and transformation. With this agenda in mind, researchers can document specific ways in which Black women develop and maintain resiliency against oppressive forces particularly through Black religious practice as a therapeutic group process. Researchers also will be able to evaluate these methods from an empowering framework that is neither deficit-ridden nor posits women of color in a pathological light. Finally, by creating research based on the values and experiences of the people being studied, “transformative research is emancipatory when it reveals and unravels political repression, economic exploitation, cultural domination, and social manipulation.” (Sohng, 1998, p. 196). Finally, it is important for social workers to increase their use of historical method to continue to obtain knowledge about non-traditional survival methods of African Americans from multiple perspectives.

Implications for Social Work Education

Understanding Black identity will permit social work students-in-training to appreciate and gain appropriate skills in working with African Americans. Culturally

relevant teaching methods that have traditionally relied on lectures and other “banking” methods of learning should be integrated with collaborative and experiential learning, inclusive of the traditions of African-Americans and other people of color. For example, Freire (1972) observed that traditional educational pedagogical techniques may be based on the banking method of education, where instructors who are perceived as experts who “deposit” information and knowledge in their students. These traditional models of learning inadvertently promote oppression, because they reinforce racist values and actions in the larger society. Instead, an active use of student learning, primarily through small group activities, can promote interdependence and cooperation within the classroom. This type of interdependence is often a foundation of many cultures of color, and reflects the concept of collective identity. Moreover, by promoting mutual support and cooperation rather than competitiveness in the classroom, students will be able to understand their own values, express them in a safe environment, and learn from their colleagues.

Teaching methods that promote mutual support and cooperation rather than competitiveness in the classroom also lay a foundation for understanding oppression and thereby develop critical skills to become aware of and address these issues within the classroom and field placement settings. Therefore, it is important for teachers to incorporate non-Western teaching methods within their curriculums particularly in the diversity courses, where African-centered pedagogy can be used as a social process. For example, oral history (a key component of communication in African, Asian and African-American cultures) and storytelling techniques may be used to gain information and understanding about minority populations. Also, cross-cultural writing assignments also can be used to encourage the sharing of information, which further enhances racial understanding, acceptance and change.

Neville and Cha-Jau (1998) have developed an emerging new paradigm in academic teaching methods that is suitable for anti-oppressive education. They produced an African-centered pedagogy called *Kufundisha*, which is a Kiswahili word meaning, “o teach.” They observe that African-teaching pedagogy, in reference to Black Studies, is a social process that is both collaborative and student centered. Classroom lectures are

interactive and are based on African-American communication styles. This method can be transferred to social work diversity education for social justice. In contrast to traditional lecture methods that depend primarily on one-way monologues from teacher to student, this method is one example of how the classroom itself can be transformed to an environment that promotes collective understanding and appreciation for different methods of collaborative learning.

Additionally, Martin (1987) notes that the use of oral history is an excellent tool to engage students in anti-oppressive experiences. It validates non-western cultural methods, and serves as a tool for including people of color in the discourse on multiple oppressions. Moreover, the practice of verbally passing down historical information from one generation to the next has been a key component of communication in African, Asian and African-American cultures. Oral histories, along with biographies and life stories can give students with the opportunity to understand the impact of historical oppression on the Black psyche. The use of storytelling and cross-cultural writing assignments can encourage minority groups to share their collective histories within a positive context that validates their own individual experiences.

Conclusions

Research Contributions

This research provides several notable contributions to the current body of knowledge within the field. First, it gives voice to the experience of Black women in America, as well as provides examples of indigenous means for coping with racial and gender oppression by the social transformation of self, family, and community. Additionally, the study also explored ways in which the Black Church functioned as a therapeutic group through its religious rituals of prayer, song, and collective problem solving through testifying and witnessing. These methods should be included in research studies related to the impact of cultural religious practice on emotional well being and mental health among Black women.

Furthermore, this research contributes to the body of social work knowledge by promoting the use of an Afro-Womanist framework for working with Black clients.

Despite advances made within multicultural social work practices, few therapeutic models have been designed for Black women by Black women, based on our everyday experiences of living. In light of the multiple oppressive forces of race, gender and class, the creation of knowledge from a Black woman's standpoint is pivotal in creating alternative ways of promoting positive self-esteem and combating the negative effects of racism and discrimination on the Black psyche. An Afro-Womanist approach to social work practice is not universal. It is specifically suited for African American women who want to empower themselves personally, collectively, politically, and spiritually by incorporating social justice within the context of the Black religious experience.

Finally, this research contributes to the social work body of knowledge by building a foundation for future social work research with African American women. All too often, the profession has fought to be legitimized by embracing traditionally normative research methods that focus primarily on individual problem solving, based on a medical model approach to the disease process. This research attempts to promote positive mental health (and thus prevent mental illness) by exploring culturally relevant practice methods rooted in ancestral voice, and incorporates a group approach to individual wellness, grounded in mezzo and macro social work practice.

Research Limitations and Areas for Further Study

This research study, while able to achieve its primary goals of using ancestral voice to identify ways in which women have historically attended to their own emotional well being, it was limited by a couple of factors. First, because of the use of historical methodology, the research was limited by the availability of surviving documentation on the works of Burroughs. I attempted to examine Burroughs' documents and other printed material in their historical contexts. After researching the information, I looked for themes that could be beneficial for contemporary social work practice. While some of her work is not relevant in today's world. Burroughs did employ overarching strategies and practices that can be adapted and used in contemporary times. Second, another limitation of the study is that the historical piece represents only one person's viewpoint. Further research comparing various models of coping and survival methods should be explored in future

studies. Finally, due to time and financial constraints, I was only able to make one visit to the primary research sites. Additional research at secondary locations could have provided additional information for the research project.

The use of ancestral voice in this research study provided a foundation for the inclusion of the Afro-Womanist perspective within social work practice. Future areas of research should expand on this knowledge by further testing this conceptual framework with African-American women within group practice. Further research should employ ethnographic methods to document women's stories through narratives, herstories and oral histories, in order to tell a story, to give voice, and to evaluate collective experiences.

In addition to creating additional knowledge, further research (in the form of a pilot study) should be conducted to determine the effectiveness of the three themes that emerged during the research in promoting positive emotional and well being among African American women. Ethnographic studies need to be conducted within Black religious institutions, particularly in partnership with entities that currently provide services for African-American women who express distressing symptoms. As a natural support network, Black church congregations can provide a community facility and an affiliation with target populations in which to conduct further research. Finally, future study should also explore the impact of the themes identified in the research with African American social work students, which could serve as a basis for promoting the additional use of natural helping and survival strategies with Black clients within social work settings.

My Personal Reflections on the Research Study

This research project has been transformative, both professionally and personally. As an emerging Womanist scholar, I appreciate the importance of creating new knowledge about Black women from our unique perspective. It has been both empowering and liberating to bring awareness to ancestral voices from the past to ordinary women in contemporary society. Personally, the discovery of Womanist ways of knowing has culminated in providing a connection to women of the African Diaspora in our collective struggle for spiritual and social liberation. This unique connection of the personal and

professional collaboration has been useful in helping me understand that my experiences as an African-American woman are not lived in isolation. My struggles, difficulties, joys and sorrows build on the ever-developing lattice work of indigenous survival themes and practices that allow us to articulate our stories and shape them into epistemological knowledge for the expanding of new and transformative ways of knowing.

On a personal level, my mother and grandmother developed and nurtured my own Womanist voice. As I encountered knowledge, my mother, a strong woman of faith, would always point to the important contributions of Black women in any given endeavor. My mother understood the efficacy of providing me with role models of African-American women; these were everyday women who made extraordinary achievements within their own social locations. Additionally, my grandmother has been a towering example of Womanist survival practice, from which I have learned important lessons. At ninety-five years of age, she is a religious woman who believes that God is on her side and has protected her from the debilitating effects of racial and gender oppression. Her tenacity, not only to survive, but also to thrive has been a constant source of inspiration to me.

Moreover, through this research, I have been able to find my voice in a collective journey of Womanist consciousness. As the daughter and sister of pastors, and having served as a fourth-generation deaconess at my local church, I am partaker in the struggle for liberation and social transformation of African-Americans as a moral imperative. Together, “our [W]omanist work is to draw on the rugged endurance of Black folks in America who outwit, outmaneuver, and out-scheme social systems and structures that maim and stifle mental, emotional, and spiritual growth? (Cannon, 1995, p. 135). My voice joins the ancestral voices of Nannie Helen Burroughs, and contemporary Womanist scholars, we represent a positive intent to dismantle the effects of three-dimensional oppression on the Black psyche.

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Historical Documents

The Nannie Helen Burroughs Papers are housed at the archival division of the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C.

The Una Roberts Lawrence Papers are housed at the Historical Library and Archives of the Historical Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention in Nashville, TN.

The Minutes of the Woman's Convention, an auxiliary of the National Baptist Convention are housed on Microfilm reels at the Historical Library and Archives of the Historical Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, Nashville, TN.

VITA

Lolita Cecelia (Perkins) Boykin was born on January 30, 1968, in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, the daughter of the late Rev. Eddie and the late Mary L. Perkins. After graduating from Robert E. Lee High School, Lolita attended Louisiana State University (LSU). In 1991, she received a Bachelor of Arts Degree in journalism, and a master of Social Work degree in 1994. In 1996, She enrolled in the doctoral program at the LSU School of Social Work. While in school, she worked as a research associate and clinical social worker. In 2002, She became a Council on Social Work Education Minority Fellow sponsored by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Following graduation (August, 2003), Lolita will work as an adjunct professor at the LSU School of Social Work. She also plans to launch her own agency committed to promoting diversity and social justice within the field of social work.