“HEAR MY VOICE:” STORIES OF BLACK WOMEN AND GIRLS 
IN A HISTORIC BLACK TOWN

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation uses oral history methodology and grounded theory methods to analyze and examine the stories of Black women and girls from the historic Black town of Hobson City, Alabama with the purpose of recovering and (re)inscribing some of the history of the town. The research questions that guided my research are 1) What are the unique lived experiences in the stories of Black women and girls in Hobson City, Alabama? 2) What are the current and historical narratives of Hobson City, Alabama and how can these oral histories disrupt or complement those narratives? And 3) What are the current tensions (either real or perceived) between Hobson City, Alabama and the surrounding mainstream communities?

This dissertation includes four chapters. The first chapter is the literature review that examines scholarship that is most relevant to my research. This chapter is an intersection of oral history methodology and community history as well as a space for research that focuses on community history of a historic black town told from the perspectives of black women and girls. Chapter two explains oral history as a methodology along with grounded theory methods used to analyze the data. Chapter three includes an analysis of the interviews from the women and girls and triangulated with data that emerged with outside sources. Finally, the researcher presents findings and conclusion in chapter four.
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Joane and my brother, Marques, who have been a constant support system throughout my life and especially throughout this Ph.D. program. I cannot forget about my niece, Madison, who has become a shining light in my world.
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INTRODUCTION

My first year as a PhD student began with a trip to the Zora Neale Hurston Festival in Eatonville, FL with the African American Women in English (AAWE) group of the University of Alabama in the spring of 2015. I remember being sick with the flu but determined not to miss this great opportunity to learn, experience the festival, and make memories with my colleagues and our professors. On the first full day of the festival, we learned that there was a conference occurring in conjunction with the festival, and that it was hosted by the Historic Black Towns and Settlements Alliance (HBTSA). That afternoon for lunch, we met all the mayors of the alliance at a fish fry hosted beside a creek on the property of one of the citizens of the town. I remember the sweltering heat, the smell of catfish, and being surrounded by rich conversations and laughter. It was during this lunch that one of the professors on the trip met the only woman in the group of mayors, Mayor Alberta McCrory. They had a brief conversation, exchanged business cards, and Professor Robinson shared with the group that Mayor Alberta McCrory told her that if she and her students could come all the way to Eatonville, Florida she could surely bring them to Hobson City, Alabama. That conversation and trip was the beginning of what would become a thriving community partnership. Fast forward to May of 2015, Dr. Michelle Bachelor Robinson invited me to attend a meeting with her and the mayor of Hobson City; never being the one to turn down any potentially beneficial academic opportunity, I agreed. We traveled to Hobson City after leaving a two-day conference in Atlanta, Georgia hosted by the Conservation Center for Art & Historic Artifacts. We arrived in town just in time for lunch, and the Mayor treated us to a gracious meal at a local BBQ restaurant. After lunch, the mayor took us
to the municipal building, which was once the Calhoun County Training school, but currently functions as the municipal building for Hobson City. There we met her secretary and the cemetery grounds keeper. During the meeting, the mayor discussed her plans for Hobson City as well as the current state of the town. She explained to us that she had created several goals for Hobson City. Those goals outlined in her Strategic Plan were the following: 1) Town Founders and Community Genealogy; 2) Cemetery research, documentation and interpretation; 3) National Register of Historic Places; 4) Historic records, documents and artifacts curation and archival preservation; 5) Youth engagement; 6) Investigation, Evaluation and Interpretation of Oldest House. After explaining the goals, Mayor McCrory stated that one of her immediate priorities was to get an official cemetery and genealogy record of all deceased persons in their local cemetery. I took on this task as my first research project, and thus began my involvement in what has now become a community partnership between the University of Alabama and Hobson City. Since May of 2015, I have been deeply involved in several ongoing research projects under the Alabama in Hobson City Initiative, including cemetery and genealogy work, a Photovoice study, and oral history research. If it was not for the trip to the Zora Neale Hurston Festival and a chance meeting between Dr. Michelle Bachelor Robinson and Mayor Alberta McCrory, I would not have known about Hobson City, Alabama, and I would not have been part of such a rich academic research experience. My involvement in the Alabama in Hobson City Initiative along with other academic experiences has helped me shape this dissertation project.

Although I have actively been a part of several projects along with other graduate students under the direction of Dr. Robinson, I wanted to carve out an independent project of my own, and yet still be an asset to and extension of the ongoing research and goals of the town. The following semester, I took a Translation Studies course with Dr. Emily Wittman where I began
to think critically about how I could translate Hobson City for other audiences using core theories and principles taught in that class. The following spring, I took an oral history service-learning course with Dr. Michelle Bachelor Robinson, where students were required to conduct oral histories with residents of Hobson City. Because of my experience conducting oral histories in that class, I felt that oral history methodology would be an interesting way to translate untold stories of Hobson City to other audiences. Considering the town’s significance as a historic Black town, oral histories would be a fitting way to preserve the town’s history, a history that has been at risk of perishing.

Before I became involved in the community partnership, I had never heard of Hobson City, even though I am a native Alabamian. The town is nestled in the middle of Anniston and Oxford, two of the more well-known cities in the state. Hobson City is the oldest incorporated Black town in the state of Alabama and the third oldest in the country. The story of how and when Hobson City was established is as follows:

Hobson City was established on August 16, 1899 and is the oldest incorporated African American Cities in the State of Alabama and the third oldest incorporated African American city in the United States. There are less than 25 remaining African American cities in the United States. The area we now know as Hobson City was first known as Mooree Quarter, and was a part of Oxford, Alabama until the late 1890’s. At that time Blacks were permitted to vote in city and county elections. Their vote usually was a controlling factor during elections; they soon became isolated from the City of Oxford.

One of the early settlers of the community gave the following account of how Mooree’s quarters were cut from Oxford. Once a Black man was elected Justice of the Peace in Oxford, this caused some confusion. One mayor in his campaign promised if he were elected that would stop Blacks from participating in city elections. After his election, he went to the State Capitol and had the corporate boundaries of Oxford redrawn, leaving the black settlement (now Hobson City) in the county. This isolated settlement remained under the county system of government for approximately three years. On July 20, 1899 approximately 125 Blacks, dwelling in the Mooree Quarters area decided that it was time to take matters into their own hands. Their self-respect and determination lead to the filing of a petition with the Calhoun County Probate Judge, E. F. Cook, to become a separate and district municipality on July 20, 1899. After proper legal proceedings, the Town became incorporated August 16, 1899. (townofhobsoncity.org).
According to the City Data website, as of 2014 Hobson City’s population is 764 with 49.4% being males and 50.6% females. The median resident age is 34.2 years. The median household income as of 2016 is $27,946. Approximately 85.3% of the population is Black, 12.5%-White, 1.3%-Hispanic, 0.5%-Two or more races, and 0.4% Asian alone (city-data.com). The town’s main street is called Martin Luther King Drive. The main buildings in the town consist of the former Print Shop building, the old C.E. Hanna which currently functions as the town’s municipal building, houses the Head Start program, the Dannon Project program, and several archival rooms; the Hobson City Library, the local convenient store Buck’s, the Chicken Shack building, the Hobson City Memorial Cemetery, and the town’s park, all which are located along Martin Luther King Drive. The new C.E. Hanna also sits on this main street towards the end of the town on the Hobson City and Oxford county lines.

There is a lot of rich history buried, living, and thriving in Hobson City, and the need to preserve that history is more critical than ever. Hobson City like most Black towns and settlements once thrived socially and economically, but due to the civil rights era, segregation, desegregation, institutionalized racism, and many local political events, the town became financially and socially unable to reach their full potential. As a result, much of the town’s significance to local, state, and national history is at risk of being lost. This dissertation uncovers some of the history that had been forgotten, buried, or simply untold. This dissertation serves as a re(inscription) into the history books of what has been documented on Hobson City; a re(inscription) that tells those forgotten stories from the mouths of Black women and Black girls who speak from the margins and borderlands of the current and dominant narrative of their town. They speak through oral histories.
The research questions that guide this study are as follows: 1) What are the unique lived experiences in the stories of Black women and girls in Hobson City, Alabama? 2) What are the current and historical narratives of Hobson City, Alabama and how can these oral histories disrupt or complement those narratives? And 3) What are the current tensions (either real or perceived) between Hobson City, Alabama and the surrounding mainstream communities?

Three major conclusions were drawn as a result of these research questions and my findings. First, I concluded that race was the major theme that was present from the origins of my study until the end. In my analysis and findings, one will see that the women talked about raced issues extensively, but the girls did not. Although race did not emerge as a major theme from the girls’ analysis there were moments where they briefly talked about it during large group discussions that were not included in this study. Those discussions were part of #blackgirls4change, a Photovoice study¹ conducted in the Hobson City community from which their interviews were extracted and analyzed as secondary data for this study. Also, the findings show that race did not have a strong impact on the town outside of the Civil Rights era. Race seemed to occupy conversations and issues outside the community. The people in the town seemed to have created a utopian community where race only entered as part of the larger incidents and events that occurred during the Civil Rights era. Before and after this era, the data shows no traces of race being a major factor or influence on the women, other citizens, or the town. The second conclusion drawn from the findings is that there were many stereotypical gendered ideologies despite the town being a culturally rich space. The data showed that certain stereotypes of women and girls still existed such as appropriate dress codes for girls, a woman’s role in the marriage, and how girls and women should behave. The last conclusion drawn from my findings

¹ The Photovoice study is explained in detail in Chapter 2, the methodology chapter.
states that because the girls’ interview questions were not constructed in a phenomenological way like the women’s interview guides were, the girls’ responses tend to be more specific and focused in terms of how they talked about certain artifacts and sites in Hobson City.

This dissertation includes four chapters. The first chapter is the literature review that examines scholarship that is most relevant to my research. In that chapter, I create an intersection at oral history methodology and community history to include a space for my research that focuses on community history of a historic black town told from the perspectives of black women and girls. In chapter two I explain oral history as a methodology along with grounded theory methods I used to analyze the data. Next, in chapter three, I analyze the interviews from the women and girls and triangulate the data that emerged with outside sources. Finally, I present my findings and conclusion in chapter four.
CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this literature review, I examine scholarship on several oral history topics, black
girlhood, and digital humanities to form a new critical space for scholarship that specifically
focuses on oral history in historic black towns. I categorize my literature review into the
following sections: 1) oral history methodology and design 2) Black women and oral histories 3)
black girlhood 4) oral history and digital humanities and 5) African American oral histories. I use
the following descriptions and definitions from scholars Allan Nevins, Louis Starr, and Linda
Shopes as a foundation to my research study. In “Oral History: How and Why it was Born” Allan
Nevins, deemed as the “father of oral history” describes oral history as “one of the latest and
most promising of these precautions and already it has saved from death’s dateless (and
undatable) night much that the future will rejoice over and cherish” (30). Nevins refers to oral
history as a savior of time and death because of the means in which we are able to preserve
information and history beyond the confines of time. In “Oral History” Louis Starr who studied
under Nevins who founded the first official oral history project at Columbia University, defines
oral history as “primary source material obtained by recording the spoken words—generally by
means of planned, tape-recorded interviews—of persons deemed to harbor hitherto unavailable
information worth preserving” (40). Starr explains oral history as source material as well as form
and substance. Lastly, in “Community Oral History: Where we have been, Where we are Going”
Linda Shopes, former president of the Oral History Association, refers to oral history as a
“maddeningly imprecise term” defining it as,
Formal rehearsed accounts of the past presented by culturally sanctioned tradition-bearers; to informal conversations about ‘the old days’ among family members, neighbors, or coworkers; to printed compilations of stories told about past times and present experiences; and to recorded interviews with individuals deemed to have an important story to tell. Each of these uses of the term has a certain currency (1).

I use these definitions and descriptions from foundational scholars because collectively they show the significance oral history has had on our country’s construction of history; these scholars also show that although oral history has progressed through the digital age of today, its core principles and concepts of the interview, the interviewer and interviewee, the source material, the form, and the substance all remain the same at its core. I consider these definitions and descriptions as I progress through this review of literature while creating a new space of inquiry based on this project. This project comes at the intersection of oral history methodology and community history. It is at that intersection where I create space for new scholarship in oral history, a space that focuses on using oral history as a methodology to uncover the histories of historic Black towns through the stories of Black women and girls. This project is one of very few official documentation of historical accounts of Hobson City, Alabama, as well as oral history methodology; it is also one of few official oral history collections for the Historic Black Towns and Settlements Alliance. The following sections will review the most relevant and pertinent information on oral history and black girlhood and show how this project enters these current conversations.

**Oral history methodology and design**

Scholars prove that there are various ways to design and implement an oral history project based on the purpose of one’s study, the focus group, environment, as well as institutional factors such as funding. The scholars in this section discuss several components of oral history as a methodology and as a design study. In David Lance’s article “Oral History Project Design,” he offers a practical guide for researchers to follow when designing an oral
Valerie Yow’s article “In Depth Interview” goes into detail on the interview portion of the oral history, the key step in conducting oral histories. Both Yow and Lance’s arguments prove helpful to me as I construct my project design. Yow outlines each stage of the process beginning with developing interview questions to transcription to analyzing the interview. She provides several helpful ways to complete each stage. For example, in developing interview questions, she suggests one way is to conduct a casual conversation with the participant prior to the interview or to do observations in the community if conducting interviews on participants where the focus is the community or environment. Although the interview questions are an integral part in conducting oral histories, they were not the subject of central importance to my study. However, using Yow’s suggestions did help me understand how to effectively use interview questions. Donald Ritchie’s Doing Oral History provides another project design book for those interested in conducting oral histories; however, neither he, Yow, nor Lance give specific examples on how to design a project for black women as participants, in a historic town. Although these texts lack specificity for important demographics in constructing the most appropriate design for my study, the overall template proved useful.

In Yow’s “Analysis and Interpretation” article, she offers ways to effectively analyze and interpret data collected during oral history interviews. She discusses coding processes and meaning making. In her “Introduction to the In-Depth Interview” article, she provides a step-by-step guide on how to conduct interviews for one’s oral history project. The steps include preparation, developing the interview guide, building rapport with the participant, informational meetings with community members, memo writing, and more. In Oral History: Understanding Qualitative Research, Patricia Leavy argues a different stance on what oral history is in relation to Yow’s “Analysis and Interpretation” by arguing that the in-depth interview is a separate
interview method from oral history because the in-depth interview includes one interview per participant and is topic focused while the oral history interview is open-ended and more participant-researcher interactive (21). She identifies four interview methods: minimalist biography interview, oral history, in-depth interview, and structure interview (21). Aside from this differentiation, Leavy follows other scholars along with Yow and Nevins in her argument on data collection, data analysis, and data interpretation processes. For the purposes of this study, I argue that oral history is the methodology, and the interview is the tool used to collect the data.

Gary Okihiro makes an important argument in his article “Oral History and the Writing of Ethnic History, where he creates a perspective on what oral history is and does that the previous scholars did not. He states, “Oral history is not only a tool or method for recovering history; it is also a theory of history that maintains that the common folk and the dispossessed have a history and that this history must be written” (209). Okihiro’s conceptualizes oral history by claiming it as not only a methodology and theory, but also a form of activism for the voiceless. He continues to say, “…this is not to ignore the importance of elite lore…nor does it intend to equate oral history with the working class and writing documents with the ruling class” (209). Here he diminishes the binaries created or established by societal factors such as socioeconomic class, race, and gender. His argument appeals to my project because it proves not only that oral history methodology is effective for collecting stories from and about Black women and girls, but it also does not demean or lessen the importance of them based on their socioeconomic identities.

In “‘The Limits of Oral History’ Ethics and Methodology Amid Highly Politicized Research Settings,” Erin Jessee highlights several challenges and limitations of oral history methodology, limitations that have not been discussed by other scholars mentioned. Jessee
argues that when conducting oral history interviews with participants in highly politicized settings such as the aftermath of the Rwanda and Bosnia mass atrocities, the environment in which she conducted her research, one major limitation included the inability to take thoughtful notes as the interviewee talked and the inability to deeply listen. She proclaims “my ability to respond with more than a nod of the head vanished and while I continued to take notes… the quality of my notes deteriorated” (292). She further states that she “quickly realized that due to the horrific nature of the events” she “failed to listen deeply during the interview, which then hindered my ability to revisit his narrative with a critical eye” (292). Jessee argues that oral historians’ inability to “engage in deep listening- whereby the researcher seeks to engage not only with the words being uttered but also with the deeper meaning inherent in the narrative as a whole” maintains a major problem (292). Another limitation Jessee highlights is that of sharing authority in these type of research settings. A third limitation is the challenge of writing oral history analyses in ways that offer a critical look at the narratives yet still successfully hide the identities of the participants in order to not cause real world consequences for said participants living in that particular research environment (297-298). Jessee argues that choosing a highly politicized research setting caused her to speak for her participants rather than with them, write about her participants in overly general terms, and that the “humanizing and democratizing potential of oral history was completely obliterated in the process” (299). I argue similarly to Jessee, that listening deeply is a learned skill, one that can not be achieved through a first or second listening of the interviews. Although, the oral histories collected for this project were conducted in safe settings and in environments that posed no high risks to the participants, it was sometimes harder to deeply listen during the interviews that I conducted, as well as the ones that
I include in this study but did not collect, simply because of varying sensitive topics brought up during the interviews.

Anna Sheftel and Stacey Zembrzycki share similar methodological issues as Jesse in their article “Only Human: A Reflection on the Ethical and Methodological Challenges of Working with ‘Difficult’ Stories”. The scholars argue that methodological and ethical challenges include shared authority, building trust, deep listening and its implications, and contentious politics are important challenges that oral historians must not only acknowledge but critically examine (191). These scholars attempt to extend Michael Frisch’s theoretical concept on shared authority by asserting that they are “interested in ‘sharing’ authority both within and outside of the interview space, by cultivating and nurturing trusting and respectful relationships with our interviewees that facilitate their participation in research production” (195). The authors go on to argue that deep listening—which they define as “listening for meaning, not just facts and listening in such a way that prompts more profound reflection from the interviewee,” is not always possible (199). I complicate their claims on the impossibility of deep listening by arguing that deep listening must be learned by the researcher; it can certainly be achieved regardless of the oral history topic. Sheftel and Zembrzycki share similar definitions of deep listening with scholar Jessee, however they place more of the responsibility on the interviewee rather than the researcher. Sheftel and Zembrzycki also provide a complicated view of Frisch’s theoretical concept of shared authority to further their argument on deep listening. I offer an alternative view of shared authority that aligns with Frisch’s by arguing that shared authority includes collaboration and is an engagement with history “to what should not be not only a distribution of knowledge from those who have it to those who do not, but a more profound sharing of knowledges, an implicit and sometimes
explicit dialogue from very different vantages about the shape, meaning, and implications of history” (xxii).

Charles T. Morrissey argues the importance of interview questions in “Oral History Interviews: From Inception to Closure.” He states that Nevins and other founding scholars of oral history did not deem the interview questions as an important or critical part of the interview process, but now many scholars think otherwise (170-171). Although Morrissey stresses the importance of the interview questions I am more concerned with the stories and the analyses that come out of those stories rather than the questions which is why I only see my questions as a flexible guide rather than a fixed questions list.

In “Ethico-Political Dilemmas of a Community Oral History Project: Navigating the Culture of the Corporate University,” Gloria Cuadraz shares certain ethical/political challenges she faced during a community oral history project on the Litchfield community-area focused on Chicano/Mexican camps. She highlighted the obvious challenges that arose being a faculty member while trying to achieve the agendas of both community and university (21-23). Cuadraz discussed how imperative it is for the university to be supportive of such oral history projects because such projects require a lot of funding, community involvement, and adherence to university, departmental, and program goals (23). When thinking of my oral history project and future oral history collections, it was important for me to understand the goals of my research agenda, as well as larger goals of my department and university because if research is not a central goal it is difficult in numerous ways to conduct oral history projects since they are commonly community based but often funded by academic resources. This issue was particularly relevant as I engaged the digital component of this project.
Black women oral histories and community histories

A substantial amount of scholarship exists that centers on community oral histories, oral histories that are collected from a target community for a specific purpose. In “Community oral history: where we have been, where we are going,” Linda Shopes refers to a community oral history project in multiple ways. Shopes argues that community can be defined by “locale, to a group of interviews with people who live in some geographically bonded place, whether an urban ethnic neighborhood, a southern mill village, or a region of Midwestern farms. Yet ‘community’ also refers to a shared social identity, and so we speak of interviews with members of the gay community, the black community, the medical community” (585). I use Shope’s definition for this oral history study which I identify as a community oral history project based on the shared social identity of my participants who are part of the black community as well as their geographical space which is a historic southern Black town.

Robin Boylorn’s *Sweetwater*, is an auto-ethnographic product of a community oral history collection. She collects the oral histories of Black women in her hometown of Sweetwater in order to make meaning of their lived experiences as Black women in the South. She does this by using theoretical approaches that include black feminist thought, muted group theory, and intersectionality theory. Anne Valk and Leslie Brown’s text *Living with Jim Crow: African American women and memories of the Segregated South*, shares the community histories of Black women living in the south during the Jim Crow Era. Although Valk and Brown’s text includes many participants in a large geographic area, her argument still focuses on Black women within Black southern communities. Both Boylorn’s and Valk and Brown’s texts are strong examples of community histories that focus on Black women because they both identify a
geographical location and show how those locations influenced or factored into the women’s oral history narratives.

In Jillian Jimenez’s article “The History of Grandmothers in the African-American Community,” she uses the primary oral history documents of renowned African-American women from the “Black Women Oral History Project of the Schlesinger Library at Radcliffe College,” which were collected in the 70s, along with other documents and materials to argue that “although the role of the grandmother in African-American communities was mediated by class differences, regional differences...there was commonality in the lives of African-American grandmothers in the latter half of the nineteenth century...and part of the twentieth century” (525). Jimenez’s research proves that similarities among Black women exist regardless of their community or location. Although Jimenez uses oral histories to help develop her argument and to examine the role of the African-American grandmother, she does not use oral history as a methodology to form that argument nor does she solely rely on it. Instead, she uses oral history documents as a source, without conducting oral history interviews, along with other sources to develop a critical analysis on the role of the grandmother in African American communities.

Dawn Hinton’s article “Unheard Voices in the Community Building Process: The Role of Poor Black Women in the U.S. during the mid-20th Century” is another example of oral history used as a source of evidence but not a methodology. In other words, both Hinton and Jimenez discuss oral history as part of the end product of their studies and not as a methodological process that fosters analytical examination. Hinton uses the stories of two Black women to argue that Black women in general were critical to community building processes during mid-20th century (40). My project contributes to the lack of scholarship that uses oral history as the sole methodology
while also framing it as a community history since the participants are those who have lived in a historic Black town.

Similarly, Steve Estes’ text, *Ask and Tell: Gay and Lesbian Veterans Speak Out*, can be considered community oral history because he focuses on a specific group in the military community during a specific time span. Charles Hardy article “A People’s History in Industrial Philadelphia: Reflections on Community Oral History Projects and the Uses of the Past,” discusses his experiences developing a community oral history project. He stated that his project “I Remember When” was the first of four community projects over a span of 6 years. He interviewed 200 participants, and with the help of his graduate students and residents, another 50 interviews were completed (2). The end products of his first oral history project included his PhD thesis, sound documentaries for public radio, and several spinoffs (2). Not only does Hardy’s project serve as another example of oral histories in predominately Black communities, but it is also a prime example of how the researcher can develop oral history research collections into numerous projects or extensions of existing projects.

Like Hardy, Brian Purnell and Oneka LaBennett developed a community oral history project that they discuss in “Introduction: The Bronx African American History Project.” They explain that “the [BAAHP] is an ongoing community-based oral history project whose lifeblood flows through a dynamic partnership between university trained scholars and over a dozen...individuals…known to the BAAHP as community researchers” (8). The purpose of their community oral history project was to examine and learn the “ways people of African descent influenced political, religious, civic, and economic and cultural life in New York’s northern most borough” (9). In Purnell and LaBennett’s article, they use the oral histories to examine the socioeconomic, political, and racial climate of that time; this study helped me to consider how I
might analyze and think through some of the same factors that would arise during the interviews I examine for this project.

In “Sparking Rural Community Dialogues with Digital Oral Histories,” William S. Walker urges scholars who do community history projects to move past the presentation aspect of oral history and create dialogic spaces for community members to share and discuss the stories in the oral histories. Walker shares how he created his first community-building experience based on the oral history collections from him and his students. They began “each program by playing short selections form oral history interviews”, and they “found that hearing these recordings (and reading the transcripts) is an excellent way to build community and get the dialogue started on the right foot” (404). Walker asserts that in order to stimulate complex conversations the facilitator must ask questions that do not “require specialized knowledge-questions that anyone can answer” (405). The facilitator encourages participants to critically reflect and make connection between past and present and between stories. These dialogue programs are a way to keep the community residents engaged in their history and a way to build partnerships within and outside of the community. It is a way for community members to see how their history continues to be relevant across space, audiences, and time. This article helped me consider next steps for this project.

**Black Girlhood**

There is virtually no scholarship that relates specifically to Black girls and oral history; however, a substantial amount of scholarship exists about Black girlhood, which has informed my research. Using oral history as a methodology will reveal ideas related to how Black girls see themselves, their environments, and how their agency affects much of their perspectives on their
lived experiences, thus adding to the black girlhood conversation using a new lens and methodology to discuss ways in which Black girls view themselves and their communities.

In “Get Your Freak On: How Black Girls Sexualize Identity,” Debbie Weekes references Heidi Mirza in her 1990 book *Young Female and Black* that “little is known theoretically about Black girlhood, and the relationship between age, gender, and ethnicity remains under-researched” (252). Six years later in 1996, bell hooks writes in *Bone Black: Memories of Girlhood* that “not enough is known about the experiences of black girls in our society” (xii). Over a decade later, novice and veteran black feminist scholars alike are still grappling with and learning about black girlhood. My project in part responds to those statements by hooks and Mirza by offering firsthand accounts through oral histories of the lived experiences of being a Black girl in a southern historic Black town. It is important to denote the term southern that identifies the geographical location of Hobson City, Alabama because although Black girls share many of the same lived experiences, these Black girls in this town have a uniquely different perspective on their experiences because of the region in which they live and the historic culture of that region.

Weekes acknowledges certain stereotypes of blackness associated with sexuality and how Black women and girls are silenced when it comes to the nature and expressions of their female sexuality (252). She argues that there is a “relationship between this silence and the sexualized othering that young Black women are subject to, in that they are only able to experience credible sexual identities by comparing themselves to their Black male and white female counterparts” (252). In *African American Literacies*, Elaine Richardson argues that Black girls’ language practices “reflect their socialization in a racialized, genderized, sexualized, and classed world in which they employ their language [and literacy] practices to advance and protect themselves”
(77). For Black girls, using language is a performative act, an act that embodies their lived experiences. Richardson’s text was useful for me as I consider the ways in which the girls in my study articulate their thoughts of Hobson City as well as how they view themselves as agents of change in their community.

In LaShawnda Lindsey-Dennis’ article “Black Feminist-Womanist Research Paradigm: Toward a Culturally Relevant Research Model Focused on African-American Girls,” she argues that “in general, African American girls are an understudied group” and that they only appear in research when being compared to more popular studied groups such as African American boys and White girls (507). She does assert that while African American girls are an understudied group, there has been a steady increase of information published about them in “research and public spheres” since 2009 (507). Using a chronological timeline, Lindsey-Dennis shows how much research has been published between 2010-2015; this timeline shows that there is a clear need for more scholarly work that focuses on African American girls. My project contributes to this growing body of scholarship by broadening the conversation on Black girls to include research by a rhetoric and composition scholar and also research that specifically relates to Black girls and oral history.

Bryana French, Jioni Lewis, and Helen Neville argue in “Naming and Reclaiming: An Interdisciplinary Analysis of Black Girls’ and Women’s Resistance Strategies” that “given the gender-racial disparities among Black girls and women’s economic, health, and education in the United States, it is important to identify ways that Black girls and women are continuing to strive despite this adversity” (4). Oral history is an effective way to identify just how Black girls and even the women in my project continue to persevere and strive despite such uncontrollable factors. They go on to discuss how much of the research on Black adolescents focuses on black
boys and thus mutes, overlooks, or dismisses the idea that Black girls deserve the same recognition and scholarly attention. Even though much discussion on gender-racial disparities targets black boys, as noted by Lindsey-Dennis, and black women, Treva Lindsey, in her article “One Time for My Girls: African-American Girlhood, Empowerment, and Popular Visual Culture,” is one scholar who uses hip hop generational feminism as a theoretical framework “for thinking through contemporary black girlhood and adolescence” (23). She argues that “hip hop generation feminism recognizes the specificity of experiences of the hip-hop generation, while attempting to navigate…the terrains of racism, classism, patriarchy, sexism, ableism misogyny…it also promotes empowerment” (24). Using this theory as a lens to think through the analysis of the black girl’s transcripts offers a critical look into how these black girls empower themselves, how they turn challenges or negative lived experiences into positivity and more. I believe that through oral history, these girls will gain a sense of empowerment because their voices and their stories will be heard.

Like Lindsey and French et al, Gholnescar Muhammad’s article “Creating Spaces for Black Adolescent Girls to ‘Write It Out’,” focuses on black girlhood but through a writing pedagogy perspective. Muhammad conducted a five-week writing workshop for black girls to analyze their literacy practices but to also allow space for the girls to use writing as a means to “define self and build resiliency” (203). Like Muhammad, my research speaks to the ways that the Black girl participants construct their identities, how they view themselves as part of a historic Black town, and how these sites can be places of resistance. In “Styled by their Perceptions: Black Adolescent Girls Interpret Representations of Black Females in Popular Culture” Muhammad and Sherell McArthur argue that current media representations of Black women influence the way black girls view themselves. To help counteract this narrative of
negative media portrayals and the influence they have on young black girls, my project explores how Black girls view themselves as agents of change and sources of disruption.

Betina Love, in *Hip Hop’s Li’l Sistas Speak: Negotiating Hip Hop Identities and Politics in the New South*, examines black girlhood through the lens of hip hop by examining the ways urban black girls in Atlanta construct racial and gendered identities and how rap shapes their lived experiences (10). Although hip hop is the cultural means she uses to study her participants she offers a way for scholars to consider black girls lived experiences through more ways than just hip hop. She argues that it is “fundamental to interrogate Black girlhood [because] Black girls have to negotiate and navigate… communities raided by crime, sexual assault and harassment, and poor schools” (31). As I analyze the oral histories conducted with the Black girls in Hobson City, it is important to take into account Love’s argument because the girls in my study are constructing their identities and grappling with their lived experiences based on negative situations and experiences that have occurred in their town as well as negative portrayals that have been constructed by outsiders about their town. It is also important to understand their multilayered lives of race, culture, gender, and socioeconomic statuses. Love goes on to make a critical point that her study proves that “girls are engaging in complicated and contradictory work of negotiating the space of Hip Hop music and culture but are doing the work alone” (103). This argument is critical to Black girlhood scholarship because it shows that scholars recognize the work Black girls do in constructing identities and grappling with their environmental and cultural influences, but that the people with power to help critically engage them like teachers, educators, administrators, counselors, etc. are frequently not there to support them. It is my hope as a scholar that part of my project creates a needed space to share the lived
experiences of the Black girls from Hobson City so that we can continue the critical conversations of understanding Black girlhood.

In *Black girlhood in the 19th Century*, Nazera Wright examines representations of Black girls of the 19th century through several key time periods: the antebellum decades, time after the civil war, reconstruction period, and right at the dawn of the 20th century before the Great Migration and the Harlem Renaissance (21-22). She examines generational differences and similarities seen in Black girl representations from Black writers both men and women and concludes that Black girls “used their wits and intelligence to fight against slavery, abuses as indentured servants, would-be rapists, and other obstacles that stood in the way of their plans for a better life” (20). Wright approaches Black girlhood through literature, something previous scholars have not done. Using fiction as an approach brings diversity to how one can negotiate Black girlhood identity and understand what Black girls have experienced. These fictional stories that Wright and other black writers create are a reflection of the cultures that they represent; the characters may or may not be real people but they are reflective of the real world experiences of black girls.

To complement Wright’s perspective of understanding Black girlhood through literature, Ruth Rosenberg analyzes the theme of Black girl representation in “Seeds in Hard Ground: Black Girlhood in *The Bluest Eye*”. Early in her argument, Rosenberg refers to another scholar Barbara Dodd Stanford’s research on Black girlhood literature. She quotes Stanford by claiming “‘Whites Only’ could have been stamped on almost every literature series for high school students published before 1965” (3). Rosenberg continues by referencing Nancy Larrick, who she claims “studied 5,206 children’s books published between 1962-1964…only 349 of those thousands of books include even one black child either in the illustrations or the text. Of that 6.7
percent (which do show a black child), all but a small fraction are ‘set outside the United States or before World War II. Quite clearly, the books used in American schools were primarily by and about white, Anglo-Saxon, middle-class people” (84-85) (436). Wright’s use of statistics conceptualizes how detrimental the lack of Black girl bodies and Black girl narratives in school texts and literature is to Black girls in America. Yet, as the decades have passed, we see more and more children’s books by Black women for Black girls; we see more scholars in academia investing their research into understanding Black girlhood; we even see more television and movies with Black girls as main characters.

In “Kindred Narratives: Reflections of Southern Black Orality in Sweetwater” Aisha Durham speaks to Boylorn’s Sweetwater through her reinterpretation of “home” and fuses her lived experiences in Southern Virginia with that of Boylorn’s in the form of a short poem much like the poetry that separates the chapters in Sweetwater. Durham’s reinterpretation of home as well as her connectedness to Boylorn shows how Black women and Black girls can find some relatedness in each other whether it is through space, geographic location, words, race, gender, or an intersection of them all. I argue that Black girlhood studies create a space for Black women to understand their past lived experiences as a girl and for Black girls to learn as they grow.

In Young Female and Black, Heidi Mirza examines Black girlhood and Black womanhood through a longitudinal study of a group of young Black women’s transition from school to the workforce. She focuses on a “structural understanding of the process of inequality” rather than the “established emphasis on subculture identity” (2). She argues,

While black women clearly do have strong cultural traditions that are historically distinct, such a celebratory emphasis is analytically naïve for several reasons. Firstly, it marginalizes men, who in many ways, have a part to play in the lives of black women. Secondly, it confuses the issue of external structural economic inequality with an emphasis of internal cultural traits. The effects of both these oversights has been, ultimately, to turn our attention away from looking at the importance of racial and sexual
discrimination, in favour of focusing on cultural determinants to economic success or failure, and in particular has been responsible for reifying black motherhood (2).

Mirza makes an interesting argument by stating that Black women are misled in many ways, due to mainstream media, popular stereotypes, and generational thinking, into believing that our Black culture determines our success or failure when in actuality it is the ongoing racial and sexual discrimination that us Black women continue to experience.

**African American Oral History**

This section provides examples of oral history projects specifically focused on African Americans or Black people and are gender inclusive. Andrea Cantrell discusses some of the challenges associated with incorporating African American oral history into state history in her article “WPA Sources for African American Oral History in Arkansas: Ex-Slave Narratives and Early Settlers’ Personal Histories.” She makes an argument that “enforced illiteracy during slavery prevented generations of African Americans from writing letters… that might have survived to offer researchers first-hand accounts of their experiences.” Her argument supports the argument for researchers to continue to document the histories of African Americans because whether it is the narratives of former slaves or African Americans in a historic black town, their stories are important to the larger history within the states as well as the country. Like Boylorn, Dawn Hinton focuses on the “hidden” voices of African American women in “Unheard Voices in the Community building Process: The Role of Poor Black Women in the U.S. during the mid-20th Century.” Although Hinton does not specifically use Muted Group Theory as one of her theoretical frameworks, like Boylorn, she does implement Black Feminist Thought as a way to think about and interpret the narratives of poor black women. Hinton juxtaposes the poor black woman with the middle class black woman to show how the voices of the former can go unnoticed, unheard, and dismissed by the voices of the latter. Muted Group Theory, used in
Boylorn’s text, shows the same ideology only with MGT, the minority, unheard voices are always dismissed by the dominant white male. Hinton shows how even though a gender shares the same race they can still experience oppression and marginalization because of other factors.

In “Oral Histories of Contemporary African American Social Work Pioneers,” Tricia B. Bent-Goodley presents her study of African American pioneer social workers with whom she conducted oral histories. Her research findings detail the five prominent themes found among the oral history narratives, four of those narratives were included in her argument. Those themes were identified to “enhance social work education” (181). She goes on to define pioneers as “individuals who have made significant contribution to the betterment of the human condition with evidence of a sustained record of achievement over a period of a minimum of 25 years” (182). Bent-Goodley argues that little is known about the “contributions of contemporary African American social work pioneers…these pioneers weathered enormous challenges imposed by segregation and overt racism…not only did they survive; they flourished (182). The little history known about these social workers relates to the little history known about Hobson City, AL; the social workers she identifies as pioneers parallels to many of the interviewees in my oral history collection who have made lasting contributions to the historic town. The five major themes that emerged from Bent-Goodley’s research include 1) the need to maintain diversity in social work education 2) the need for high professional expectations 3) being guided by a sense of purpose 4) partnering with the community 5) understanding institutional building (193). This study is a strong example of analyzing oral histories for themes in order to make meaning and develop understanding of real world issues on a specific field of study such as social work.
John Bloom’s “‘The Farmers Didn’t Particularly Care for Us’ Oral Narrative and the Grass Roots Recovery of African American Migrant Farm Labor History in Central Pennsylvania” is another example of African American oral history project. Bloom’s article is a carefully composed narrative of the oral histories he conducted with African American grassroots migrant farm workers and the people who helped those workers. Although his argument excludes methodology and analysis, he creates an informative narrative that gives the history of African American migrant farm laborers and their experiences, experiences that have previously been little to non-existent in official documentation. Bloom states, “While much of the history of migrant farm labor in Pennsylvania is contained in official sources…oral histories with farm workers and those involved in the Shiloh migrant aid program have helped to reveal this hidden history of African American farm labor” (325). Bloom’s study is yet another example of why documenting African American and Black histories are important to the larger conversations that take place on these issues and events.

This literature review encompasses scholarship that helped me form my argument about the need for oral history collections on historic Black towns. Not only is there a need for oral histories, but there is also a need for digital preservation of historic Black towns’ histories. My project starts to fulfill these needs by documenting the history of Hobson City, Alabama through oral history collections from Black women and girls, and by also arguing for digital preservation of marginalized history. The following chapters will detail the methodology, analysis, and findings of my study. In chapter 2, I explain the methodology that I used in collecting and analyzing the oral histories.
CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

Overview

In this chapter I provide the purpose of the study, research questions, the methodological approach, oral history, the theoretical framework, description of the participants, description of materials and equipment used, and how I conducted the study.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to learn more about the history of the historic Black town of Hobson City through oral history collection and data analysis. The research questions that guided this study are as follows: 1) What are the unique lived experiences in the stories of Black women and girls in Hobson City, Alabama? 2) What are the current and historical narratives of Hobson City, Alabama and how can these oral histories disrupt or complement those narratives? And 3) What are the current tensions (either real or perceived) between Hobson City, Alabama and the surrounding mainstream communities? Oral history was the research methodological approach and rhetorical analysis served as the strategy used to make meaning, interpretations, and implications of the data.

Methodological Approach

Oral History was the methodological approach for this study, which is a type of qualitative research. The Oral History Association (OHA) defines oral history as “a field of study and a method of gathering, preserving, and interpreting, the voices and memories of people, communities, and participants in past events” (oralhistory.org). In Doing Oral History, Donald Ritchie explains the process of this methodology along with certain exclusions as,
collecting memories and personal commentaries of historical significance through recorded interviews. An oral history interview generally consists of a well-prepared interviewer questioning an interviewee and recording their exchange in audio or video format. Recordings of the interview are transcribed, summarized, or indexed and then placed in a library or archives. These interviews may be used for research or excerpted in a publication, radio or video documentary, museum exhibition, dramatization or other forms of public presentation. Recordings, transcripts, catalogs, photographs and related documentary materials can also be posted on the internet. Oral history does not include random taping…nor does it refer to recorded speeches, wiretapping, personal diaries on tape, or other sound recordings that lack the dialogue between interviewer and interviewee (19).

This dissertation project focused on the untold stories from Black women and girls in a historic Black town; thus, I used oral history as the method by which I analyzed, conceptualized, interpreted, and made meaning of the data. Oral History is the most appropriate and effective method of “rescuing, recovering and (re)inscribing” the stories of Hobson City because there has been a dearth of information that has circulated in mainstream history books or other news outlets aside from what the Historic Black Towns and Settlements Alliance and community historians of the town produced (Royster and Kirsch, 2012). There are many residents who currently have valuable information and primary documents that provide an account of the town’s history to Alabama and to the country. However, because the town suffers from lack of resources and because of past negative experiences with other outside researchers and government officials, the residents have chosen to keep the documents and other materials under their own watch in their private residences or at the town’s municipal building.

To understand the significance of using oral history as a methodology to further the research in Hobson City, it is important to first know the evolution of the community partnership between the town and the University of Alabama. In 2014, five mayors from historic black towns and settlements began meeting to discuss potential opportunities to capitalize on their individual and collective Black histories. As a result of those initial meetings, those five towns formed the Historic Black Towns and Settlements Alliance, Inc. (HBTSA). The towns included are
Tuskegee, AL, Grambling, LA, Hobson City, AL, Eatonville, FL, and Mound Bayou, MS; Hobson City is the only town with a woman as mayor, a Black woman. The organization’s purpose is to leverage historic preservation to protect their respective communities, educate their residents and the public at large, and generate economic development individually and collectively. Due to the services of two consultants enlisted by the alliance (Mr. Everett L. Fly, licensed landscape architect and licensed architect; and N.Y. Nathiri, CEO/Director of Preserve the Eatonville Community) and a 2015 conference at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, the towns and settlements were encouraged to develop individual goals and to seek university partnerships in order to help meet those goals. As a result, Hobson City’s town leadership established the following the goals: 1) Town Founders and Community Genealogy; 2) Cemetery research, documentation and interpretation; 3) National Register of Historic Places; 4) Historic records, documents and artifacts curation and archival preservation; 5) Youth engagement; 6) Investigation, Evaluation and Interpretation of Oldest House. Due to a chance meeting with the mayor of Hobson City in January of 2015 in Eatonville, FL and a formal meeting in Hobson City in May of 2015, a community partnership between the University of Alabama and Hobson City was created. Because of my oral history research experience and my involvement in other ongoing research in the town, I argue that oral history collection contributes to goal one (town founders and community genealogy), goal two (historic records, documents, and artifacts curation and archival preservation) and goal three (achieve national registry recognition for historic places). Oral history is the most effective method of sharing the history of Hobson City through the voices of women and girls that will reach many audiences. These stories will be shared with not only the citizens of Hobson City, but also generations of the
people who come to and from the town, the academic community, the Historic Black Towns and Settlements Alliance, and other audiences.

Theoretical Framework

The main overarching theories I used to implement the oral history methodology and frame the analysis of the stories include Critical Race Theory, Grounded Theory, Intersectionality Theory, and Muted Group Theory. I also used two theoretical concepts created by Jackie Royster and Gesa Kirsch, Critical Imagination and Social Circulation as a feminist approach to analyzing the transcripts.

First, I relied on Grounded Theory as the foundational theory. According to Kathy Charmaz in *Constructing Grounded Theory*, “grounded theory…consists of systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to construct theories from the data themselves” (1). She goes on to say that “Grounded theory begins with inductive data, invokes iterative strategies of going back and forth between data and analysis, uses comparative methods, and keeps you interacting and involved with your data and emerging analysis” (1). Therefore, grounded theory allowed me to develop a theory or theories inductively without being constrained by a pre-existing framework. Grounded theory is an effective way to analyze the data because it is an interactive theory that allowed me to make consistent stops throughout the analysis process and analyze data at every stage. This theory was also effective because it uses strategies in line with oral history methodology such as interviewing but takes those interviews through a rigorous process of multi-layered coding, memo writing, reflection and reflexive practices, and (re)construction.

After I used grounded theory to build a foundation during the interview, transcription, and coding processes, I considered other theories once I was able to assess the data. The second
theory to emerge as relevant to this work was Critical Race Theory. According to Gloria Ladson-Billings in “Just what is Critical Race Theory and what’s it Doing in a Nice Field Like Education”, Critical Race Theory or CRT consists of several prominent themes: 1) it acknowledges that “racism is ‘normal, not aberrant, in American society’” 2) it employs storytelling to “analyze myths, presuppositions, and received wisdoms that make up common culture about race and that invariably render blacks and other minorities one-down...CRT focuses on the role of the voice to link form and substance in scholarship” (Ladson-Billings). In CRT, “voicing allows the oppressed to communicate their experiences and their realities” (Ladson-Billings). Two last prominent themes are that of the citizen in democracy and CRT’s relationship to education. Critical Race Theory is appropriate for use in this project because it provided a lens to examine the stories collected based on the town’s historical significance, its current socioeconomic state, and its demographics over the past decades, which have all been influenced to some degree by race. Although the town’s racial demographics have remained consistent since its time as Mooree Quarters, other factors have drastically changed, and they can all be tied to race in relation to property, education, and economic occurrences. By using CRT as one theoretical framework, I uncovered some of the racial tensions between Hobson City and its surrounding mainstream communities, Oxford and Anniston, Alabama.

Along with Critical Race Theory, I used Intersectionality Theory as part of my theoretical framework. In “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color,” Kimberle Crenshaw coined the term “intersectionality,” a term used to “denote the various ways in which race and gender interact to shape the multiple dimensions of Black women...” (1244). She goes on to argue that “the intersection of racism and sexism factors into Black women’s lives in ways that cannot be captured wholly by looking at the race or
gender dimensions of those experiences separately” (1244). Robin Boylorn used this theory in her book *Sweetwater* when she argued that intersectionality theory can be applied when examining women’s lives because it is important to understand how one can experience privilege in one identity and oppression in another. This theory allowed me to examine the narratives of both the women and girls to better understand their multilayered identities and how they function in various environments where they assume both privileged and oppressed roles.

In “Redefining Intersectionality Theory Through the Lens of African American Young Adolescent Girls’ Racialized Experiences,” Lisa Harrison argues that scholars who use intersectionality mostly discuss the theory in relation to sexuality, gender, and race, but that age should be another identifying factor included. Harrison argues that the intersection of age places a major role in dominant discourse (1034). Harrison continues this point by explaining,

> Everyone regardless of age, sex, race, and other markers of difference is influenced and uses dominant discourses to make meaning of the world in which they live. To that point, everyone also has the ability to utilize new discourses often comes from acquiring new knowledge…however, for young adolescents, their access to knowledge and experience is often controlled and bounded, thus, arguably making young adolescents more likely to utilize dominant discourse to make meaning of their world. Furthermore, with so many negative discourses about young African American adolescent girls, it becomes even more important to interrogate the dominant discourse that influences how Black girls view themselves and the world around them. (1035)

Therefore, Intersectionality Theory serves both the Black women and girls in my study.

Lastly, Muted Group Theory, developed by Edwin Ardener and Shirley Ardener, is the last theory that completes my theoretical framework. In Celia Wall and Pat Gannon-Leary’s article “A Sentence Made by Men: Muted Group Theory Revisited” they explain how the Ardeners defined Muted Group Theory.

The Ardeners contended that there were ‘dominant modes of expression in any society which have been generated by the dominant structure within it [sic]’ (1975b:20). To be heard and heeded an individual must use this dominant mode of expression. The use of an alternative, ‘individual’ mode of expression will not be heard. To be understood, the would-be-communicator must suppress her own mode of expression in favor of the
dominant mode and thus she is ‘muted.’ Muted does not necessarily mean silent: ‘the important issue is whether they are able to say all they would wish to say, where and when they wish to say it’ (E.Ardner, 1975b:21). Generally, in a situation where gender is a consideration, women are therefore the muted group (22). Muted Group Theory allowed me to think through the best ways for my participants to speak on topics of importance in their interviews, how I framed interview questions, and how I offered the most transparent representation of them in my dissertation.

Cheris Kramarae furthers the conversation on MGT by arguing that Muted Group Theory goes beyond gender differences as the marginalizing factor. She states, “interest and concern are about not just gender…but a range of other marginalizing differences as well (including race, sexuality, age, and class)” (55). Kramarae’s argument is important here because the layers of MGT gave me a means to not only analyze the stories of the women and girls as a collective marginalized group, but the theory also allowed me to analyze their stories from other marginalizing factors within this collective group. For example, the girls are viewed as the subordinate group out of the two because of their age. Therefore, providing a space for their voices to be heard helps to understand their lived experiences that would otherwise go unheard, dismissed, or overlooked in a culture where Black girls are clear subordinates to their Black women elders.

To complement the theoretical framework, I relied on the concepts established by Jackie Royster and Gesa Kirsch’s book Feminist Rhetorical Practices, using a feminist lens to interpret the oral histories. The two concepts that were important to my research are Critical Imagination and Social Circulation. Critical Imagination is “one of several inquiry tools available for developing a critical stance in order to engage more intentionally and intensely in various research processes” (71). Social circulation offers a way of thinking and understanding “complex rhetorical interactions that happen across space and time” (110). It also disrupts traditional
spaces and dichotomies of rhetoric that have long been occupied by men. The outcome of using social circulation “is to enhance the capacity to reimagine the dynamic functioning of women’s work in domains of discourse, re-envision cultural flow in specific localities, and link analyses of these phenomena in a… way in support of amplifying and magnifying the impacts and consequences of women’s rhetoric” (98). These concepts were useful to my research because they allowed me to view the current narrative of Hobson City from the perspectives of women who 1) are residents of Hobson City 2) work or once worked in the town 3) participate in social activities that happen there 4) have generational ties that stem from the town’s early beginnings and 5) navigate the dynamics within their private and public spaces.

**Participants**

Six women were interviewed for oral histories and five adolescent girls’ talk back interviews were used as part of this study. I chose to not use pseudonyms for the participants for two reasons 1) the women interviewed were aware that multiple sources would have access to their stories and 2) the girls who are part of this study had already had their identities accessible to the general public through the PhotoVoice study that they participated in.\(^2\) The participants are as follows 1) Karen Striplin born February 1, 1965 in Dadeville, Alabama, 2) Wanda Cunningham born March 7, 1961 in Calhoun County, Alabama, 3) Alberta McCrory born May 9, 1948 in Hobson City, Alabama 4) Katie Pyles born February 8, 1940 in Hobson City, 5) Barbara Boyd born January 31, 1937, and 6) Georgia Calhoun born June 21, 1930 in Choccolocco, AL.

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\(^2\) #BlackGirls4Change was a PhotoVoice study conducted by Professor Michelle Bachelor Robinson, as principle investigator, and graduate students Candace Chambers, Khirsten Echols, and Margaret Holloway, as investigators, which involved using photography as means for having adolescent girls in the Hobson City community evaluate places they wanted to know more about and places they wanted to change in their town. The results of this study are currently under review for publication.
The five adolescent girl participants were Jaden, Tesia, ZaKerria, Aliya, and Melody, all of whom were in middle and high school during the time of their interviews. The sample pool does not include participants in their 20s, 30s or 40s for two reasons: 1) the women who participated were selected with the help of Alberta McCrory, mayor of the town, as senior members of the community who would have extensive history about the town 2) from my numerous visits to Hobson City, these age groups of women were simply not visible or engaged in the community and therefore more difficult to access.

When thinking of how best to portray my participants and whether or not to use pseudonyms, I referred to The Belmont Report, which identifies three key ethical concepts researchers must consider and adhere to when working with human subjects; those three concepts are, respect for persons, beneficence, and justice. The respect for persons concept requires that researchers obtain informed consent from the participants. The justice concept states that there must be an equal distribution of benefits and burdens for the study. Lastly, the beneficence concept requires that the benefits must outweigh the risks regarding the participants. To make sure that I adhered to those three ethical concepts regarding the participants I followed all guidelines and principles for my study. According to the Oral History Association, as of September 8, 2015, “the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services…specifically recommended that oral history be explicitly excluded from review by institutional review boards, noting that oral history already has its own code of ethics, including the principle of informed consent” (oralhistory.org). The girls and their parents all gave informed consent to have their information and their interviews used for research purposes and for public use, which justifies the appropriateness to use their interviews from the Photovoice study in my oral history study. The women all gave informed consent before their interviews, and they were aware that their
oral histories would be available to the public for use. Considering the beneficence concept, I determined that all benefits outweighed the risks of this study. The participants were in no physical harm during the interviews (many of them were in their own homes); they were not forced to share anything in their narratives; they were all aware that their interviews would be available and accessible to the general public as well as the University of Alabama, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and also the Hobson City community. The participants were all volunteers who willingly wanted to participate and share their stories. Ultimately, the participants who volunteered all wanted to share their stories on the history of Hobson City, Alabama and who wanted to enact some type of positive change in their community. The risks were minimal and included emotional distress if they chose to share personal stories that were not asked or required by the interviewer.

The participants in my project were Black women and girls because black feminist thought naturally manifested at the origins of this research study. It started as a chance meeting between Black women and has since become a purposeful re-occurrence to keep Black women and Black girls the focus of many of the community partnership initiatives as well as what has become my dissertation project. Therefore, I chose to situate my study within this vein of black femininity. I was interested in studying the stories of Black women and girls for three reasons: 1) I wanted to explore the female lived experiences in a historic Black town, 2) I wanted to collect cross generational stories to add a layer of perspectives to certain topics that would possibly be discussed in the interviews, and 3) I wanted to use these stories and research to gain more understanding of my own Black Feminist identity. My own dual positionality as a Black woman and scholar gave me a critical lens for examining racial and gendered issues that Black women
experience. Because of this racial and gender commonality and its influence on my research, I was motivated to include both Black women and Black girls as participants in my project.

Being a Black woman graduate student and dealing with my own challenges within the academy while simultaneously figuring out my self-identity was a major factor in why I chose to devote my time in research and writing to understanding Black women and girls. Collecting oral histories from the women and girls in Hobson City simply felt right as I considered countless things I have learned about myself over the years and because of my newfound fearlessness of understanding both Black girlhood and womanhood by participating in scholarly conversations, conversations where I previously felt I was unqualified to speak. Purposefully choosing to engage with Black girls and Black women was a brave move on my behalf, and yet the familiarity of the town of Hobson City made it easier for me to solidify that decision.

It was important for me to include both Black women and girls because I wanted cross-generational stories. I think of my own family, both the patriarchal and matriarchal sides, a large family with numerous aunts, great aunts, first, second, and third women cousins, deceased great grandmothers, and I think about the pieces of stories I have missed over the years. Cross-generational perspectives or accounts give more to a story than simply relying on one generation. It is only within those cross-generational stories that one gains a complex and a more complete understanding of a significant time in history or a geographic space.

Materials and Equipment

The equipment used to conduct oral histories included an HD CMOS Canon Camcorder Vixia HF530, Tascam DR-40 Audio recorder, and Tripod. The Camcorder was used to document the oral histories via videos and to serve as a backup audio recorder. The audio recorder served as the primary audio recorder. The tripod was used to hoist the camcorder for stability. The
camcorder and audio recorder included SD storage cards that were used to transfer the data from the devices to the computer. For the oral history that I conducted in the Fall of 2017, I used the Quicktime player software for the transcription process. Quicktime allowed me to decrease the speed of the audio so that I could transcribe more effectively and faster. Each interview had to be transcribed before conducting the coding processes. I used tables created in Microsoft Word for the coding processes.

**Transcriptions and Folders**

All of the interviews except one, were already transcribed and stored in an online repository called UA Box. UA Box is an unlimited cloud storage service that the University of Alabama offers for free to students, faculty, and staff. I downloaded all of the transcripts with the permission of the Professor Robinson who was the authorized user over the accounts where the transcripts from a course she taught in Spring 2016, when oral histories were collected, a course in which I was enrolled. I downloaded the girls’ transcripts from the another account where I was one of the authorized users, as a result of being an investigator on the PhotoVoice project conducting during that same semester. I then created digital folders for each participant for organizational purposes. Each folder would contain the participant’s transcription, initial codings, focused codings, and analyses. I chose to stay faithful to the transcriptions by providing verbatim transcriptions of each participant because I wanted to embrace the authenticity of their voices throughout the entire study.

**Interviews**

I used existing oral history interviews that were collected in the Spring of 2016, existing talk back Photovoice interviews that were collected during the Spring of 2016, and interviews I collected in the Fall of 2017. I categorized these interviews as life story community histories.
The goal of the interviews was to learn about the history of Hobson city through the lives of some of its residents and major community figures. Hugo Slim and Paul Thompson describe life stories in *Listening for a Change: Oral Testimony and Community Development*. They state, “these [life story interviews] are normally private, one-to-one encounters between interviewer and narrator. Sessions should be held at a time convenient to the interviewee and in a suitable location, preferably somewhere which offers seclusion, comfort and familiarity” (64). My interviews adhered to Slim and Thompson’s definition because these interview sessions were one on one encounters and were conducted in environments familiar to the interviewee. With my research goal being to gain insight on the history of Hobson City through this oral history collection, that history was told through the interviewee’s life stories.

The first set of interviews were collected as part of a service learning requirement of a graduate English Composition and Rhetoric course in the spring of 2016. For an entire semester, the graduate students engaged in scholarly conversations with premier texts from the field of oral history. Because the professor of the course was the community partner consultant of the Alabama in Hobson City Initiative, she constructed the course to include a service learning component so that the graduate students could do research in the town. Our final projects required us to travel to Hobson City, Alabama with a partner to complete oral history interviews on residents who had been selected by the professor/consultant and the mayor of the town. The final product of the oral histories resulted in a seminar length paper. A total of 12 oral histories were collected in that course; I used the stories collected from women out of that set for this analysis.

The second set of oral histories were collected as part of a Photovoice study that I along with the consultant and two other graduate students participated in with five adolescent girls of
the community. Photovoice is a participatory action research methodology. According to Carolyn Wang and Mary Ann Burris in “Photovoice: Concept, Methodology, and Use for Participatory Needs Assessment” they state that “Photovoice is a process by which people can identify, represent, and enhance their community through a specific photographic technique” (369). They continue to say, “As a practice based in the production of knowledge, photovoice has three main goals: (1) to enable people to record and reflect their community’s strengths and concerns, (2) promote critical dialogue and knowledge about important issues through large and small group discussion of photographs, and (3) to reach policymakers “369). In “#blackgirls4change: Literacy and Youth Engagement in a Community Environment” Michelle Bachelor Robinson et al describe how the photovoice study in detail which gives context to how I selected the girls for my study and how their interviews were constructed. The participants (the girls in my study) were recruited at two local events, the 2015 Founders’ Day Celebration and the 2016 Black history Program. The team conducted a total of seven sessions: one orientation session, two photo sessions, once community activity planning session, one gallery show planning session, and two community project sessions (Robinson et al). The talk backs occurred at the end of every Photovoice session and served as a reflective moment for the girls about certain historical topics related to Hobson City. It was during the photo sessions that the sound walks occurred. Anna Harris in “Eliciting Sound Walks” states that “there is much to learn by closely attending to the places and practices important in our [participants’] lives, and conducting interviews in the midst of them” (25). The girls’ interviews were conducted in their hometown of Hobson City inside the town’s library, one of the sites discussed in their interviews as well as the women’s interviews. Therefore, they were actively in the midst of the very environment on which their interview topics centered on.
The last group of oral histories were collected by me during the fall semester of 2017. I interviewed Representative Barbara Boyd in the fall semester of 2017; I had plans to interview two more women from the town but due to health issues they were not available to participate.

Coding Process

In order to theme, analyze, and interpret the interviews, I followed initial and focused coding processes. Initial coding as explained by Charmaz “should stick closely to the data” and the researcher should “attempt to code with words that reflect action…rather than of topics and themes that may feel strange” (116). Initial coding can be done line by line or more loosely by incidents. I chose a mixed methods approach by using both line-by-line and incident-with-incident initial coding. The second stage of coding involves conducting focused coding. According to Charmaz, “focused coding expedites your analytic work…without sacrificing the detail contained in your data and initial codes…these codes are often more conceptual than many initial word-by-word, line-by-line, and incident-with-incident codes” (138). To conduct the initial coding process, I copied and pasted each transcript into a two-column table in Microsoft Word. The transcript data was pasted into the left columns, and I performed the initial coding in the right columns. The two column tables made it easier for me to see the data as I conducted the initial coding. For the focused coding process, I created a third column in each table and used the initial coding data sets to produce focused codes. The tables allowed me to clearly view the data and to see themes emerge. Because the girls’ interviews were significantly shorter in length compared to the women’s, I only conducted initial codes on their transcripts. Themes emerged in the initial coding phases of their interviews because there was not a lot of transcript to code. After all interviews were coded, I used the focused codes from the women’s interviews and the initial codes from the girls’ interviews to determine what themes emerged from each interview. I
then counted the number of times every theme appeared in each interview to calculate which ones were the most and least common. I then used those calculations of the themes to determine and organize my findings.

The following chapter will provide a detailed analysis of the coding process conducted on all transcripts from the participants. I will triangulate the interview data with outside sources and my commentary. This triangulation of the data will form the product of the oral histories.
CHAPTER 3: ANALYSIS

The purpose of this chapter is to reveal the individual stories from the participants and piece together the history of Hobson City, Alabama that developed from each of the stories. This chapter has a section devoted to each participant because I wanted to privilege the individual voices over the topics and themes they each discussed. Therefore, I begin with a brief introduction of each woman and girl, then I discuss each oral history based on the data that emerged during the coding processes. I include transcript excerpts along with outside sources to triangulate the data. Because, not much is documented about Hobson City in secondary sources, I rely mostly on public sources such as newspaper articles, organization website information, the town’s website, and any primary documents that I could identify. Using Muted Group Theory, I purposefully chose to situate the girls’ oral histories before the women in this chapter. This theory traditionally gives space for women’s voices to be heard where men are the dominant gender. I extend this theoretical approach to give space for the Black girls who would normally be silenced among the elders in their community. Therefore, the analyses are organized with the girls first with the women following.

Hobson City’s Girls

This section analyzes the oral histories from Melody, Jaden, Tesia, Aliyah, and Zakerria. Each girl participated in one or two interviews over the course of several months in the spring of 2016. Their interviews were not conducted in traditional oral history format where the interviewer and interviewee engage in conversation for a lengthy amount of time. However, they do conform to oral history principles through what scholar Anna Harris identifies as “sound
“walks.” Harris explains sound walks in oral history in her article “Eliciting Sound Memories.” 

She argues,

I want to extend this approach now of emplaced interviewing as a form of sonic elicitation, to consider the elicitation of sound memories while walking. By walking with informants, researchers can learn more about the places that people inhabit, and their bodily connections to these places. Oral histories have often been used in making sound walks or audio trails, but less commonly is the use of sound walks in the conduct of oral histories, to elicit sound memories. Walking, or sound walking, however, can reveal something new about the ways in which people relate to the spaces around them including their sonic memories of these places. (26).

These interviews were conducted as a result of sound walking. I include their interviews because they are centered on discovering the history of Hobson City. The girls’ interviews were collected during a PhotoVoice study where the girls discussed images of places and things in and around Hobson City. In their interviews the girls discussed what they liked about the things and places in the pictures they took, what they did not like, and what and how they would change those places and things for the betterment of their community.

Melody

In Melody’s first interview she identified several sites in Hobson City that included: The Chicken Shack, her grandfather’s church, New Hope Church, the print shop building, and the clinic. Melody first talked about the Chicken Shack, which was once a local restaurant in Hobson City. She briefly shares her knowledge of the history behind the restaurant in the following excerpt, “Yea, and I put it because it has the year that it was first made and established. And like it’s historic… I knew that it was a Chicken Shack there before and they remodeled it and made another one so that people will come back to it” (Melody).

She goes on to talk about how she wants to know the reason the business closed. There is no documentation besides a news article about the Chicken Shack II. In “Generations later, Chicken Shack returns to Hobson City,” Journalist Zach Tyler of the Anniston Star interviewed
lifelong resident Willie Atkinson about the grand opening of the new restaurant. Atkinson stated that “her husband ran a service station from the building” referring to the current building where the Chicken Shack II is located (Atkinson). Mayor Alberta McCrory stated in that same article that the original Chicken Shack “was where Hobson City’s park is now, more than 60 years ago now” (Alberta). Therefore, although the name remained the same, the location changed throughout the years, and the Chicken Shack II that opened in 2015 was located on Church Street. As of the Fall 2017 semester, the restaurant had closed.

“Long past heyday, oldest black Ala. city at risk” written by Dave Martin at the Associated Press states that as of 2009 there were only three businesses left in the town: a print shop, a barber shop, and a convenience store (nbcnews.com). This article was written May 25, 2009. As of today, Fall 2017, the only local business that remains is the convenience store. The print shop that Melody spoke of is abandoned, and there are no traces of the barber shop. The article also supports collections from some of the women about the police department. The Associated Press states that “The city still has a police car and a fire truck, but it can't afford officers or firefighters. County deputies handle police calls, and neighboring cities help with fires” (Martin).

Melody identifies two churches in her interviews, New Hope Baptist church and her grandfather’s church, which she did not provide a name for. New Hope Baptist church is a church that appears several times in other participants’ interviews. New Hope Baptist church has a website that provides an extensive history. The church’s narrative states that “it was in the white Baptist church of Oxford, Alabama that the New Hope Baptist Church had its beginning” (newhopembchobsoncity.org). The blacks in Oxford had no choice but to join their former masters’ churches because they had nowhere of their own to worship. Consequently, their rights
and privileges in the church were highly restricted. Later, a “few Negro men and women, no longer wanted as members of the white church, began early in 1865 to seek means to worship…God.” (http://www.newhopembchobsoncity.org) They held worship services in a building they named “Dark Corner” in Oxford in 1868 (http://www.newhopembchobsoncity.org). Therefore, this church was established before Hobson City became its own municipality. Soon thereafter, the men and women of the congregation formed an organization called the Colored Baptists which “became known as the New Hope Baptist Church on March 19, 1871” (http://www.newhopembchobsoncity.org). According to the website, the charter members of the church were the following citizens: Peter Cunningham, Bethel Teague, Harrison Mattison, Nica Cunningham, Dolly Mattison, Bertha Mattison, Thomas Griffin, Carter Pyles, and Reta Mattison. In 1912, they built a new church under Reverend S.B. Brownlee. In 1969, the current building was built “at a cost of more than two hundred thousand dollars” under Reverend Judge L. Stringer. The current New Hope Baptist Church is located on 706 Church Street in Hobson City, Alabama (http://www.newhopembchobsoncity.org).

In Melody’s second interview she identified a 1957 class picture from C.E. Hanna, a welcome the king picture, a trophy desk in the old C.E. Hanna, the Tigers’ Den picture, and the trophy case in the old C.E. Hanna. All these items were found throughout the old C.E. Hanna, 3

3 The building is registered as a Rosenwald School. According to the Resource Library page on the savingplaces.org website, “In 1912, Booker T. Washington approached philanthropist Julius Rosenwald about his concept to build rural schools desperately needed for African American children across the segregated south. That partnership sparked an initiative that eventually created more than 5300 schools, vocational shops and teacher’s homes across 15 states in the South and Southwest from 1912-1932” (Preserving Rosenwald Schools). The building was first the Calhoun County Manual Training School. After desegregation, the name changed to C.E. Hanna, named after Professor C. Edgar Hanna from White Plains, AL who was principal of the school. In 2006, a new C.E. Hanna opened as an elementary school while the old C.E. Hanna serves as the town municipal building, houses the Head Start program, the Dannon Project, and several archival rooms.
mostly in one of the rooms that has been transformed into a museum space. When talking about the trophy desk, Melody refers to James Dunn as the owner of the trophies etc. She states, “So, the next one, it was the trophy desk that all the James Dunn’s like his trophies and accomplishments… I think it should be out in the open too because it was in that room that was locked and no one could see it” (Melody). Just as she talks about displaying the trophy desk, she wants the other items like the Tigers’ Den picture to be on display in an open area as well. Melody shows concern about audience and assigns value to these items because she wants others to see them as she sees them. Melody also sees the worth in those artifacts and how they could foster value and pride in the community if they were visible and accessible.

**Jaden**

Unlike the other girls, Jaden only participated in one interview. During this interview, she identified four different images that she wanted to talk about, the gym, the nurse’s office door, a football helmet, and a stage. The first image was of the gym at the old C.E. Hanna school; the gym sits adjacent to the main school building. Jaden first talked about the basketball goal and that she wanted to repair it as well as the overall state of the gym. She envisioned a remodeled gym fit for basketball games and for those who wanted to use the building. Here she talks about the gymnasium:

I think because like the goal, it can be fixed. It basically seems so empty and it doesn’t get used often. A newer type of goal. The floor would be a little better, instead of the floor it is because it’s a little creaky. The walls can be the same color but they will be painted better (Jaden).

Her next image was that of the nurse’s office door in the old C.E. Hanna School. Jaden stated that she wished the nurse’s office was used more especially since the Head Start program resides in the building; she did not want that space to be wasted. She states, “I think that it should be used more and since it is a school on the other side, they could probably use it as an actual nurse
office instead of it just being there… it would probably have a little window on the door” (Jaden).

Jaden’s third image was of a helmet from C.E. Hanna’s homecoming game against Westside. Westside is still a school in the Calhoun County community as Jaden said her school plays them in sports. Her fourth image was that of the stage. From the interview, it is not clear if Jaden referred to the stage in the gym or the stage in another room in the back part of the school. She wanted to make use of the desks that were piled up on the stage and clear the rest of the clutter. The fifth image was a picture of the principal’s office door. She stated that scratches covered the door, and it appears someone tried to paint over them but they were still visible.

A recurrent theme of community value appeared in Jaden’s interview. She wanted to improve the current state of buildings and other things located in her community. She wanted to make use of those things again. In every discussion of each image, she wanted to fix something to use it again, such as fixing the door of the nurse’s room so that it could be used for its purpose. I think Jaden’s ability to see the worth of her town through the usefulness of the buildings and artifacts says a lot about her own identity as a black girl. Not only does she see the worth of Hobson City (although she does not directly state it) she uses her language in a performative way to unveil her knowledge of her town’s history. For example, she already knew that the nurse’s office was active in the past when the school was open so she articulates that she wants to improve the door and make it functional for the child care program.

Aliyah

Aliyah’s images included several historic artifacts and local sites within Hobson City. Her images included an anniversary picture of the Black Mayors’ Conference, a picture of the National Conference of Black Mayors Incorporated, the CCTS Tigers den, and an historical map
documentation. Aliyah did not clearly describe some of the images, which made it difficult to determine what she was referring to for some of them. However, the ones she did identify were important artifacts found in one of the archival rooms in the city hall, which is located inside the old C.E. Hanna. She took a picture of an anniversary picture of mayors who were part of the black mayors’ conference. Here is her discussion on the black mayors’ conference picture,

“Umm these people that’s in the picture. They look like very good people and like now people is messing up Hobson City and bringing violence back in Hobson City and looking at these people …like what we’re doing now…Maybe we could be in their place” (Aliyah).

She describes that a historic picture of former mayors sparked a sense of change for her, and she described them as good people. She contrasted the mayors in the picture with the current people in town stating that the current people are messing up Hobson City and causing violence. The picture caused Aliyah to think about how she could stop the violence in her town. Much like Karen and Gail who talked about crime watches for the community in the oral histories that will follow, Aliyah sees herself being active in helping the community become a more non-violent place.

In her second interview, she mentioned New Hope Baptist church, the print shop, a fireplace, and Oak Ridge Baptist Church but said very little about those churches as well as the other artifacts she identified. She responded only with short phrases, not going in depth about much.

Zakerria

In her first interview, Zakerria talked about more images of local sites in Hobson City: Oak Ridge Church, the cemetery, the playground, the print shop, and the new C.E. Hanna School. Zakerria closely identified with the church because she currently attends Oak Ridge. She
discussed taking a picture of the crosses that stand in front of the church and wanted to know why those crosses were put there. Oak Ridge Missionary Baptist Church does not have a website like New Hope, but they do have an active Facebook page. The church is located on 929 Bradford Street in Hobson City, Alabama.

About the town’s cemetery, Zakerria wanted to know more about the people who have been buried there and why. Some of the town’s most influential people are buried in that cemetery including former mayors and people whom Zakerria knew. Recorded documents from my cemetery and genealogy research show that a total of 425 people were buried in the cemetery between 1841 and 2012. Zakerria also brought up the town’s playground and explained that it was a new one, built in the last year or two. She talks about wanting to know more about the playground such as who built it and why they chose that specific location. She states, “I know that it was built last year around June or July and ever since then people been going down there having many events” (Zakerria). The cemetery sits just behind the park upon a hill.

Zakerria identifies the print shop and the new C.E. Hanna School as her last two sites that she took pictures of. She briefly describes the current state of the print shop building and inquires about the function and purpose of the business; she wants to know why it closed. She is familiar with the new C.E. Hanna School. In reference to the new C.E. Hanna, she says, “I know that it holds grades up to 5th and 6th and I know who the principals are. The principal is Mr. McCall and the assistant principal is Mr. Mitcham. I wanted to know why they moved it from Hobson City to this place” (Zakerria). The school’s website provides contradictory information on the exact location of the school. The address states 1111 Watson Drive Oxford, Alabama 36203, but the website’s title says “C.E. Hanna Elementary School Hobson City, Alabama.” The current
principal is Clint McCall and assistant principal is Clay Mitchell. The school is part of the Oxford City Schools District (hanna.ocse.schoolinsites.com).

Zakerria identified several artifacts in one of the archive rooms located in the old C.E. Hanna. One artifact she identified was a Dedication poster; it was 20 years of dedication. She states, “They shouldn’t have it sitting on the floor. They should put it up somewhere to make it be noticed or seen… It probably would be on a wall in a frame, so when people walk by they can see who was a part of Hobson City” (Zakerria).

Zakerria shared similar interests as Jaden and Melody about wanting to improve some of the things and artifacts in the old C.E. Hanna to add value to their community. The second artifact was a picture of presidents; the third artifact was a 10th year anniversary picture. This picture consisted of people in Hobson City during the town’s 10th year anniversary. She insisted that the names of each individual be listed at the bottom of the picture so that citizens would know who these people were. That comment showed how she valued the importance of knowing her community’s history and others knowing it as well. Lastly, Zakerria identified a picture of C.E. Hanna’s Tiger’s Den.

Tesia

In her first interview, Tesia identified five places and artifacts in Hobson City that she wanted to learn more about. Those places and artifacts are: the new C.E. Hanna School, New Hope Church, Hobson City Cemetery, Hobson City Park, and the Kingdom Box. The Kingdom Box that Tesia identified is a box located in the nucleus of the town close to the library. It is a donation box for people in the community to give and receive clothing and other types of personal or home items. She discusses why the Kingdom Box stood out to her by saying,

I liked it because it tells how good people are should give their clothes for people who don’t. It was like the kingdom box…the kingdom box is when people who like don’t
want to throw away that want to give to people who don’t have clothes who are poorly and elderly sometimes. I wanted to know more about it because I like to like help my community out and like give people stuff that they need and what they don’t have but they need it (Tesia).

Tesia goes on to talk about the other places she identified in her town. She talked about her school, the new C.E. Hanna and how she knows that a black person built the school but wants to know that person’s history. She talks about her church New Hope and that she knows the pastor’s dad built the church. She identifies the Hobson City Cemetery and inquires about the history of it and implies that there is a possibility of it closing. Here she implies the closing of the cemetery by saying, “because I want like..if..because if they were closing down because they tried to close down the cemetery I would try to help them and stuff with it” (incomprehensible) (Tesia). I am uncertain whether Tesia heard that the cemetery would be closing through community talk, news reports, etc. or if she simply thought of it on her own. However, I did not find any evidence on the closing of the cemetery.

Tesia also briefly talked about the town’s park, another location she identified during her interviews. According to the Hobson City-UNC Historic Preservation Prospectus written by Mayor Alberta McCrory, Town Council Deneva Barnes, and Carthell Green, “Hobson City’s ‘town park’ was commissioned as soon as the community was incorporated. The Hobson City Park is one of the oldest African American public parks in continuous use in the United States. It is a recreational legacy that spans at least 115 years” (1).

Tesia identified five more places and artifacts in her second interview. They include the following: a picture of the old C.E. Hanna, the archive room in the old C.E. Hanna, a former classroom in the old C.E. Hanna, the gymnasium in the old school, and an image she named 1595. In this interview, Tesia’s focus shifts mainly toward the old C.E. Hanna. She inquires about the history and the current state of this building. She identified a classroom that has been
turned into a museum of sorts since the school closed; this classroom was her former 5th grade teacher Ms. Sharon Caldwell’s room. She identifies another room in the building that has turned into an archive room with the help of the University of Alabama English graduate students. Tesia then talks about the school’s gymnasium and what she envisions that space being used for. Here is her response:

It is the gymnasium because like I would like add another part to the gymnasium to like where you can have like parties and stuff because they sometimes have parties in the gymnasium or like a get together for the community. and I would like to keep that part and the little basketball part because I like basketball and stuff so I would like keep that part and like add another piece to the building and stuff like that…like people on one side of the building building the floors and girls and everybody playing basketball on the other side. It’s like a little get together or birthday parties or anniversaries or something on the other side or something. (Tesia)

She identified two pictures, one of the old C.E. Hanna being built and one she named 1595, which is a quilt. She envisions these pictures being put on display for others in the community to see because of how important the messages are that are depicted in them.

Hobson City’s women

This section analyzes the oral histories provided by the Black women in Hobson City. Three of the women are citizens of the town and the other two women are not but are affiliated with the community in several ways. I begin with the oral histories from the women who are citizens of Hobson City and end with the oral history of the women who are from neighboring towns to provide a seemingly outsider perspective on Hobson City’s history.

Alberta

Alberta’s interview was the most comprehensive historical account of Hobson City. She recounted numerous events that happened in and around the town with great detail such as the Freedom Riders bus burning, sports events, music events, educational life, the local economy,
and local businesses. Alberta provided an overview of how Hobson City became its own municipality. She states,

Hobson City was established in 1899; they were at one time part of the city of Oxford, which is a predominantly Black town. And during that time some Blacks were allowed to vote if they owned property, they had a job, they met the age requirement, good moral character, those kinds of things. And so during the 1893, maybe 1894, election, a black man ran for Justice of Peace. And because they had a controlling hand, the blacks in that area, this man won the election, but during the time, the race, there was a white man who said that if the black man won, that he would go to Montgomery and have the boundary lines redrawn so that it would exclude the people from, and it wasn’t Hobson City, it was called Mooree’s Quarters at that time, and that they would exclude the people from Mooree’s Quarters from living in that area, so after they were out in the county for about three years, some black men, and I would say, some women were involved as well, took matters into their own hands and went and saw an attorney, so that they could become a separate municipality, and so they did that and they organized themselves and became a separate municipality; and they named the town, Hobson City, which is named after a Spanish-American War hero from Greensboro, Alabama, whose name is Richard P. Hobson….And then at that time, you can imagine, with the racial climate being the way it was, that they probably couldn’t have named it after a Black man, and so they were probably smart in that sense to name it after one of their heroes. (Alberta)

She believes that the name Moore Quarters “had something to do with the Moors,⁴ the dark-skinned people, and that area was just where the black people lived, because they were segregated even then” (Alberta).

She recounted the Freedom Riders bus burning incident. This incident happened when a group of African Americans rode a bus to protest the segregation of transportation. The bus came through Anniston, Alabama and members of the Ku Klux Klan heard of them coming. They followed the bus and according to Alberta either punctured the tires or did something hazardous to the bus that caused it to catch on fire. Alberta recalls the location where the bus stopped,

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⁴ Oxford Dictionary defines Moor as “A member of a north-western African Muslim people of mixed Berber and Arab descent. In the 8th century they conquered the Iberian peninsula, but were finally driven out of their last stronghold in Granada at the end of the 15th century.”
which was outside of Anniston on a highway. Here is part of Alberta’s excerpt on the Freedom Riders topic:

The Freedom Riders came through, was that, ’64 ’65, no it wasn’t ’65. And I should know that, way off. Because when the bus---there were two buses: a Trailways bus and a Greyhound bus---and the Trailways bus, I think may have taken a different route---I’m not sure what happened---they made it to Birmingham, but the Greyhound bus didn’t make it because some members of the Klan punctured the tires, and when the bus got so far out on the Highway, I’m not sure, maybe I’m thinking something else, maybe it wasn’t that they punctured the tires, they did something and the bus broke down, the bus didn’t break down, whatever they did caused the bus to stop out on Highway 202. And I’m kind of not clear as to what happened and maybe I’m not as clear about what happened because I’ve tried to block some of that out. And I’ve met several of these people who were on that bus, I’ve been in meetings with them and coming-togethers with them, and we celebrated the 50th anniversary of the Bus Burning and so actually I’ve met people on that bus who thought they were going to die that day because of what happened. So I’m not sure if they had done something to the tires and when the bus got a little further down the road it couldn’t go any further, and then somehow the bus caught on fire, it was something that they had done to the bus that caused the bus to catch on fire. (This was like in?) Anniston: I remember, and this happened on Mother’s Day, and I remember we were told not to go downtown on Sundays when the kids went to the movie theaters, we were told not to go the movie theaters, not to be out anywhere, because the Klan was on a rampage, and so the bus didn’t make it to Birmingham, and then you had the next biggest group of civil rights workers in Birmingham and Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth was in Birmingham at the time. And so our leaders in Anniston called Rev. Shuttlesworth and they were able to come over, they sent some men from Birmingham over to get the Freedom Riders who had been taken to the hospital and then the people at the hospital were afraid to treat them because they were afraid that the Klansmen will come, because the Klansmen were saying that they were going to take the people out and kill them and all that stuff. And so when people from Birmingham got there they were able to get all those people and get them transported over to Birmingham. (Alberta)

She states that the county has since memorialized that incident by turning the bus burning site location into a memorial park, which is currently being planned. They already have a sign at the site that memorializes the incident at the location. Alberta shared that a professor from the University of Florida and his graduate students were actively involved in sharing the history of the Freedom Riders’ bus burning incident and that they helped create the murals in downtown Anniston that tells the story of that historic incident. Another event that Alberta recounts is that of the Hobson City becoming its own municipality. Unlike the other participants, Alberta
provides more details on the bus burning incident by detailing some of the after events. She references a Reverend Shuttlesworth who was a black leader in Birmingham; she credits him with assisting in the safe transportation of the freedom riders after the incident. She claims that he sent some men to Anniston to pick up the injured freedom riders and get them to safety in Birmingham. Alberta notes that the Klansmen had threatened to harm anyone in town who would try to help the riders which is why Shuttlesworth’s efforts is so important to the incident. The hospital in Calhoun County would not take the riders in so they had to leave with the men sent by Rev. Shuttlesworth to seek help from hospitals in Birmingham, Alabama.

The Freedom Riders incident was one of several that occurred but this one garnered the most attention. The purpose of the Freedom Riders’ organization was to test a court decision that made segregated transportation facilities unconstitutional. The Freedom Riders rode from Washington DC and made it all the way to Anniston, Alabama before this major incident occurred. On their route, they protested segregation in the South, by attempting use of whites-only public restrooms, lunch counters, and more. It was in Anniston, Alabama where the Freedom Riders were involved in the bus burning incident along with mob fights. Because of the atrocity of this incident and the few that occurred immediately after that day, the Freedom Riders garnered national attention (http://www.history.com/topics/black-history/freedom-rides).

According to “Marking how far they’ve come\ Rep. Lewis Leading Freedom Riders on Journey into Past” by Ernie Suggs, writer for the Atlanta Journal- Constitution,

Over the next few months, there would be dozens of Freedom Rides through the South, with more than 300 riders ending up in prison. On Sept. 22, the Interstate Commerce Commission moved to end all vestiges of segregation in interstate travel, including signs, restrooms and seating. The order went into effect Nov. 1, 1961, ending the Freedom Rides. (Suggs)
A film produced by Stanley Williams titled *Freedom Riders*, provides firsthand accounts as well as accounts from journalists and historians on the bus burning incident in Anniston. The transcript of the film describes a much similar story as to Alberta but with greater detail. In reference to Alberta’s confusion on if the tires were punctured or not by the KKK, historian Raymond Arsenault, states that “The Anniston Klan had it all worked out. They had one of their members lie down in front of the bus. They were puncturing tires. They were breaking windows. They wanted to make sure that bus couldn't leave before they could surround it and do whatever they wanted to do (Arsenault). Also, the incident happened on Mother’s Day as Alberta remembered but is was in 1961, not ’64 or ’65.

Alberta seems to recall many incidents that happened right after each other. After the Freedom Riders’ incident she discusses the 16th Street Baptist Church bombing that occurred in Birmingham. She then remembers a killing in 1963 after the church bombing which happened in September 1963. She claims that a white supremacy rally took place while she was across the street paying an insurance bill for her parents. According to Alberta’s recollection, the leader was a guy by the last name Lynch. She remembers the people at the rally were holding flags and Bibles while the leader who was a pastor, preached hate towards Blacks. Lynch shot a black man after the rally. He was later charged, tried, and convicted of that killing. Alberta claims that this incident was the first time in the state of Alabama that a white man was charged and convicted of killing a Black man. After lengthy investigation searching through newspaper articles, I found the story about the killing Alberta references. Although Alberta’s claim that the incident was the first time Alabama had tried and convicted a white man for killing a Black man, the rest of the

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5 *Pbs.org.* http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amERICANEXPERIENCE/fILMS/FREEDOMRIDERS/
details tell a much different story. According to “The Death of Willie Brewster: Memories of a Dark Time,” by John Fleming, editor at large for The Anniston Star, a black man by the name of Willie Brewster Sr. was the person killed in the incident Alberta mentioned. According to the article, Brewster was “the victim of a notorious shooting at the height of the violence that gripped Alabama in the summer of 1965” (Fleming). Fleming documents the rally that Alberta mentioned but extends her story to detail further events. He states “It was from one of those rallies, prosecutors would later argue, that a carload of men left one July night, following the elder Willie Brewster and several coworkers headed home from a shift at an Anniston foundry. One of them, Hubert Damon Strange, would be convicted of manslaughter” (Fleming). Brewster was killed somewhere along Alabama Highway 202.6 There were also two other men involved, Johnny Ira DeFries who was acquitted and Clarence Lewis Blevins whose charges were dropped before the case made it trial (Fleming). Though some of Alberta’s details were fuzzy, she clearly remembers what it was like to live in the community during these incidents.

When asked about community lore, Alberta recalls two folktales have been seemingly passed down through generations in Hobson City, the Brer Rabbit story and the Sly Fox story. Alberta does not tell those stories but only says that they are the ghost stories of the town. She does however describe conflict on who should be credited with the creation of those stories, a white man or a black man. She claims that the white man was credited for them but that a black man was the real originator. Several sources provide information on these two stories and also the writer, Joel Chandler Harris. Lawrence Levine writes in Black Culture and Black Consciousness that “the most effective single force in popularizing [Brer Rabbit] tales after the

6 There are several articles that provide details on this crime, all of which can be found in The Anniston Star.
Civil War was the work of Joel Chandler Harris” (82). These are the folk tales that Alberta talks about in her interview. Levine offers an overview of Harris who has been credited with these tales by stating,

Beginning with the dialect sketches he published in the *Atlanta Constitution* in the late 1870s— which he brought together in his first volume of tales, *Uncle Remus: His Songs and Sayings* (1881)— Harris spent much of the remainder of his life deluging his countrymen with Afro-American animal tales…Harris insisted that his tales were ‘given in the simple but picturesque language of the negroes, just as the negroes tell them’. Harris asserted that his work embodied ‘everything, or nearly everything of importance in the oral literature of the negroes of the Southern States.’ In fact, the picture that emerges from his work is a relatively frozen one which helped to established the stereotype that slave tales were comprised almost exclusively of Brer Rabbit. (83)

John Blassingame argues in *The Slave Community*, that slave tales such as Brer Rabbit stories were “a projection of the slave’s personal experience, dreams, and hopes, the folk talks allowed him to express hostility to his master, to poke fun at himself, and to delineate the workings of the plantation system (127). Robert Cochran argues in “Black Father: The Subversive Achievement of Joel Chandler Harris” that people were shocked to find that “Uncle Remus” the narrator of the Brer Rabbit tales, was white, because well Harris himself was a white man who “claimed his fame as the creator” (21). After this revelation critics forcefully separated the narrator from the hero “brer rabbit” to show that Brer Rabbit was “a Signifying Rabbit, in the fullest sense of that term…when Brer Rabbit outwits and eventually destroys Brer Wolf, Brer Bear, and Brer Fox, his victories are interpreted as supplying at least vicarious pleasure and at most pragmatic advice to black audiences” (21). It makes sense that these tales would be passed down generationally in Hobson City with it being an incorporated black town founded by those who sought to break away from former slave masters and the power of the white community.

Alberta shared her recollection on sports within the community. She talks about celebrity baseball players coming to Hobson City to play in their park. She delves further into that recollection by stating that the celebrity players Hank Aaron and Jackie Robinson were part of a
black baseball league, a league located in Birmingham, Alabama about 45 minutes west of Hobson City. Alberta and others talk about sports in their interviews, but Alberta is the one who goes a little more in depth about sports, baseball specifically. She mentions that Birmingham, Alabama had a Black baseball league and that some of the players would come from there to play in Hobson City’s park. According to the Negro Southern League Museum history page, The Negro Southern League “was created in 1920 by a group of African-American businessmen and baseball enthusiasts. From 1920 until its demise in 1951, the Negro Southern League served as a feeder route for many great black baseball players to go on to the Negro American League and Negro National League” (birminghamnslm.org). Alberta mentions baseball player Willie Mays as one of the players who came from Birmingham to Hobson City numerous times to play in the town’s park and in the history section of the museum’s website they list Willie Mays as one of five Hall of Fame members.

She recalls other events that are categorized as racial experiences. She remembers segregation and integration. She recalls experiences as a child going to the malls with her mother and not being able to try on shoes. She tells of how blacks could not try on clothes or shoes in the mall, and alternative ways that they had to try on items. It seems as though it was the norm for her as she was growing up and she never knew any different. Alberta recalls two stores, Woolworth’s and Roses. Those were the only two stores blacks could eat at while out shopping. Alberta vividly remembers racialized experiences that directly involved or affected her more than those experiences where she was a bystander or witness. Her recollections of racialized experiences that directly affected her show how one’s physical and emotional interactions within racialized spaces create a more lasting and vivid memory in a person’s mind. Furthermore, direct
racial experiences caused her to both embrace those experiences and grapple with her understanding of race relations, self-identity, and social norms.

Alberta remembers Hobson City having its own police department. She talks about the presence of the police department in the community and how the policemen made their presence known in positive ways. Most of them lived in the community and were frequently seen walking throughout the town. Alberta recalls the police department’s financial struggles and claims that during the time the department was there the town was not economically strong enough to fully support all of their financial needs such as buying modern equipment and newer cars. However, Alberta claims that the Civil Rights Bill gave their police department more resources or funds. She does not say why the police department closed in the 90s. She claims that currently the town is patrolled by state troopers and the Calhoun County Police Department. She says they do not have a major presence in the community as they only come when necessary. So there is a major difference between the current state of law enforcement and the way things used to be.

Alberta vividly remembers being emotionally angry for decades due to the social and racial climate in and around Hobson City, Alabama and in other parts of the country. She shares that this personal anger lasted from the 60s to the 90s. The degree of which her personal feelings manifested says a lot of how greatly the incidents during those times affected her and other black people.

After Alberta explained her recollection of several racial incidents she tells how she became involved in the civil rights era. It is important to note that she did not sit idly by while blacks were being oppressed and fighting for equality but that she felt the need to help fight for social justice. She identifies several key people that had some type of influence, whether it be positive or negative, on Hobson City and its surrounding areas. She describes the positive
influence of a pastor from Morehouse College who inspired her to become actively involved in
civil rights. She describes that pastor’s relationship with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.; they worked
together during that era. Alberta identifies a man named Strayberry who was a professor at the
University of Alabama located in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. She credits Strayberry for researching
the killing in Anniston. The black man whom Strange murdered, identified as Willie Brewster.
She claims that she met some of his family who lived in Anniston during the time of the
Freedom Riders bus burning incident. I did search the University of Alabama’s directory for
Professor Strayberry, but I was unsuccessful in locating him; I also tried a basic google search of
his name in relation to the university and was not able to locate him.

She briefly discusses employment in that most men in Hobson City were foundry
workers. Alberta describes the foundries effect on the men in the community by saying,

and a lot of fathers worked in foundries, Anniston was a foundry town, and so they had
several Foundries, which I think is the reason we don’t have a whole lot of old black men
now because working in that environment helped to kill them all early. It’s not the
foundry town that it used to be. (Alberta)

Alberta blames the bad environments in the foundries that contributed to many of the men’s
decline in physical health, which is the reason she claims there are very few old men living now.
The foundries located in and around Anniston, Alabama include the Union Foundry Company,
Tyler Union, Bae Systems Steel Productions Division, Huron Valley Steel Inc, Anvil
International, Lee Brass (1917), Associated MetalCast, Talladega Foundry & Machine (1909),
and Tyco Fire Protection Products (whitepages.com). Some of these foundries are national and
international businesses according to their websites, but the foundries with local sites in the
Calhoun County area provided their establishment dates and were most likely ones at which the
men in Hobson City worked. Upon further investigation and research from Baptized in PCBs by
Ellen Spears, I found that a major lawsuit was filed against the “global giant Monsanto” and its
partners for contaminating Anniston, Alabama with polychlorinated biphenyls also known as PCB’s (1). This contamination likely contributed to the illnesses and deaths of the men in Hobson City who worked in those foundries. Spears also documents that “plant workers in the 1930’s sued for ill health resulting from occupational exposure” (9). She further argues that evidence showed that the “dirtiest jobs” were always saved for the black employees and that they experienced severe exposure to PCBs (10). These findings support Alberta’s opinion that the foundries caused a lot of the black men in Hobson City to die early, leaving very few elderly men in the town today. Also, all the factories named above were within 10-20 minutes driving distance for those employees who lived in Hobson City, with most of foundries in West Anniston, and one, Associated Metalcast, southwest of Hobson City.

Another issue that Alberta discusses that no other participant engages is the railroad tracks as a socioeconomic marker between communities. She talks about her religious beliefs and her belief in hope and better days for her and those in her community.

…so I believe for me it was that hope, that things would get better, that we too will get to a promised land, and get to a time when things will be better for us, that we receive better homes even in our community. Because we could go right across the railroad tracks and you could see the difference, and even though we had nice homes in the community, you saw more nicer homes in Anniston, the area where Whites lived, and you could tell that the people who had the means and the resources because they had jobs and opportunities that were denied to black people. (Alberta)

The railroad tracks in communities symbolize a change in socioeconomic status. On one side of the tracks one will usually find the more affluent part of town and other side the more impoverished part of town. The tracks also symbolize a difference in race with Blacks and

7 For more information on the PCB lawsuit in West Anniston, Alabama see Ellen Spears’ Baptized in PCB’s: Race, Pollution, and Justice in an All-American Town.
people of color living on one side and whites on the others. Alberta talks about the current state of the town and the effects of integration. She states,

now we see a different kind of neighborhood, we see communities have been abandoned, kids don’t come back to the community looking for jobs, because they…because of integration they can go places…other places. And so all of that has affected the life of the community. (Alberta)

Because of integration, many of the young people who grew up in Hobson City had the choice to attend schools in neighboring areas and because the town lacks career opportunities many of those students do not return home, even those who want to return cannot because of the limited opportunities there. Alberta describes the current state of Hobson City as trying to return back to the days of self-sufficiency and creating more opportunities in the town. She describes how Hobson City used to be an independent town that did not have to rely on resources from Oxford or Anniston. She states,

But, eh, then we were self-sufficient, we had everything, we had a park, we had a swimming pool, we had a baseball field, where I’m told Willie Mays (the baseball player?) and Jackie Robinson came to Hobson City, to that baseball field. And so we had our own cemetery, and we had grocery stores, we had barbershops and beauty shops, and small eating-places. So the communities were just self-sufficient…(Alberta)

She discusses the town economic state in the years when the town flourished independently by saying,

The businessmen who owned businesses in the community, they lived in the community. So we grew up with all of those positive influences, and knowing that they were there, even the bootleggers, and when I say bootleggers, that’s a name that…eh…moonshiners, and so bootleggers are the people who actually sold the liquor that the moonshiners made, and there was a business for them. And there are some very powerful stories, that didn’t come from the bootleggers themselves but came from people who borrowed money from them to send their kids to college, because there were no Pell Grants and scholarships and things of that nature. And you could not go to the black bank, I mean, because there…you didn’t have one, and so this is how the people lived and how they survived, and even when it came to buying property, banks will not loan money in poor black neighborhoods, and these were not even poor black in the sense that they later became poor black. (Alberta)
In this excerpt, Alberta partially describes how Hobson City functioned economically during its earlier years. The citizens depended on one another and helped each other out financially. They saw value in all types of entrepreneurs even the bootleggers and moonshiners. They worked together for the betterment of their town. She describes how the people were aware of the financial barriers that they faced when dealing with white people who held economic power, so they worked together to build their own financial freedom. She goes on to describe other local businesses in Hobson City in the following excerpt of her oral history,

We had two grocery stores in Hobson, we had two service stations that was a wood yard because a lot of people burned wood for cooking their dinner at home but by the time I became a teenage people had bought gas cookers for cooking. There was a cabinet shop at Hobson that made cabinets, beauty shops, barber shops, a couple pool holes, and a dry cleaning store, and a sweet shop where kids bought cookies, candies etc. But as I said, these were times when people were pretty much self-sufficient. You could go to the local store to get beans, canned goods. We had a post office that I think was established not long after the city was organized. (Alberta)

This is how the town survived economically, by investing in their own businesses and buying locally, because likely in those days, they have very few options for where they could buy.

Unfortunately, since integration and the ability to take their business elsewhere, only one of these businesses remains in Hobson City, and that is the Bucks convenience store/service station.

When asked about musical influences, Alberta talked about everything from her love of the Negro National Anthem to musical influences in Hobson City. She claims several black musicians frequented the town.

James Brown came to Hobson City in the 70s, but before then we were in what we call the Chitlin Circuit, and those artists were going from place to place making music and dancing and for black people they didn’t have nowhere to go, but certain cities had somewhere where they could go, but they could go to the Chitlin Circuit. B.B King came to Hobson, many of the big stars, they came. In fact, one of my friends told me not long ago, he remembered he stood on a milk crate outside, so that he could peep into the window. So some of the popular names back then and I can remember as a lil’ child and even as a teenager because the adults who went to that kind of entertainment, you know when everybody was getting ready to go somewhere (Alberta).
Hobson City was an entertainment oasis for black musicians and celebrities. Alberta’s
description of the entertainment life in Hobson City shows how vibrant and alive the town used
to be in earlier years. The town had its own song titled “The Hobson City Stomp” by Cow Cow
Davenport. She recalls music being a major part of her life and how certain activities, church,
and the training school shaped the culture of the community. She talks about the town’s culture
here:

Some of the things that impacted me the most is when we had our own schools, and we
had activities, cultural events. We did everything. We had a choral director at school who
went to the Chicago Conservatory of Music, and for a black man to go there back in the
50s or whatever that was really something. I used to share this music with some of my
Professors at the seminary and they were appalled. A little town and we had everything
we wanted. We had football, basketball, girls were cheerleaders, and almost everybody
graduated from high school, we had like a 98 or 99 percent graduation rate. And so all
our parents made sure that we were prepared: physically, mentally, and emotionally.
There was no such thing as a child failing and a child left behind, because the teachers
were there to help us with any problems. And if we missed something at home we had the
community to fall back on. And I tell people I learned how to speak in the church, going
to Sunday School and getting up doing the reporting at the end of the Sunday School
class and then being in school and getting up to speak and, sometimes, writing columns
and numbers to add them up. We had so much more to look forward to than just going to
school: we had graduations, school plays. We had a band: so we had drums, saxophones,
clarinets, and so the kids were getting their music, they were getting everything that they
needed to get. (Alberta)

Out of everything that Alberta shared in her oral history, I found her perspective on
integration to be the most impactful in regards to racism, exclusivity, and black culture. She
proclaims that,

And so when integration came along, we were trying to find our way into somebody
else’s world and so we lost a lot of that, and really have not regained it. In some
communities, some churches, some groups, are holding on and trying to reintroduce the
core ideas back into the lives of students but for the most part, we didn’t have that
problem back when the schools were in our community. And so we had a school that was
right there in our community (Alberta).

To go from a thriving all Black town to one that is struggling and currently working towards
regaining financial freedom and self-sufficiency is a journey that many African American towns
in Alabama and throughout the country share. Although integration was a marker of progress as it relates to civil rights, many scholars have argued that it weakened the strength of the African American communities (Cashin, Nelson, Walker).

*Katie Pyles*

Katie’s oral history presents some interesting and common themes such as community, church, and pride. She consistently talked about being proud of herself and Hobson City; she is proud to be a resident of a historic Black town. Katie’s family roots run deep in Hobson City as she claims,

I grew up here… my mother was born and raised here in Hobson City, and my father was just born across what they called the Rocky Hollar. We are, we are local people… My grandmother came to Hobson City when she was five years old, from, they call it… or somewhere out there by Hartford Lake. That’s where my grandmother came. To Hobson City. And she lived here till she was 98. She died. She died she was 98 years old. (Katie)

Katie’s family has lived in Hobson City for several generations, which explains her feeling of pride for the town. She also consistently talks about respect and love for the community. When she talks about the police in Hobson City during the time the town had a police department, she recalls having respect for them and being proud of them and other officials. She says,

We had respect for them. If they said “move” we move, we didn’t try to fight back. We had a mayor, always had a mayor. And a city council. And like my husband said, they loved Hobson City. And we love Hobson City. We was not squatters like we have now, we were born and raised in this city. This was a prideful place for us. (Katie)

Katie clearly differentiates between those families that are part of Hobson City’s heritage, and those people who are just living there.

Selfhood is another theme that became apparent in Katie’s interview. There is a segment where she talks about marriage and identity in relation to the church. She states,

I was a Methodist. I was a member of Rising Star Methodist Church. And when I married it was a thing they had that you followed your husbands. My husband was at New Hope Baptist Church. So I had to join New Hope and be baptized in that church and I been a member for 52 years. But I was a Methodist, I was born a Methodist. (Katie)
Here she discusses how she had to abandon her religious affiliation once she married her husband and assume his religious identity. She goes more in depth about self-identity and others’ views on how a woman or girl should carry herself. Katie recalls not being allowed to wear nail polish because her family believed that nail polish was a sign of achieving a certain level of maturity. She recalls only being allowed to travel for school sports game as a cheerleader because there was a chaperone on the bus. Her parents took a lot of measures to ensure her innocent childhood was preserved.

Katie brought up another theme seen in many African American ancestral narratives, that of moving from the South to the North. Blacks saw the North as the land of opportunity as they tried to escape slavery and Jim Crow. Katie recalls some of her family leaving Hobson City to move up north for better job opportunities. She said the women moved for better maid jobs. She recalls thinking that her family up North was rich and viewed herself and her family as poor. This idea of others’ perception of the North was seemingly created through family narratives of what they heard or experienced. So Katie’s perception of her family is one of many that has long been perpetuated through African American culture since slavery. Katie’s idea of rich vs poor is conceptualized through her experiences with gift giving; furthermore, those experiences taught her about socioeconomic status.

Katie later discusses her political engagements within Hobson City where she revealed her husband was a former mayor of the town, and also certain programs that she focuses on in the community. She explains,

Well… politically engaged I just attend council meetings. And if they have something going on in the city that they need citizens to participate in I participate. My husband was mayor so I didn’t put myself out there in a political way. But whatever the city needed, if they had a program that needed citizens to show up, because that’s the only way we got recognition. You know, if the mayor put something out…and the citizens didn’t show up, then we didn’t get no help. Because they said if the citizens ain’t interested why should
we be interested? So this is one of the reasons I tried to stay, and I try to do it now because Mayor McCrory needs citizen participation in order to get some of these programs going that she has in her mind. (Katie)

Katie’s husband, former Mayor Robert Pyles was the reason she did not portray a high profile political persona. She wanted to support her husband during his time as mayor of Hobson City. However, she was and continues to be a major contributor and active citizen in the town for whatever the current mayor needs and helps in any way to ensure the betterment of her community. Katie went on to talk about community pride and how having that type of pride remains important for Hobson City. She claims that having such pride affects other people tremendously; that “It either runs ‘em away or makes ‘em act different.” (Katie). Katie refers to the people in Hobson City and people from other areas when she talks about how impactful community pride is on others. She claims that it is critical to have such community pride in order to progress as a town and to defend the town to others who may have negative or inaccurate views on Hobson City.

Later, Katie talks about racial experiences within and around Hobson City during her childhood. She talked about positive experiences between whites and blacks and also societal rules that blacks had to follow. She describes these experiences in the following excerpt:

When we were kids, and when I say kids cuz I was born and raised in Hobson City, there were no racial bigotry, or however you say it. We loved white people, and the reason we loved white people was cuz that’s where my mother and father got their living. And the white people that they associated with was good to us. Some of ’em was like family. They didn’t mind coming to your house, they didn’t mind eating with you. Only thing is, you had to stay in your place. We knew where our place was. We weren’t crazy. You know, we knew. Sure I would have loved to have gone to their front door, you know, to go into their house. But we knew cuz our parents already told us, they “You go to Ms. So and So’s house, you know what door to go to, you know how to act, you come home.” But those people were good to us. There was no love lost. And if we ever needed them all we had to do was call on ’em. We didn’t, we didn’t push our way into their, into their lives and they didn’t push their way into ours. There was no hate like it is today, all of that, no. The police didn’t have to beat our children, because we taught them. You know, nowadays, police can’t say nothing to a black boy unless he want to kill him. It wasn’t like that. We had a good relationship. (Katie)
Katie explains the racial climate during her childhood years as a more positive one. It is evident that the whites controlled the financial opportunities of Black women during those times as she tells how her mom and other women worked for the white families. A lot of rules developed by society due to segregation were unwritten rules, but there was a mutual understanding between whites and blacks on how blacks should act appropriately. This description of Katie telling how she knew which doors to enter in the white person’s home reaffirms that although Hobson City was its own municipality, the people there were still living in a white world. Even though that was the case, Katie reasserts the independence of Hobson City much like Alberta did, through her description of the town’s businesses. Katie states,

We had a grocery store. I mean a full-fledged grocery store. We had a post office. We had a barbershop, poolroom, skating rink, and my cousin had what we called a sweet shop where we could get two cookies for a penny. You know how they had those big plastic containers with the cookies on the counter? He ran this until he died, sitting there in his little shop. Everybody would go to Tom Jeb’s Place. And we had a restaurant, right there at the traffic light with the empty space is, now where the Chicken Shack is. Now on the corner we had a full-fledged restaurant, we had ladies that owned it cook four course meals in there, and the people that worked around the area would go there and eat. (Katie)

Hobson City’s prosperity is evident through the many thriving local businesses that once flourished in the town. Katie credits outside businesses for the diminishment of Hobson City’s economy. She detailed the decline in local businesses in the following excerpt,

…the grocery store was the one I think went first. And, yeah I think it was cuz, you know like Hartford and Anniston had fast food restaurants and dry goods stores, things like that, so that drew the people out of the city. And I think that’s why the Chicken Shack, too, is not operating, cuz I don’t know what it is. I guess it’s because when we go out of town to eat you can do everything else you want. You know, like if you go out to the exchange, you can eat, you can shop. If you go down to the mall you can shop, go to the movie. So I think that’s what… and then the money got slack. Then the police department closed off. We don’t have no protection or police protection for a city like this, you get robbed of everything you have. Right now you can’t leave a home empty…It’s just been a gradual decline in the things in the city, and you know when it goes so low and the people that really could pull it up are dead and gone, it’s kinda hard to start over. (Katie)
She talks more about the police department and that it used to be located close to her home and how she knew the only prisoner there at one point. She explains that the jailhouse was history and now it is gone and that no one ever told them, people in the community, about the need for preserving community history. She regrets not knowing or being unaware of how critical it is to preserve as much history in the community as possible because she states that “Otherwise I would have never changed this house. This was the house in Hobson City.” (Katie). Katie refers to her home being one of the oldest houses in Hobson City when she made that comment. She regrets making changes to it without knowing the history of that house and its historical connection to Hobson City.

Karen Striplin

Karen’s oral history produced a major theme on loneliness. The feeling of loneliness was connected to her self-identity and her home. She recalls feeling lonely throughout many parts of her childhood and identified her home as the object of her loneliness.

And then we moved down here to the house, I kinda experienced a lot of loneliness. Because I just had brothers. I have an older sister, she like got married when I was 12 but still. We didn’t hang out, because you know, she was like 17 and I was 10, you know, a lot younger than her. And we were the only blacks that lived in that area right there. I had friends, but still, I, it was something about moving into that house that I started kinda going into a shell right, right in there. (Karen)

The feeling of loneliness in which she identifies as a dominant feeling throughout her childhood contradicts another part of her identity in which she labels herself as a party girl. Several times throughout her interview she discusses being a party girl. When asked what were good distractions to blow off steam she responded, “Oh, I partied. I partied. I partied. I partied.” (Karen). But her party life could have been a way to fill the void of being lonely even though it appears contradictory. She attributes her loneliness to living in Constantine and juxtaposes that
emotion to that of happiness when she talks about her times in Hobson City. When asked about her childhood she explains,

And we were the only blacks that lived in that area right there. I had friends, but still, I, it was something about moving into that house that I started kinda going into a shell right, right in there. Because there was no more black children, you know black people didn’t even live in Constantine when we moved in that house. (Karen)

Now that she’s older, Karen considers Hobson City home even though it’s not her hometown. She states, “Well…it’s, it’s my home. I don’t know. Maybe it was all the times I partied here in Hobson City that. Cause I felt the connection when we moved here. When Isaiah and I moved here, you know” (Karen). When asked about her involvement in Hobson City, Karen explains that she is actively involved in creating a community crime watch. She details the project in the following excerpt,

my project now was helping set up uh crime watch here in Hobson City. We had a shooting January 31, no one was shot, but uh there was some type of disagreement in the park and some family called some other family that wasn’t from here and they came and fired quite a few rounds and kids were in the park and so, um, they had a town hall meeting, I was there…And I thought about it and I thought about it and I said you know I’m gonna do this. So…that’s what I’m working on. (Karen)

When talking about scheduling meetings to plan the program, Karen is aware of the community demographic and what will and will not attract them. She states,

So we’re just gonna start with the basics. We had the first town hall meeting and the Sherriff suggested a neighborhood watch. And so, a couple of, a week or so ago is when I started to do the project so I got the next meeting, it was last Monday on the 20th. And one of the elder residents said, “You know, let’s do the next meeting down there on the corner cause a lot of people that need to hear this, they’re not gonna come to church. Cause the Mayor planned it in the church cause she knows people will be more respectful in the church, discussing things with the police and such so, um, we’re gonna have like a neighborhood, like a little rally, anti-crime rally down there by the happy tree. Monday. (Karen)

Here, Karen details an issue with attracting people in Hobson City to the meetings and how she worked to solve that problem. Although churches play a big role in the community, some of the citizens do not feel comfortable or simply do not attend church. Therefore, it seems that using the
church as a default meeting place for important community issues does not always work for Hobson City citizens. While discussing the neighborhood watch program, Karen shares similar recollections of the former police department and community violence as other women did.

When asked about police relations and community violence she provides the following response:

"It’s really not bad. According to my research, it’s really not bad. We’ve had for years though, it’s not great either. Because I think when they first came we felt like we were being policed by outsiders. Although for a second there we didn’t have anybody and they had state patrols because during that period where we lost the police department, we lost the police department, a lot of drugs moved into Hobson City that wasn’t already here. And things got pretty wild for a second there. So they sent state patrols. (Karen)

She claims that police department closed in either 2006 or 2007. Then the state sent in state troopers to patrol. According to Karen, she claims,

"Well we had state patrols, yeah state troopers were coming and writing up wrecks. Really everybody was workin’ Hobson City. And then it got really bad and state patrol started, they sent a, oh we had a chopper for 3 or 4 weeks just circlin’. Like you would’ve thought it was south central LA… that was back not long after we lost the police department. No, that was the late 90s when that happened. But still, what I said happened, happened, about a lot of drug deals moved in and such. (Karen)

Karen recalls a major incident that involved chopper police surveying the Hobson City community that the other women did not mention. She states that it was a major incident that happened in the late 90s but does not give details about it. She identifies Hobson City as a violent place but also provides solutions to the violence such as creating a neighborhood watch.

So far Hobson city has been portrayed as a respectable community with only a few bad apples but Karen’s recollection adds a new perspective to the town’s identity. However, she does recall similar details, as the other women, on Hobson City’s former police department.

Karen’s interview produced another theme about education connected to opportunity. At the time of the interview she had returned to college to finish her bachelor’s degree. She views education as an outlet, as a necessity, and as a struggle. Education served as a means to more opportunity and that has been the case for many Blacks because we were once denied the right to
pursue an education. Karen also relates education to struggle when she explains how certain life events hindered her from staying in school or returning to school and when she was enrolled she experienced struggles related to academics such as not knowing how to do certain assignments or use certain software applications. In regards to finishing her degree, she states,

I was taking a class here and there at Gadsden. And I finally got into this Adult program at Talladega College in 2008. And really went all the way through the program and had some other classes to take and had a couple of I’s in classes and I got sick in 2010. So I didn’t try to go back for a while. I continued to work, but I didn’t go back for a while. And uh, so last year, I took another stab at it. Didn’t make it. So this year, I’m taking another stab at it. And I’m trying, I got a little small PowerPoint to do, that I can’t do I don’t know how. And um, I’m trying to get my paper in. Maybe she’ll take it, maybe she won’t. (Karen)

Karen’s conversation about completing school shows the determination that she and other black women have despite living in a marginalized community where they do not have access or the tools needed to thrive academically. Although the town has a library, it is not enough or not the best method of help for her because she needs tutors, consultants, or advisors to help with her educational needs.

Gail Cunningham

Gail is one of the women who has lived in Hobson City all of her life and has deep family roots in the town. She states, “I’ve lived here for all my life. And my parents moved here in, like, I guess, my mom came up in about 1957/1958, somewhere like that. I don’t really know when my daddy came up” (Gail). When asked to give a general overview of the town, Gail focuses more on the leisure activities that occurred in the community. She says,

So then, from what I knew of Hobson City, it’s a really good city. We used to be up here where the center is where they used to play baseball. They used to have baseball games up here on Saturdays and Sundays. We had another little building that was, like, in front of here and we used to come up and bowl. Right across the street was a swimming pool. We used to have lots of charter buses. People used to have picnics up here in the park on the weekends. It was really nice. (Gail)
Gail continued to discuss community activities as she talked about her family home. She states, “Okay, growing up in Hobson City. Our yard was the community yard. That’s where most of the kids came to play” (Gail). Her home was always open to the children in the community to play and eat. Gail described her home as a safe space in the community.

Gail provides a discussion on the police department by contrasting the community safety from when she grew up with the current safety of the town:

…it’s a bit different. Because, here we used to always have the police there, riding down the street, protecting. If you wanted to be outside at night, you didn’t have to worry about the shooting or nobody, or anything because we always had the police there. Unfortunately, you know, now that the financial situation we have here we don’t have them, but, I still sits on my porch day and night, because you know where I sit nobody knows that, you know that we be there. I try to watch out in my community, the neighbors’ kids and such. It’s a big deal for everybody. Mainly with the law enforcement here now, it’s not always the peoples in Hobson City that’s doing it. It’s mostly from others peoples that’s coming into the city”. (Gail)

Like Karen, Gail talks about the importance of community safety and that she is a watchperson for the community. She takes on this responsibility much like Karen does with Karen developing an official neighborhood watch program. Also, Gail’s discussion about community safety shows her concern for Hobson City. She always references her porch as the watch place because that is where she feels in control. She explains how she watches over the neighborhood children and how protecting the children in the community is important. She consistently returns to community safety in other parts of her oral history, which shows how important Hobson City is to her. When asked what makes her feel most connected to the town she says,

Now, I love Hobson City. One thing that being connected to Hobson City is that everybody, if you find a good neighbor, you got a good neighbor. Even when I lived out on my own, now I live with my mom, everybody watched out for everybody. The best thing, you know, Hobson City is not a bad city, and I’m just going to come straight out. Everybody says you don’t want to live in Hobson City, but once you get to Hobson City, you will love it. (Gail)
Not only does Gail share how important community safety is, she also shares how proud she is of Hobson City much like Katie did in her interview. She expresses hope for a town rebirth so that it can thrive like it once used to.

When Gail discussed how Hobson City thrived economically and culturally, she mentioned the same local businesses and attractions as the other women, but introduces some that were not identified by the others. When asked about community businesses that are no longer in Hobson City, she says,

Yeah, we had bingo. I love bingo. I remember congregating for bingo. The clubs, we used to have two beauty shops here in Hobson City. We still have a little barber shop where the guys get their hair cut. The plant across the street. We also had a doctor’s office here, where the health center is, we had a doctor’s office. We had a little, what we called a café. We had a bunch of different stuff in Hobson City, but as time went by things change. (Gail)

Another similar theme that arises with the same interviewer is that of community violence. However in Gail’s interview she connects the violence to drugs. She expresses the need to diminish the drug houses in the community because they cause violence and other bad things in the community. One theme that has not been seen in the other interviews yet is that of co-dependency. She addresses this theme by explaining how the men of Hobson City are dependent on the women. She identifies men as the weaker gender in her interview. She views the men’s co-dependency as a negative factor and a negative marker placed on the town. Gail expresses the need to end that co-dependency on women in order for the town to flourish or to move in a positive direction. Gail goes on to express her implications of women being the stronger gender in various ways. She talks about herself as being self-sufficient and being a family provider, a role that traditionally would be assumed by the man of the house. She talks about the reality of being a woman as well. During the time when Hobson City thrived, there were a lot of local businesses. She expresses negative feelings about having to leave Hobson city to go purchase
necessary things like food items, etc. She prides herself on being a self-sufficient woman and that identity juxtaposed with Hobson City’s current identity of being a dependent town do not align well to her. Although Gail talks much about community safety, she does not provide any solutions for the town besides serving as the community watch person from her front porch.

Gail’s identity of being a self-sufficient woman stems from the teachings of her parents and modeling their actions. She expressed that her dad liked gardens and that they had a family garden growing up that produced most of their food. She explained that they only relied on the grocery store for meat. Everything else was grown in their backyard. She desires to go back to those moments of nostalgia and recreate what once was.

**Barbara Boyd**

Barbara is the one of two participants who is not a resident of Hobson City, Alabama. However, because of her strong ties to the community as well as her ongoing contributions to this historic Black town, I found it imperative that her history be documented along with the other women and girls. Her positionality offers a different perspective on the history and current state of the town. Barbara was born in Calhoun County on January 31, 1937; she has spent most of her adult life as an educator and politician. Therefore, Barbara’s analysis first discusses her career as an educator and how it is tied to the history of Hobson City. She then discusses her political career, which highlights her connections to the town and its neighboring towns.

*Educator Career*

Barbara Boyd’s interview went in depth about her teaching career in Hobson City, and its neighboring school districts and how she currently contributes to this historic town. Barbara taught at Calhoun County Training School for seven years, which she credits as being the only high school for blacks in the county for a number of years. While there she taught French and
English classes. Barbara shares contrasting experiences teaching at Calhoun Training in Hobson City with teaching in integrated schools outside of the town. One example of those contrasting experiences dealt with the financial resources available to teachers at Calhoun Training vs other integrated schools she worked at afterwards. She says,

So other than that I remember as faculties we had to raise money back in those days for school supplies. Everything. It was so different when I went into the integrated situation. I could just ask for things, and they were just there. I mean we sold some of everything (Barbara).

She shares her experiences leaving her comfort zone and community in Hobson City to go teach in integrated schools and how those experiences shaped her as a Black woman. In the following excerpt, she talks about the experience dealing with the possibility of teaching at an integrated school for the first time.

But at any rate, we were all worried. Most of the teachers were because we were gonna go out into situations that we'd not been used to. But I said this even to teachers, "I'm not worried about it. Not that I think I'm that brilliant, but all you gotta do is do the same thing you been doing in my opinion, if you're a good teacher, you just teach." That's the real deal. That's the way I did. But I said only one thing I'm gonna say to the superintendent, "I'm not gonna go to Wellborn." They said, "If he tells you you gotta go Wellborn, what are you gonna say to him?" I said, "Just like this. Mr. Beasley, you don't want a dead teacher on your conscience." They laughed at me. They said, "What do you mean?" "'Cause I don't have the personality right now to go there because I'm too outspoken and I won't go along with the things that I don't need to go." They laughed. They said, "Well, you're gonna have to have a job." Well, luckily I did not have to go. I was probably one of the first or second ones to go, but Weaver High School, I went out into a little area first, into a little trailer like thing. 'Cause we had seven, some worked 7:30 to 12 and they wanted that until they built a new school (Barbara).

Because Barbara, like other participants, brings up the importance of Calhoun County Training, it is important to locate the history of this significant school. I find it fitting to share the school’s history under Barbara’s analysis because she was an educator for many decades and because she taught at the school for several years after beginning her career at J.W. Darden High school in 1962. Amanda DeWald documents in “C.E. Hanna School Wears the Name of a Rich History” the origins and the transition of this historic school. According to DeWald’s sources,
the school was originally named after Professor C. Edgar Hanna. Shortly after Hobson City’s incorporation, the town made education a priority. “Twenty miles to the northeast, in White Plains, Professor C. Edgar Hanna ran an elementary school. The city sent a committee there to recruit him to help them found a new school” (DeWald). According to DeWald, the school was first named The Hobson City and Oxford Academy and opened in the year 1905. William Hutchings, current principal of CE Hanna elementary at the time of this article, stated that “people from Heflin, Bynum, Ohatchee, White Plains sent their children to that school to board at the county’s only high school for blacks” (Hutchings). A fire burned down the first building, which was located on Lincoln Street in Hobson City. Consequently, the school was rebuilt on what is now Martin Luther King Drive under the Rosenwald Initiative in 1923 and named Calhoun County Training School. In DeWald’s article, Dunn states that Edgar Hanna’s beliefs in industrial education, and it was very common to see him teaching trades to the boys when he wasn’t doing his duties as principal (Dunn). DeWald states, “the school gained recognition from the state and county for its teaching of manual trades: bricklaying, carpentry, sewing, and bicycle mechanics” (DeWald). She quotes William Hutchings when he referred to those trades as “black trades…[because] people knew them from the experience of slavery, and the school passed them on” (Hutchings).

Barbara mentions Fort McClellan in her interview when she says “they built a Weaver High school in Anniston, the Fort McClellan was in bloom then” (Barbara); this is the same army base that DeWald says Hobson City resident and former football coach of Calhoun training went to ask for football resources. DeWald quotes Dunn when he says he went to Fort McClellan to ask for help from their captain and the captain brought football uniforms for the team the very next day (Barbara). Moving along to the time of World War II, Dewald states that “with many of
its teachers overseas fighting…Hobson City again watched its school burn in 1942”(DeWald).

DeWald states that Hanna died in 1960; this was just before Barbara began teaching there 2 years later, and the school desegregated in 1972, just two years after she left Calhoun County Training. DeWald explained that the Oxford City School system bought Calhoun County Training from Calhoun’s school system in 1987, and that is when many changes to the school occurred such as central air and heat and then the school was named C.E.Hanna after Edgar Hanna (DeWald).

This article corroborates all of the participants’ stories on the current status of the school which serves as Hobson City’s municipal building and the current CE Hanna is located behind Oxford Middle School on the Hobson City/Oxford line.

Following Barbara’s time at Calhoun County Training school, she went on to teach at Weaver High School, her first job at an integrated school. After her time there, she went on to teach at Gadsen College, Jackson State University, and Miles College.

**Political Career**

Somewhere along her journey in life, Barbara entered the political arena. The following excerpt from her interview details what motivated her to enter the world of politics:

... I went through life thinking that if I got the highest degree I could, I would be able to make changes in education. My masters is in supervision and curriculum development, but I could never get hired as a supervisor in Calhoun County. Those men who, some of them, who were hired was either coaches who were losing, they had to put somewhere, principals who were. I was in Alabama with some of them and by the way, I'm not bragging, but at the master's level I had a 4.0... The real deal was I would always get up in the top three or five, but never getting through. So all of the sudden I realized, ”You are so wrong, the only way you gonna make changes or do anything in education or anything else is you've gotta be in the political arena.” (Barbara).

Barbara discusses her connection with Hobson City as the representative of District 32 of which the town is a part. Although District 32 encompasses more than just Hobson City, Barbara is particularly proud of her continued involvement in this historic Black town. She credits herself with seeking and using funds to pave the Martin Luther King Jr. Drive in Hobson City; this road
is the main thoroughfare in and out of Hobson City. She also states that she received 190,000.00 dollars to have the Hobson City library and senior citizen center built. This building is the second most used building in the town besides the old C.E. Hanna School. Senior citizens of Hobson City gather at the senior center daily for group activities, lunch, and much more. The town residents use the library daily as well. There is someone there who serves as the librarian; there are several computers and other technological devices in the library, and of course a vast array of books of all genres. Many children go to the library after school; many residents go there to get internet access, and much more.

Influential People

Barbara mentions numerous people during recollections of past conversations during her teaching and political career. Some of the people mentioned were former principal Mr. J.F. Mitchell, former student Dr. David Satcher, former mayor of Oxford, Alabama Mayor Leon Smith, former Mayor of Hobson City Mayor Snow, current Hobson City Mayor Alberta McCrory, former Alabama Governor Don Siegelman, her uncle Riley Bird, Freedom Riders’ people, and members of the Solutia Organization. Former Alabama Governor Donald Siegelman served one term from 1999-2003. Records state that Mayor Leon Smith died September 17, 2017 as Barbara had indicated in her interview. She said her uncle Riley Bird and Mayor Smith were both major influencers as she ran her first political campaign.

Georgia Calhoun

Georgia was the only other person aside from Barbara who did not live in Hobson City, Alabama. However, she was still a major contributor and voice in the town. Georgia grew up in Choccolocco, Alabama, an incorporated community in Calhoun County. Though Georgia has
never lived in Hobson City, she has close and long lasting ties to the community. She describes her connection to the town in the following excerpt:

I finished high school here. I finished high school in 1948, the training school. It was the only high school in the county for black children. We traveled like 20 miles to get to school. And we didn’t have a bus for some years – the first years. But we rode with our father as he went on to work… That’s the school building, there [points] (Calhoun).

She further describes some of her contributions and connection to the town when she talks about her experience going to school in Hobson City,

At school, the elementary school was built in 1876, and it still stands, and I have had – put it on the historical registry. We’d go to school – it was a one-room sch– well, two room; it had upstairs and downstairs. And all the children, 1 through 6, sat in the same room with one teacher, and she taught everything. Our books was sort of passed over to us from the white schools. We had outdoor toilets at that time, and we had water buckets with a dipper. Everybody had their own glass with their names on it. Now, I don’t know when they ever got washed, but I guess they did, you know. We had both heat – we had a big heater – and men in the community kept the firewood wherever else there was to be kept for the fire. (Calhoun)

Although Georgia never lived in Hobson City, she left a lasting footprint on the town with her successful efforts of attaining historical registry for the old C. E. Hanna School, now the City Hall.

Georgia talked a lot about school and education just as the other women did, but she talked extensively about school and education meshed with church life. She describes school life being mixed with church life in the following excerpt,

And so we would go – sometimes, when we’d have revival meetings and church would be going on, she’d turn out school, and we’d all go over to a revival meeting, sit on the mourner’s– I think I sat on the mourner’s bench about six years before I joined the church. And we’d go to every funeral that they had, then we’d come back to school, because it was right next door, you know. (Georgia)

Church and school intertwined because of the tight knit culture the community had created and because of the close locations of the local churches and the school.
Georgia goes back to her connection to Hobson City by describing the town’s uniqueness. She states,

Well, when I came away to Hobson City, we were like – see, we would, like, have to walk from down to Oxford area [*points*] – here. You can see, that’s no good. And the parents – a lot of the parents would open their doors for the children who were walking so we could get warm – and we did that, you know, a year or so. And parents from all over the county helped to support the school. If they were having events – my mom, people from all the other areas would come, we were from Brutonville, Alexandria, Choccolocco, White Plains, Central City, all those – this was the feeder school. And so everybody’s parents worked together with that, you know. It was just like another home for me. And since I have been a professional person, I try to support this area with whatever I can help do, you know, because I feel, it being an all-black area, black school, there’s a lot of potentials here that I would like to see happen. I work along with them, see whatever I can do. (Georgia)

It seems as though the school being the only school for Blacks for a long period of time made the town unique. The school was the nucleus of the town that brought not only the people in Hobson City together, but also Blacks who lived in neighboring communities. Hobson City served as a safe space for them all. Georgia continues to describe her connection to the town and how she wants to remain actively involved in the town’s progression. She states,

I would like to see – see, we still – we attend church down here from different churches, you know, different times. And this school burned one time, too, and we had to go to school in the church, New Hope Baptist Church, until it was built back. I would just like to see Hobson City grow into a – I’d like to see more art things done here, you know. Like, the community could come together and do oral history programs. Because there’s a lot of history – and look, a lot of history’s been buried. You need to get these people – see, I’m 85, and I don’t plan to go nowhere until I’m 100, but that’s not up to me. Oral history programs, they could do; I would just like to see them – just, bloom into a – I think the Mayor is on the right track, where she’s trying to get more cultural things and trying to connect, being connected with other black cities, black towns, and all – so one day they ought to be able to have their own museum. Maybe the library could grow. (Georgia)

Georgia not only sees how important recovering Hobson City’s history is to its survival, but she also sees how important it is for the town to connect with other black towns. Georgia mentioned possible programs and ideas that the other participants did not, which is implementing oral history programs, focusing on the arts, and building a museum for the town.
Georgia had an extensive career in education as a teacher. She taught at numerous schools including a Jewish daycare center, West Point in Georgia, Norwood elementary, and South Highland. Her academic career was just as extensive as her professional one. She attended the Calhoun County Training, Alabama State University, Atlanta University, and Jacksonville State University. She describes her educational experience in the following excerpt:

So, when I did come to County Training School [points finger] and I finished valedictorian and perfect attendance, and I got a scholarship to Alabama State. It was a teacher’s college then; it’s now Alabama State University. I majored in secondary education; I was in social studies and English… Then I decided, after two years of that, I think I’d like to have a degree in elementary education. So I went to Atlanta University and got my elementary certification…. I had also prepared myself and got my elementary certificate to be media – in media in elementary education. And I got that at Jacksonville State University. My master’s degree. (Georgia)

Georgia explained that Alabama State University used to be a teachers’ college during the time she attended. According to Blackpast.org the university had several prior names but became the State Teachers College in 1929, then the Alabama State College for Negroes in 1948, then Alabama State College in 1954, and lastly its current name, Alabama State University in 1969 (blackpast.org). Since Georgia was born in 1930, she would have to had attended the school when its name was Alabama College for Negroes or during the school’s transition from State Teachers College to Alabama College of Negroes. Georgia also identifies Atlanta University as a school she attended; this school was founded in 1865; in 1988 the university consolidated with Clark College to become Clark Atlanta University (cau.edu).

Georgia, like some of the other women, does not recall any bad race relations within Hobson City or between Hobson City and its neighboring community. Her lack of information on that topic can be attributed to her not being a resident of the town; however, she does speak at length about the role race played in her community and how race conditioned both blacks and whites to perform in certain ways. She explains,
It’s all black; I haven’t heard of any race relations. Now where I lived – like I said, my neighbors were white. We played with the white children. It was just that you knew that at the end of the day, you’re going to your house, and I’m going to my house. On a Sunday, you’re going to your church, I’m going to my church. You’re going to your school, and I go to my school. So it wasn’t a question of that, you know, and we just got along well. (Georgia)

Georgia describes the unwritten racial rules that people followed in her community in order to keep peace among white and black people. This separatism she experienced was not an isolated experience but was the common narrative across the Jim Crow south.

**Conclusion**

These analyses of the oral histories conducted with the women and girls revealed a wealth of information and history about Hobson City, Alabama. The excerpts included from each of their oral histories allowed their voices to create a space of shared authority between myself and them. It was important to let their words tell the complex history of the town without me speaking for them. Although my voice in intertwined within their narratives through my efforts of creating a complete narrative of each woman and girl’s interview, I wanted my voice to be secondary to theirs as these are their stories, their town, and their perspectives. My authority takes over through the triangulation of their stories with my research, and my analysis. In the following chapter, I discuss the findings from the analyses by explaining what themes were found from the focus codes and what they mean in the larger context of re(inscribing) history in a historic Black town.
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

In this chapter, I use the data from the analyses and codes of the oral histories to explain the rhetorical actions of that data. I analyzed oral histories from five Black girls and five Black women to uncover the history of the historic Black town of Hobson City, Alabama. My findings include the following: 1) Race was the core of all narratives; 2) Race, community, identity, feelings, family, education, church/religion, schools, people, major incidents/events, employment, and Hobson City markers were the major themes that emerged; 3) Both women and girls shared a lot of knowledge about Hobson City. The original research questions that have guided this study are listed here: 1) What can be learned from the stories of African American women and girls in Hobson City, Alabama? 2) What is the current narrative of Hobson City, Alabama and how can these oral histories disrupt or complement that narrative? and 3) Are there any current racial tensions between Hobson City, Alabama, Oxford, Alabama and Anniston, Alabama? After completing the coding process and analyzing the data, a fourth question emerged; What does the data say about the women and girls’ identities?

The purpose of this study was to discover and (re) inscribe some of the history of Hobson City, Alabama, which is the oldest incorporated Black town in the state. I used the oral histories of Black women and Black girls to (re)discover and (Re) inscribe this history. The oral histories focused on how the women and girls perceived their town, what they knew about the general history of the town, and what personal recollections they wanted to share that could add to the town’s current narrative. I organized this chapter into five sections- the girls’ findings, the women’s findings, discussion, conclusion and future research.
Girls' Oral History Results

I analyzed interviews from five girls who are citizens of Hobson City, Alabama. They include Jaden, Zakerria, Tesia, Melody, and Aliya. I used the initial codes from the girls’ interviews to find themes because their interviews were not long enough to conduct focused codes. For a quantitative understanding of the themes, I provide a breakdown of how many times each theme emerged: Artifacts-8, Church-5, School-6, Cemetery-2, Print Shop-3, Park-2, Clinic-1, and Chicken Shack-1. The next section includes a breakdown of the findings under each theme.

Artifacts

The girls each identified at least one picture that they found in the old C.E. Hanna School that shared part of the town’s history. Some of these artifacts related to the school’s history and others related to the larger community history. The fact that the girls found the picture artifacts interesting and had questions about them alludes to the untold stories of those artifacts.

Artifact 1

Two of the girls talked about the Tigers’ Den artifact. When asked about the Tigers’ Den, Aliya stated, “it’s not that I want to change it I just want to know more about the tigers’ den. What was the reason for the tigers’ den and why was it called the tigers’ den” (Aliya). ZaKerria was the second girl who talked about the Tigers’ Den; she stated, “The last picture was the CCTS tiger’s den picture… like the classroom beside it has Tiger’s Den but they should make the tiger bigger and like put more decorative because of some of the paint is coming off of it” (ZaKerria). The Tiger’s Den artifact was found in the alumni archive room for the school that contained only artifacts relating to the school such as football helmets, homecoming pictures, etc. The girls seemed unaware of the importance of the Tiger’s Den or that it played a major role in Calhoun
County Training School’s school spirit because they did not question the tiger being the school’s mascot or ask any questions related to the climate of the school’s spirit. Aliya seemed more curious about the history of the Tiger’s Den while ZaKerria focused more on the actual picture.

Artifact 2

The second artifact identified by multiple girls was the 10th anniversary Black Mayors’ Conference picture. ZaKerria described her thoughts on the picture; she stated, “It make me want to change it because like they cut that off and put like 10th anniversary right there, but they should’ve just put that at the bottom. And they could’ve put names up under it because many people don’t know who they are” (ZaKerria). Aliya shared her thoughts on the picture by saying, “umm these people that’s in the picture. they look like very good people and like now people is messing up Hobson City and bringing violence back in Hobson City and looking at these people …like what we’re doing now...maybe we could be in their place” (Aliya). Aliya and ZaKerria show their concern for preserving this artifact and how important it is to recognize influential and historical people in their community. The girls’ desire to preserve these artifacts shows how they value things in their community. It also shows their awareness of their community’s history being at risk, even other citizens in the community know the importance of preserving the town’s history because it was community people who created these archival rooms using their own resources. The girls in this study have been shaped by their community and their pride in their community comes through because they have been raised in a place where pride in its rich heritage is commonplace.

Artifact 3

The third artifact identified was the trophy case in the old C.E. Hanna School. Melody was the first girl who identified the artifact. She stated, “So, the next one, it was the trophy desk
that all of the James Dunn’s like his trophies and accomplishments. I think it should be out in the open too because it was in that room that was locked and no one could see it” (Melody). Tesia said “yea like put it somewhere or in that little trophy box thing they have, put it in there because that’s like the new beginning of something because that’s like, it could probably be the new beginning of something beyond (incomprehensible) or something like that and with that it helps people with working and stuff. like probably Ms. Caldwell can like tell some other people about it and they could start that school back again or something like that” (Tesia). Both Melody and Tesia viewed the trophy case as a special artifact that protected some of the school’s most valuable trophies and prizes. They viewed the trophy case as a prized possession that would create a positive image of the school, an image of new beginnings. Tesia and Melody both saw the need for displaying accomplishments by people from Hobson City, as they advocated for displaying James Dunn’s trophies. They both wanted to create a more positive narrative of their town because they wanted other’s within and outside of Hobson City to know about such accomplishments. Perception is important to them, and they want others in the community to be proud of this particular citizen’s accomplishments, but they also want outsiders to know about him.

Only one girl talked about each of the following artifacts: the 1595 picture, and the 100 years’ dedication poster.

Artifact 4

The 4th artifact was the dedication poster found in the old C.E. Hanna. ZaKerria identified and shared her thoughts on the poster. She stated,

My first image was the 20 years of dedication poster. They shouldn’t have it sitting on the floor. They should put it up somewhere to make it be noticed or seen. Maybe the frame of it and they have colors behind it. Maybe they should change all of it and replace it with more stuff. Like having a better frame and it should be... I just don’t like the way
they have it brown. It should be another color. It probably would be on a wall in a frame, so when people walk by they can see who was actually a part of Hobson City (ZaKerria). ZaKerria’s thoughts on the dedication poster show that she sees the need to preserve important artifacts that were a major part of Hobson City’s history. Her need to preserve this specific artifact tells that she wants others to know that Hobson City is part of something larger than Calhoun County and even Alabama, that her town has been part of a nationally recognized organization. She talks a lot about improving artifacts even with this one because again, she like the rest of the girls, wants to change the negative perception that others have of the town, particularly those who live outside of Hobson City. By telling how she would fix or improve this artifact, she shows how important appearance and perception is to her.

Artifact 5

The 5th artifact was the 1595 picture as identified by Tesia. She stated, ok it was the 1595? thing right here. um I would change it to like I wouldn’t put it in that one room. I would sit it in the front so everybody could see it because it was really pretty. and I would like put it in the front where the mayor’s. the mayor office is. I would like put it right there on the side. there was some other stuff like that too and I would get this one CT Tigers and I would like put that in the front. I would put that on the other side because it was really pretty (Tesia).

Tesia’s description of the 1595 picture is another example of seeing the value of an artifact and understanding the history behind it. Tesia described the poster as “pretty” a word that none of the other girls used; she describes the poster as “pretty” twice. The other girls never talked about the beauty of things, which is why Tesia’s comment is unique. The poster she referred to is actually a yellow and black quilt with a leopard stitching around the border. The poster includes the letters CTT and the year ’95. In a room full of tainted pictures this quilt really stands out, which is probably why it caught Tesia’s eye. A unique way of telling the history of the town’s school, quilting has long been part of Africans and African Americans’ cultures from pre-slavery and onward. The fact that Tesia noticed this quilt and referred to it as “pretty” speaks to her cultural
heritage that she may or may not be aware that she is part of. Quilting has long served as a means of kinship for black women, whether on the plantations, in their homes, or in their communities. Writers including Alice Walker and Toni Morrison, show how quilting has been interwoven into black culture through their storytelling. Scholars like Olga Davis, Floris Cash, Cuesta Benberry, discuss the power black women hold through the art of quilting and acknowledge quilting as an art form that both black women and black men have been performing as long as whites have. Therefore, thinking about Tesia’s thoughts on the quilt she labeled “1595” and her unique comment of calling it pretty seems to be supported by a wealth of cultural heritage: the colors appealed to her; the stitching appealed to her; and the messages in the form of the letters and numbers appealed to her curiosity. Black culture that has shaped Tesia and taught her how to recognize art, specifically black art forms.

The girls talked the most about artifacts found in the old C. E. Hanna School. The school and the artifacts found in it were important to them; these artifacts showed that education is a priority to them, and the community at large, and that the old C.E. Hanna holds a lot of history about Hobson City that is behind closed doors and therefore not accessible or visible to others. Every girl wanted to fix at least one of the artifacts that they discussed which speaks to them wanting to change the narrative of their town to one that is more positive or better than the current narrative that they have experienced. The idea of fixing or improving things also shows how important perception is to all of them; they were highly conscious of how others, specifically outsiders, perceived Hobson City. They also thought that no one outside of Hobson City knew much about the town, so they wanted to display new and improved artifacts in highly visible places.
Church

Church in the community was a central theme that emerged from the girls and women’s data. Of the 5 girls in the study, 4 discussed church, and 4 out of 6 women discussed this theme. For the girls, they identified churches in their community a total of five times. Tesia talked about a picture she took of her church, New Hope. She stated,

…I liked it because it’s my church and I love church… my umm pastor’s dad built the church… I want to know why his dad built it… I can ask him or I could like go online probably and probably because there are some stuff about new hope online because we have a website and stuff (Tesia).

Zakerria identified her church in a picture as Oak Ridge church. She stated, “I chose the 3 crosses at Oak Ridge Church… Well, I know it’s at our church and it was a design for the church, for the outside of the church” (Zakerrria). Melody was the only girl who talked about church twice in one interview. In her second interview, she talked about a church in the community. She stated, the next one was the picture of my grandad’s church…: Because it’s just his church and I’ve always like wondered about it because it’s in my family’s history… Well, I know that he preached there when my mom was growing up and that it has changed a lot since then (Melody). After that discussion, Melody identified another church; one that Tesia identified. Melody stated “The next one, it was New Hope, the first church we went to… Well I don’t know who any of those people are so I guess who are the people? Ask someone who goes to the church that knows like everyone” (Melody). Next, Aliya identified Oak Ridge Church, the same church that Zakerrria discussed in her interview. Aliya stated, “the first image was the oak ridge Baptist church and it got a whole bunch… like who these people are and like why do they have the dates” (Aliya). Jaden was the only girl who did not talk about any church in Hobson City. It is interesting to note that Jaden did not talk about church considering that over the course of the
study during the Photovoice sessions, she was very vocal about being actively involved in her church.

The fact that 4 out of 5 of the girls talked about churches in the community shows that church played a central role in their lives and is a major part of the town’s history and culture. Church as part of everyday life has been passed down through generations in the girls and women’s lives seeing that they and their families have been members of these churches for decades. Church not only served as a historical site but also as place of learning, fellowship, as well as community activism when there was a community breach. The girl’s thoughts on church juxtaposed with the women’s thoughts show a key difference, some of the women discussed church life as racialized experiences while the girls did not. This point shows that the role of the church was much different for the two generations. For example, Melody discussed a picture of her granddad’s church and shared that she always wondered about the church considering it was part of her family’s history (Melody). On the contrary, Alberta shared her thoughts on the 16th Street Baptist Church, which was bombed and killed innocent Black girls. Although this church is not in Hobson City, Alberta referred to it as her church stating “I felt like God had not protected those little girls who were in Church and then knowing that men had no concern for other folk lives and didn’t care about our place of worship. This was our church, that sacred place that you were able to go to be safe from anything that happens” (Alberta). The girls viewed the churches in their communities more as places that they did not know much about and less as places of learning, fellowship, and community safe havens. The women viewed their churches as safe spaces and places of learning.
School

School was the third theme that emerged from the girls’ data. This theme appeared a total of seven times. Zakerria discussed the new C.E. Hanna School which is located on the Hobson City/Oxford dividing lines. Here is Zakerria’s short discussion about the current school:

It’s the new C.E. Hanna School. I know that it holds grades up to 5th and 6th and I know who the principals are. The principal is Mr. McCall and the assistant principal is Mr. Mitchell. I wanted to know why they moved it from Hobson City to this place (Zakerria).

Here is Tesia’s discussion about the current C.E. Hanna School.

I liked it because it’s my school… that a black person built the school… like I want to know what the black person was and why did he build it for other people to go to school… well me I would like go on google or umm like place where you find out like where you like find out who built it and like why they did it and stuff (Tesia).

In her second interview, she talks about the old C.E. Hanna that was formerly Calhoun County Training School. She states,

I think they were building this...that building over there I think. I like that one because it was like the new beginning of C.E. Hanna and the gymnasium and like the place where it all started. like where they teach skills and stuff. and where I would see like how I would imagine it is like um…. like probably Ms. Caldwell can like tell some other people about it and they could start that school back again or something like that.

Jaden discussed the old C.E. Hanna by focusing on different parts of the school. Here are her four excerpts:

(1) The next picture I took was the nurse’s office door. I think that it should be used more and since it is a school on the other side, they could probably use it as an actual nurse office instead of it just being there.

(2) It was a picture of the stage… It was very unorganized and cluttered up there like a bunch of different stuff up there that probably shouldn’t be on the stage… By going up there and cleaning up the stuff up there. Putting it somewhere where it could be used. Like instead of having desks piled up in corners, you can actually use them for better things, than just being there… It would be like an empty stage, painted walls, clean floor, put some windows where it’s just patched up with tape at.

(3) [Gym at the old C.E. Hanna]: Well, I named it, just “gym” … I think because like the goal, it can be fixed. It basically seems so empty and it doesn’t get used often… By painting the walls, new flooring, new goal possibly. A newer type of goal. The floor
would be a little better, instead of the floor it is because it’s a little creaky. The walls can be the same color but they will be painted better.

(4) [Principal’s door at the old C.E. Hanna]: It’s just the door to the principal’s office… How it’s like it’s scratched everywhere and stuff. It looks like when they repainted the door after a couple of years they painted over it. The paint smudged and got everywhere on the sign… Instead of having this window painted you can put an actual window there, like a one-way window and it doesn’t have to be like you can’t see right in. You can fix up where they painted on top of the “principal” and paint the door a little bit neater, nicer.

The girls discussed the old C.E. Hanna five times and the new C.E. Hanna only twice. The girls were more interested and invested in the old C.E. Hanna than the current one partly because they had previously attended that school, their family attended that school, and they know the importance the old C. E. Hanna has in their community. The girls’ comments on fixing things in the old C.E. Hanna tells of their concern of preserving the school since they know its historical significance. Jaden’s excerpts are the perfect example of the girls wanting to preserve the old C.E. Hanna because she talks about improving parts of the school in all four of her discussions. Their concern over the preservation of the school also indicates that the girls hold a much stronger attachment to the old C.E. Hanna than they do the current C.E. Hanna.

Cemetery

The cemetery as a historic place in the community emerged as another theme. The cemetery is located right behind the community park just upon a hill. The girls discussed the cemetery only twice. Here is Tesia’s discussion of town’s cemetery:

because I liked it because it was a cemetery and cemeteries are beautiful to me. it’s like a cemetery is a place where you bury people’s loved ones and families because you don’t like some people get cremated and most people put them in a grave… because I want like…if…because if they were closing down because they tried to close down the cemetery I would try to help them and stuff with it..

Zakerria also discussed the cemetery. Her discussion is as follows:

The cemetery…I know people from Hobson City has been buried there… Why are they buried there?... Why are they buried there?
The cemetery arose as a point of discussion for two main reasons: curiosity, and the thought of having a cemetery just for the people in Hobson City. Tesia talks more generally about cemeteries but then talks about Hobson City’s cemetery specifically; Zakerria’s thoughts are specifically for the town’s cemetery. Tesia referred to cemeteries as beautiful, which shows her appreciation for life, death, and burial rituals. In “The City of the Dead: The Place of Cultural Identity and Environmental Sustainability in the African-American Cemetery,” Diane Jones argues that “the cemetery also exists in African-American culture as an important aspect in preserving community” (235). She goes on to describe how cemeteries in black communities represent “the cultural, historical, religious and social customs of African American people, the historical nature, location, history, and current participation” (235). Therefore, although the cemetery arose as a theme only twice from two girls, it does not negate the importance of this theme because the cemetery in Hobson City is another historical aspect in preserving the community. The cemetery also represents the many people who were buried there, serving as one way the town has recorded information through death and burial documents, generational ties to the community, and genealogical information.

**Print Shop**

The print shop as a community site emerged as a theme from the girls’ data. The print shop is an old abandoned building located on the main street in Hobson City. It sits on the left side just before the library, park, and cemetery. This theme appeared three times from all interviews. Zakerria was the first girl who identified the print shop, and here is her discussion:

The next one was the print shop… Yea and I can see both of the sides where it says “the print shop.” That is probably was a print shop and store that people can buy supplies… Why did it go out of order?... Probably ask people that’s way older than us and lived here longer.

Melody was the second girl who identified this site. She stated,
The picture of the print shop because every time we come to Hobson City I’ve always wondered what that used to be. Just because it’s says print shop. Was it something big to everyone?... I didn’t know anything about it. I just used to go past it all the time.

Aliya was the third girl who discussed the print shop. She stated, “the print shop… what was in it to make it that name be the print shop… maybe go on the Hobson city website and find a link that says the print shop and read it” (Aliya).

The location and size of the building is enough to spark the questions that Aliya, Melody and Zakerria posed, which is likely the reasons the building held a prominent place in their thoughts. With the building being located on the main street in the town and having only one identifying marker caused curiosity among them, especially since the building has been abandoned for as long as any of the girls can remember.

**Hobson City’s Park**

The park arose twice as a theme among two of the girls. The park also known as the Booker T. Washington Park once held a swimming pool, tennis court, baseball field, and was the park that many African American baseball players came to practice. Tesia and Zakerria were the only girls who talked about the community park. Tesia stated, “it reminds me of the park that I went to when I first moved to Alabama… my friend’s auntie built that park… bench I want to know why she built it and why she did it for the community… I could either ask her or her auntie why she did it or I could go online” (Tesia). Zakerria discussed the playground, which is part of the park. She stated,

The next one is the playground… It was clear, 3 slides and stairs… I know that it was build last year around June or July and ever since then people been going down there having many events… Why did they build it in that specific place? Maybe ask the mayor who built. (Zakerria)

Like the print shop, although only two of the girls discussed the park, their decision to do so shows how they currently viewed the park and what the park meant to them versus what the park
meant for older generation of women who were around when the park functioned as the nucleus of the town hosting famous athletes and more.

**Clinic and Chicken Shack**

Melody was the only girl who talked about the Chicken Shack, a former local restaurant in Hobson City and the local clinic. Her excerpt on the Chicken Shack is as follows:

"Yea, and I put it because it has the year that it was first made and established. And like it’s historic… I knew that it was a Chicken Shack there before and they remodeled it and made another one so that people will come back to it… Why it got shut down like in the first place… I guess we could ask people that like have elders that were here around that time. (Melody)

Here is her excerpt on the clinic: I picked the clinic because… learning about the people that’s in there and how they got there maybe… I knew it was an HIV/AIDS Clinic… Just them being there and wondering why. (Melody)

I was surprised that more girls did not discuss the Chicken Shack because it too sits on the main street like the print shop, and it is a large colorful building. I thought the girls would have been more curious about the restaurant since it was a place that had intrigued me, but that was not so. I also predicted that the girls would not talk much about the clinic because during their sound walks, they did not gravitate towards the place or even acknowledge it much.

I did learn more information from the girls that helped me piece together more of Hobson City’s history such as when the school closed, knowing they attended the old C.E. Hanna, learning more information about the current C. E. Hanna, and that preserving their community’s history was just as important to them as it was to the women. While the girls posed many questions about artifacts and sites throughout the town, they consistently used their language to show what and how they would change or improve things in Hobson City. This action goes back to Richardson’s argument on how black girls use certain language practices to reflect their lived experiences (77). The girls all used words such as fix, better, change, to demonstrate how they
saw the need to improve either an artifact or site in the town. The girls showed that although they interpreted some of the town’s artifacts and places differently than the women, that they all shared the goal of sustaining the culture of the Hobson City through preservation efforts was still evident. By calling for change in their community, the girls took on identities of disruption by seeing the need to counteract the current perspective, a negative perspective they claimed that outsiders had of their town. In their interviews, they were always concerned about what outsiders knew and thought about Hobson City and so they used their language to disrupt that narrative by creating a new one that tells of the untold history of their town. The girls counteracted a negative portrayal of their town through their language. This act was important because the girls knew that their town’s narrative was also a reflection of them. They claimed people thought bad things about Hobson City which in turn meant that bad people lived in Hobson City, them included. So counteracting this negative perspective of their town also changed the way others viewed them as well as how they internalized outside perspectives. This internalization and reflective thinking the girls experienced is much like what Muhammad and McArthur argue in “Styled by their Perceptions: Black Adolescent Girls Interpret Representations of Black Females in Popular Culture.” I was surprised that the girls did not know as much, if anything, about some of the places in the community such as the print shop, the Chicken Shack, and the cemetery. Most of their history knowledge focused on the school, which shows how much of the community’s culture shaped them into seemingly privileging the old C.E. Hanna over other sites in Hobson City. The girls’ interviews offered a perspective on Hobson City that would have been missed if I had included only women in this study. The analysis of the girls’ interviews showed how the older generations shape the younger generations into privileging or focusing more on the town’s historical school and education rather than other aspects of the town’s history. If I had not
included the girls in my study I would have missed a critical perspective of how their generation thinks and views the old C.E. Hanna versus the perspectives from the women, who talked about memories of teaching and attending the school when it was Calhoun County Training School.

**Women’s findings**

*Racial Experiences*

Based on the data collected, race was the number one theme that emerged from all six interviews. I conclude that race played a large role in the lives of women in various ways and that race impacted their identities and way of life both directly and implicitly. All six women shared racial experiences within and outside of Hobson City, as well as other race related events or occurrences throughout their lives. These experiences included segregation, integration, Jim Crow Laws, racial comparisons over time periods, and race within the workplace. Race emerged a total of 48 times from all six interviews. I provide the following excerpts from each woman’s interview as evidence to show the ways race emerged as a major theme.

1. **Barbara on school integration**

So other than that I remember as faculties we had to raise money back in those days for school supplies everything. It was so different when I went into the integrated situation. I could just ask for things and they were just there.

2. **Karen on race and childhood**

And then we moved down here to the house, I kinda experienced a lot of loneliness. And we were the only blacks that lived in that area right there…Because there was no more black children, you know black people didn’t even live in Constantine when we moved in that house.

3. **Katie on race relations with white people during childhood**

We loved white people, and the reason we loved white people was cuz that’s where my mother and father got their living. And the white people that they associated with was
good to us. They didn’t mind coming to your house, they didn’t mind eating with you. Only thing is, you had to stay in your place.8

(4) Georgia on racial experiences as a mother with young children

So they started the Jim Crow laws. Jim Crow laws was worse than slavery. You couldn’t go here as a child, I couldn’t go in a restaurant. I couldn’t go in a library. You couldn’t go to a white person’s front door. Now, I could, because in my community, we just could do that. But, black man walking on the street, meeting a white woman, he had to get off. And you couldn’t drink water downtown. You had a black fountain – well, you said colored fountain – and a white fountain. Restrooms was colored and white. So, and even when my children were born, I put – they were little boys, thank God – I put fruit jars in the back of my car, so they wouldn’t have to stop at the restrooms [laughs], and we knew how to fry the chicken and make the lunch so we wouldn’t have to stop at a restaurant. So you didn’t want all the indignation.

(5) Alberta on economic and property discrimination

And you could not go to the black bank, I mean, because there…you didn’t have one, and so this is how the people lived and how they survived, and even when it came to buying property, banks will not loan money in poor black neighborhoods.9

(6) Gail on no racial tensions among communities

We never really had a race different. The only different we had was when we first moved into transition from Hobson City School, which was Calhoun County, to Oxford City school system. The first two years was kind of rough, but after that, it is all of what you make of it as a person.

The women referred to racial experiences extensively and consistently throughout their interviews, as race was a variable in their daily, lived experiences as well as the society in which they lived and functioned it. The women cannot tell their stories about working or education without mentioning race because it was central to all their actions. Because of race, they taught in segregated schools, because of race they had to experience integration, because of race they had to live and function in separate spaces. One of Critical Race Theory’s tenets acknowledges that “racism is ‘normal, not aberrant, in American society’” (Ladson-Billings). This theoretical

8 This excerpt is quoted at length in chapter 3.
9 This excerpt is quoted at length in chapter 3.
tenet proves true in the women’s narrative because their racialized experiences were the norm. Race existed and still exists as the constant underlying theme of people’s everyday lives. Therefore, it makes sense that the race theme emerged most frequently from extensive discussions from the women’s interviews.

*Identity*

Identity was the second theme that emerged from all six interviews. Each woman provided self-identifying information, but they also talked about their identities in other ways.

(1) Alberta on people in Hobson City being self-sufficient

But, eh, then we were self-sufficient, we had everything… But as I said these were times when people were pretty much self-sufficient.

(2) Katie on her identity during adolescence

You know, I wasn’t that dancing girl, and that short skirt wearing girl… Well they called me what they would call a wallflower…

(3) Karen on identifying as a loner

My sister got married and went off. So I, I made friends, with, with the white girls, and you know I had other friends but I’d have to walk to Zion Hill or walk to Jones Hill. Something like that. So I just, so there was just a period right in there when I expressed a lot of, I had a lot of loneliness. Where I became a loner. And now I’m still a loner.

Out of the six women, Georgia was the oldest, being born in 1930, followed by Barbara, Katie, Alberta, Gail, then Karen. Both Alberta and Katie identified Hobson City as their place of birth while Barbara, Georgia, and Gail identified other areas of Calhoun County; Katie was the only one born outside of Calhoun County in Dadeville, Alabama, which is in Tallapoosa County. Although Barbara and Gail identified Calhoun County as their birthplace, they made clear that they were not from Hobson City. Although all the women had various careers, Georgia was the only one who directly identified herself as a professional by stating “And since I have been a professional person…” (Georgia). However, this does not diminish other women’s careers
because they all described their career lives in great detail. The fact that Georgia made that proclamation shows her self-confidence. Several of the women talked about their experiences as a woman which shows an awareness of their gendered experiences whether it was in the workplace or at home in their communities. Katie and Gail shared memories of their childhood identities coupled with the idea of being a woman. Gail states that she “had five brothers and one sister, so [she] was the tomboy” but that she “knew the real life of a woman” (Gail). Katie states that she “wasn’t that dancing girl” or “that short skirt wearing girl (Katie). Their ideas of what it meant to be a woman or what a good girl was explains that they were brought up in a culture that had shaped their views on the role of a woman and the good girl/bad girl image as a child, and so even though Hobson City was in some ways a disruptive culture from mainstream spaces, t was also very traditional in other ways.

Community and Hobson City markers

The data that emerged under the community history/Hobson city markers theme proved to be much different than the data that emerged from the girls’ themes that spoke to places and history of the town (i.e. artifacts, cemetery). For example, Alberta shared an overview of Hobson City’s history which was pretty extensive, more so than the other women who recalled that historical narrative. Georgia and Katie focused more on other’s perspective of the town with Georgia saying “Well, one thing they should know, that this is a black town who’s struggling, and who has a leader now who’s really trying to make things better, and instead of looking out, come in. Come in and help.” (Georgia). Barbara identified a place in the community that the girls did not, which was the library. Gail along with a few others discussed local businesses that once thrived in the town; obviously the girls’ were not born during these times, which explains their

10 Alberta’s overview of Hobson City’s history can be found in chapter 3.
lack of knowledge about these places. Gail stated that the town had a bingo place, a doctor office, a plant, and more, and Alberta concurred. Karen was one of several women who talked about community safety but specifically, her and Gail whose focus was one developing a community watch program for the town.

*Education*

Education was another theme that emerged; five of the six women discussed this theme in various ways such as education and resources, educational accomplishments, generational education, and education equality.

(1) Georgia on her educational accomplishments

I had also prepared myself and got my elementary certificate to be media – in media in elementary education. And I got that at Jacksonville State University. My master’s degree.

(2) Karen on her views about education and her educational journey with her son

I just feel like education enhances everything. So, … It is, and that’s mostly what it is for me, you know. I was trying to go to school and finish school so I could show my son how important it was for him to go to school and finish school. I managed, he wound up finishing before I did so (laughs). He finished, he came outta high school in 2010. I really was supposed to graduate that May too but I didn’t.

(3) Alberta on financial resources for education

And there are some very powerful stories, that didn’t come from the bootleggers themselves but came from people who borrowed money from them to send their kids to college, because there were no Pell Grants and scholarships and things of that nature. And you could not go to the black bank, I mean, because there…you didn’t have one, and so this is how the people lived and how they survived

(4) Katie’s idea that education equals better opportunities

But after I went to school and graduated you got a better job, you could opt for a better job. She couldn’t.

(5) Barbara on education and employment struggles

That’s a great question. I thought … I went through life thinking that if I got the highest degree I could, I would be able to make changes in education. My masters is in
supervision and curriculum development, but I could never get hired as a supervisor in Calhoun County.

Gail was the only woman whom did not share any educational experiences, the other five women talked at length. Gail moved up north then back south to work at a local plant right after high school, which could be the reason she did not talk much about education; post-secondary school experience was different from the other women, even Karen who did not pursue college right after high school. Even though Gail’s experience was different, education was just as important for her as it was the other women because she did describe positive moments that occurred during her high school years. Education played a major role in the women’s lives mainly because education equaled varying forms of freedom. It gave them more opportunities in life.

*Schools*

Three women in my study talked about schools, although in different ways. Alberta described the climate of Calhoun County Training school in relation to the community by explaining that they had a “98 or 99 percent graduation rate” and that “if [they] missed something at home [they] had the community to fall back on” (Alberta). Georgia recalled using one of the community churches for school after it had burned down; and Barbara talked about Oxford middle and high school being feeder schools for those students who graduated from the current C.E. Hanna. Although three out of the six women spoke on schools, I concluded that they all valued the idea of school as the others talked more about education rather than the schools as a tangible place. Barbara focused more on the Oxford schools because she talked about them as places rather than her teaching experiences, and she did the same in reference to the current C.E. Hanna. Georgia did the same thing in her narrative about going to school in a church.
Employment/Careers

This theme emerged from the women’s data where they talked about their careers, their husbands’ and others’ careers, and their experiences gaining employment.

Barbara who is former teacher and current state representative talked extensively about both careers; here is a partial excerpt from her discussion about her political career:

as legislators we get a discretionary fund which usually are like grants…. I'm backing up a little bit of the funds for the public library and the senior citizens bill which is like 190000 which is the largest amount I've ever bought into one district… So that was how I come about even with funds for any projects. So I have done other things that educational wise that you might need in Hobson City and see it or related with the school. (Barbara).

Karen shared her experiences during her first job she attained during high school stating that she worked at Community Enabler, which was part of Alabama’s ACETA program that provided summer jobs to students. She then states that “in 11th grade [she] was in DECA and... started working in a restaurant (Karen). Gail shared her various career paths stating that she worked at a plant, a hotel with her aunt, and other jobs. Georgia shared her interesting career journey in the following excerpt:

I worked at a Jewish day care center over in Irvington, Pennsylvania – uh, New Jersey. I’m sorry: Irvington, New Jersey... Well, I came back home after three years and I went to West Point, Georgia – taught school in Georgia, 8 years. I would drive to West Point every Sunday evening and come back Friday afternoons. Sometimes I would go on Sunday mornings if there was something going to be happening that Sunday evening. But that was a very good experience. (Georgia)

Katie discussed her husband’s career stating that he was mayor of Hobson City, and he worked in the military and retired at Fort McClellan. Lastly, Alberta talked about others’ experiences gaining employment:

…we had a city bus and there were a few people who, when we went to mass meetings we had to ride with someone and there were a lot of people were afraid to go to the meetings because they were getting fired and a lot of these women worked for white women in their homes cause that’s what most of them did up until they were able to work in plants and other places of employment, instead of doing domestic work and a lot of fathers worked in foundries. (Alberta)
The reason Katie and Alberta focused more on other people regarding employment experiences and careers is because Katie’s husband is a former mayor of the town, and Alberta is the current mayor. Alberta wanted to share what the average Black person’s experience was like gaining employment and what their career experiences were like while Katie wanted others to know more about her husband whom she spent most of her life traveling with due to his military career. It seems she put her career aspirations on hold to support him because she only mentions having a job once or twice in the interview with little detail. This moment was another where the history being shared was gendered in the sense that a discussion about work experience was shifted to a discussion on one’s husband instead of a discussion of one’s self. Even in the sharing of her history of Hobson City, Katie privileges her husband’s work over her town.

**Famous and Recognizable People**

This theme emerged from the numerous times famous or well-known people were identified by the women. During Hobson City’s prime years, many athletes, singers, performers, politicians, and more visited or contributed to this historic Black town. Both Gail and Alberta named celebrities that frequented Hobson City such as James Brown and Willie Mays. Alberta had the most detailed narrative of famous people who visited the town.¹¹ She and Barbara both identified politicians and activists who visited and contributed to Hobson City. Barbara spoke about former Alabama’s governor Don Siegelman, and Alberta mentioned Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth.

The famous singers, performers, and athletes who frequented Hobson City did so during the early to mid 1900s. They came to this town because they saw it as a safe space for Blacks, a space where their work and talent would be appreciated by their own. The location of Hobson

¹¹ For a more detailed account see chapter 3.
City could not have been better because it is located in an area between Birmingham, Alabama and Atlanta, Georgia. So the athletes such as the baseball players who were part of the Negro Southern League and who went on to play in the Negro National League would visit Hobson City to play and practice. These athletes and performers viewed Hobson City as a home, a place of acceptance, and security. Hobson City had all the local businesses and community spaces that appealed to them. Also, people like Fred Shuttlesworth’s concern for Hobson City showed how Black leaders allegiances expanded beyond city borders, demonstrating that Black people created a tight knit network system during those times to combat racism and oppression.

**Significant Incidents/Events**

This section includes best examples of the data that developed into the significant incidents/events theme.

(1) Barbara shares a teaching incident

And I said No I don't know anything about it but we got to go to and I said no you can’t go. so we are at that time a meet. She came to my door as she battled for them day got to sit down and she said but they said no they not going. So she went to the principal and he came. Now here's the thing where it's good. I guess he knew me. I realized because that was in support of the nation. He came to my door and he asked for them to go. I said No sir. Mr. Mitchell [inaudible]. I never shall forget I said an hour boo hoo and boo hooing. Because I realized what I had done and what I had said to him. So he said but what I want to know from you is why they did not go. I said Mr. Mitchell they did not go because I was not respected. He said You said you were not respected? I said no. I said Mrs. Gerrard's did not come to me and ask me and the students told me and they insisted that they were going to go and I knew then that if I allowed them to do that to me I was new and I was young I would never have any control. And I said I was sorry. But when you came to the door I was just determined that they weren't gone go. And that's why I said he said but they need to practice tomorrow. I said Yes sir. But here she comes to me and let me know that they need to practice they've thought about that after even after then and I said Now I was just lucky.

(2) Alberta on a white supremacy rally and the killing of a Black man

It was a killing that took place after white men had had a white supremacy rally on the courthouse steps in Calhoun County and so there was this white man who was a preacher that went all around the South preaching hate and he told the men there at that rally “to follow them to go home and go that evening and kill a nigger.” I remember that because I
was across the street from where they were; I had gone to pay the home insurance for my mother and so they were across the street and I saw men waving their Bibles and waving their confederate flags. This is the same Bible that we had, that’s at home, that’s at church, and here they are using this bible and flipping through there showing you why you can hate your black brother, how it is okay for you to kill your black brother. And so that night some black men were on their way home from work and somebody was shot and killed, the man didn’t die right then but he died later on…

(3) Georgia on Freedom Riders’ incident

Well, let’s see now. The Freedom Riders started because – let’s go back. Slavery. In 1863, when President Lincoln issued the Emancipation and the slaves were freed. Ok. Then, the slave owners – I don’t know whoever slave owners, or just mess – it wasn’t all over… Now, not only – so, the Freedom Riders were started because they, We gonna stop all this junk. And they started in Washington and came all the way down, and they stopped at restaurants and they didn’t have any trouble so much till they got in Carolina, and that’s where the trouble started. Then, that’s – Congressman John Lewis was beaten, then. Then they came on down to Atlanta. And Dr. King told them, I think you could have trouble waiting for you in Alabama. So when they got to Anniston, there was two buses. Now, they were not chartered busses, these was regular busses, because they were white – and now let me tell you, there was as many white Freedom Riders as there was black. Lot of Freedom Riders. Lot of whites helped to calm the storm, you know. Alright, so, when they got to Anniston, they got to the Greyhound Bus station, this mob had crowded up. Now just in one block of the police station. And they were all [inaudible]. And the police never came. So they punctured the tires and wouldn’t let them off the bus and everything. And then they followed the bus on out on 202. And that’s where the tires went flat. When the tires went flat, they blew up – threw a bomb through the window, which set the bus on fire, and propped the doors where they couldn’t get out.

(4) Katie on the decline in local businesses

Well, the grocery store was the one I think went first. And, yeah I think it was cuz, you know like Hartford and Anniston had fast food restaurants and dry goods stores, things like that, so that drew the people out of the city. And I think that’s why the Chicken Shack, too, is not operating, cuz I don’t know what it is. I guess it’s because when we go out of town to eat you can do everything else you want. You know, like if you go out to the exchange, you can eat, you can shop. If you go down to the mall you can shop, go to the movie. So I think that’s what’s and then the money got slack. Then the police department closed off. We don’t have no protection or police protection for a city like this, you get robbed of everything you have. Right now you can’t leave a home empty. Like if I were to move out of this home, and nobody moved in it, in two months everything that would be sellable would be gone. They would break in and take everything. It’s just been a gradual decline in the things in the city, and you know when it goes so low and the people that really could pull it up are dead and gone, it’s kinda hard to start over.
Four out of the six women detailed major events or incidents in which they were either a witness or the person involved. Although these were major incidents, they were all racially charged which speaks to how race was foundational to their lived experiences. The events such as Katie’s thoughts on the decline of Hobson City’s businesses explain the struggles black communities experience when they have to compete economically with white or diverse communities. Because systemic racism exists, it continues to be harder for black communities to thrive economically, which is what happened to Hobson City. When the women experienced significant incidents on their jobs, such as the one Barbara describes, they had to learn how to grapple with overt racism and their identities as black women and professionals.

**Feelings**

This section includes data that best portrayed feelings from each of the women, feelings about themselves or toward others. For example, Katie talked at length about her family’s love for white people. Gail talked about her love for Hobson City when she said “Hobson City is not a bad city, and I’m just going to come straight out. Everybody says you don’t want to live in Hobson City, but once you get to Hobson City, you will love it” (Gail). Barbara described strong feelings toward her political counterparts by declaring they “Were so bitter and criticizing me, it would be okay if you just wanted to get on board now, but you want to get on board now and take over” (Barbara). Karen shared her feelings of loneliness and happiness when she lived in two different towns. Alberta used stories to deal with emotional pain by claiming “Eeh, well, in terms of the stories, we heard the stories, and a lot of the stories centered around humor stories, because I guess that was to kind of cover that pain” (Alberta).

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12 See chapter 3 for this excerpt.
13 See chapter 3 for this excerpt.
The women did not share many emotions during their interviews; I had to interpret most of their emotions from listening to them talk about certain topics, but they did not directly talk about emotions that much. Alberta was the only one who talked about her personal emotions more than once. However, even though the women barely talked about their personal feelings does not mean they did not experience feelings of pain, joy, anger, happiness, excitement; these feelings can be heard in their interviews.

Discussion

I relied on my existing theoretical framework as well as other theories to make meaning of the findings and to think about the importance of studying the narratives of Black women and girls. I would not have gained this type of understanding about Hobson City’s culture and history had I chose to include black male participants. The narratives offered by the women and girls helped me to better understand my own racialized experiences and my black culture. The women and girls in this study gave me a way to think about my own identity as a black woman, my adolescent years where I experienced school life at a diverse school and then transitioned to an all black high school; these women gave meaning to the way I think about the women in my family, their careers, their roles as women, mothers, wives, and more. Both groups’ narratives fostered reflexive thinking on my behalf so that I could better understand my agency and how it has evolved over my life. Their narratives also prompted reflective moments as I read and listened to stories that I felt related to some of my personal life experiences and those where I was merely a bystander or wallflower during situations and incidents that occurred in my family and in my communities. Therefore, by choosing to study the narratives of only black women and girls was not me promoting exclusion of the other gender but more so me seeking connectivity and understanding from those who are like me.
To reiterate, I drew three major conclusions from this study. First, I concluded that race was the major theme that was present from the origins of my study until the end. In my analysis and findings, one will see that the women talked about race extensively but the girls did not. Although race did not emerge as a major theme from the girls’ analysis there were moments where they briefly talked about it during large group discussions that I did not include in my study but were part of the Photovoice study. Also, the findings showed that race did not have a strong impact on the town outside of the Civil Rights era; race was not part of their daily lives. The people in the town seemed to have created a utopian community where race only entered as part of the larger incidents and events that occurred during the Civil Rights era. The women only talked about race when it involved the Freedom Riders’ bus burning incident, they only experienced or remembered experiencing racialized experiences in Oxford or Anniston, or other places in Alabama, but never in Hobson City. The data showed no traces of race being a major factor or influence on the women, other citizens, or the town before or after the Civil Rights Era. The second conclusion drawn from the findings is that there were many stereotypical gendered ideologies despite the town being a culturally rich space. The data showed that certain stereotypes of women and girls still existed such as appropriate dress codes for girls, a woman’s role in marriage, and standard behavior for girls and women. For example, Katie talked about not being allowed to wear red nail polish as a girl in which she equated the color red with being deemed as grown or mature. She also expressed another gendered moment where she stated how she had to change religious denominations once she married her husband. She implied that the role of the woman was to conform to the husband’s beliefs and ideologies. The last conclusion drawn from my findings states that because the girls’ interview questions were not constructed in a phenomenological way like the women’s interview guides were, this caused the girls’
responses to be more specific and focused in terms of how they talked about artifacts and sites that spoke to the history in Hobson City.

**Critical Pedagogy**

I think about how Paulo Freire’s theory in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* runs as an undercurrent to some of the themes such as race, community, and education. Freire’s theory on critical pedagogy argues that education seeks to transform certain power structures by marginalized or dehumanized groups such as blacks, Hispanics, etc. by drawing on their knowledge. Freire’s theory that the oppressed must liberate themselves and their oppressors because the oppressor cannot do so because they are dehumanized, speaks to Hobson City as a community and to the women and girls who have shared their stories (44-45). The founders of the town, once oppressed by slavery, former masters, and white society were forced to seek freedom which caused them to establish a town of their own. The women and girls who thought that others viewed Hobson City as a negative place sought to liberate themselves and others from that mindset by speaking about their town and themselves through a more critical lens. Freire’s ideology of dehumanization vs. humanization led me to examine how the women and girls viewed themselves as agents of their community. They are a marginalized group in multiple ways which, by Freire’s guidelines, means they were already dehumanized; yet in every instance in which they engaged in some level of critical inquiry about Hobson City, prominent events, or even self-identity, that critical inquiry broke down the dehumanizing walls and allowed them to experience humanization or liberation. The findings are that the women and girls were aware of oppressive behaviors, which began their critical thinking about their identities and their roles in their communities. Once they worked through the narratives that they shared in the oral history interviews, they participated in self-discovery, which is part of liberation. I found that some of
the women had blocked out traumatic incidents, some created a utopian future, and some
returned to moments of nostalgia; but they all talked about active solutions, all of which are part
of humanization process which Freire argues “can only be done by means of praxis: reflection
and action upon the world in order to transform it” (51).

Critical Race Theory

Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic explain CRT in their book *Critical Race Theory: An
Introduction*, as a movement of “a collection of activists and scholars interested in studying and
transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power” (2). They argue that the movement
includes similar issues that traditional civil rights and ethnic studies discourses encompass “but
places them in a broader perspective that included economics, history, context, group-and self-
interest, and even feelings and the unconscious” (3).

This theory speaks to the racial inequities the women experienced when talking about
education and schools. CRT provides ways of understanding American society’s creation based
on property rights. In the interviews, several of the women told the narrative of Hobson City
becoming its own municipality and the development of the current C.E. Hanna School. They
discussed the voting rights issue within Oxford where blacks had the voting power, which
resulted in whites wanting to redraw the county lines to regain voter strength. This event resulted
in the blacks establishing their own municipality, which at the time was called Mooree Quarters.
They established the town so that they could have power and control over their own political
sector and property. I was initially surprised to hear about some of the negative experiences with
integration because I was thinking more about resources gained rather than resources lost as it
related to education and schools. But the women’s experiences with integration told a completely
different story. According to more than one of the women participants, the effects of integration
hurt Hobson City more than it helped the town. The children of the community benefited from more educational access due to school integration; however, the loss of community resources and cultural ideals hurt them more in the end.

The girls’ narratives focused more on school related topics, which showed how important the old C.E. Hanna School was to them as well as their current schools. They all knew the history of C.E. Hanna being the only school for blacks at one point, and they all talked about the school, parts of the school, or artifacts found in the school in ways that spoke to the need for preserving their community history.

The women brought up race in various ways throughout their interviews whether directly or implicitly. The number of times the theme emerged proved that race played large roles in their lives and their communities. The data showed that systemic racism existed within Hobson City and its neighboring communities. Critical Race Theory serves as a tool for understanding how and why race was such a prominent theme throughout the interviews because this theory partially relies on the voices of Blacks to tell the stories embedded in racial experiences to counteract the possible revisionist history or other false narratives. For example, when asked to provide a brief overview, which was embedded in racial experiences, of the history of Hobson City, the women relied on a narrative that had been passed down through generations since the origins of the town.

Hobson City markers, major incidents/events, and community were the top three themes that emerged from the interviews, which suggests that topics under those themes were the most important to the women. These three themes emerged in a way that allowed for a time of reflection and a time of action. All the women wanted others who were not familiar with Hobson City to know that it is a community filled with rich history, a tight knit community despite
certain events that have happened over the years. These women all know the importance of keeping the history of the town alive, and they all wanted to relive those nostalgic moments when the town once thrived. Most of the women spent several moments throughout their interviews reflecting on the good times in Hobson City and shared stories of what the community used to be like. Some of the women seemed to want to return to those moments when the town was economically stronger and more independent.

The girls shared similar narratives about artifacts and local places within the community. They were more curious and inquisitive than the women because many of the places and artifacts that they talked about were before their time. For example, they wanted to know who built the cemetery or who were the former mayors of the town that they saw in pictures in some of the archival rooms. The key difference between the two groups is that the girls wanted to learn while the women wanted to inform. This dynamic is potentially powerful because it speaks to how history is learned and preserved and how aural and oral modalities are important to Black history making and learning.

Critical Imagination and Social Circulation

I relied on the feminist concepts by Jackie Royster and Gesa Kirsch to better understand the women in relation to the themes that emerged. The two concepts, critical imagination and social circulation allowed me to better understand the women’s multilayered lives. Royster and Kirsch argue that social circulation “invokes connections among the past, present, and future” (23). This concept also “disrupts the public-private divide by suggesting a more fully textured sense of what it means to place these women in social space rather than private or public spaces” (24). So instead of examining how the women functioned in private and public spaces, I looked at how they engaged in various communities such as their professional communities, local
communities, and in activist communities (24). For example, Barbara and Gail functioned in similar ways in their professional and activist communities by working as Black teachers during and after segregation and by serving their communities to help better the lives of African Americans. I viewed the women as rhetorical agents in their multilayered communities because of the way they thought, understood, and talked about certain topics. Through their narratives, they showed how they moved from one space to another with fluidity without creating disconnects between their multilayered identities.

I used the critical imagination concept to understand both the narratives of the women and girls. Because the girls were more inquisitive than the women, it was easier to understand how they created alternate realities through their narratives. Royster and Kirsch state that “imagination functions as a critical skill in questioning a viewpoint, an experience, an event, and so on, and in remaking interpretive frameworks based on that questioning” (19). Using their argument on imagination allowed me to critically engage with both groups’ interviews. Using their narratives and the data that emerged allowed me to form evidence based conclusions and imagine certain experiences based on the research.

**Muted Group Theory**

Muted Group Theory is another theory I relied on to make meaning of both the women and girls’ narratives. I align my beliefs of MGT with that of Robin Boylorn, in her book *Sweetwater*, where she argues that the theory can be applied “to the lives and study of black women” because it “attempts to represent nondominant or marginalized groups whose voices and experiences are often overlooked or silenced (7). She goes on to say that the theory “states that the dominant groups determine how, (or if) the experiences of nondominant groups are communicated (7). This theory functioned throughout every single narrative collected for this
study. By simply choosing to collect stories from Black women and girls, I created a space for them to discuss topics that would normally be constructed and discussed by dominant society. Furthermore, I chose only to focus on their words and voices and not those of the interviewers because I wanted to privilege their discourse. Lastly, by choosing to allow their narratives to speak for themselves in a scholarly arena, I attempted to represent these women and girls in a rhetorical space that has been historically dominated by white men.

Moreover, hearing the stories from their mouths added a necessary analytical layer to understanding the women and girls instead of simply relying on their transcripts. It is only through their voices was I able to gain a truer sense of their “sense-making capabilities for strategizing and analyzing their lives” (7). Also, I found that although the girls inquired about a lot of things, they were also equally knowledgeable. This knowledge showed through their discussions of local sites in the town such as the history of certain churches, the local park, and certain artifacts. Their discourse proved that they wanted others to know that despite their ages, they knew about their town, but wanted to know more. Often, older people overlook children in meaning making discoveries, so in this instance where the girls had the power to be rhetorical agents and agents of change in their community was a new reality for them. Muted Group Theory gave me a way to represent the narratives as collective voices who spoke on similar issues and topics, thus creating a space where all women and girls are heard which helped me create a balance between individualism and collectivism.

**Intersectionality Theory**

I also relied on Boylorn’s argument on Intersectionality Theory as she states that the theory “offers a way of investigating how gender joins other identity factors to influence how women experience oppression. It is grounded in the idea that people live layered lives and often
experience overlap, making it possible to feel oppression in one area and privilege in others” (6). Using this theory allowed me to examine how the women and girls could experience privilege in one area and oppression in others. For example, when comparing the two groups they both are marginalized based on their race and gender; however, the women experience privilege in their community because of their age. When the women discussed their racial experiences, they experienced oppression because of their race. Although the women and girls did not talk about their individual socioeconomic statuses, they all experience oppression because they live or are associated with a lower demographic community in comparison to the more economic affluent communities that surround them. Contrary to that, they are also privileged in an all-Black town simply because of their race because they are the dominant race in their community. Therefore, both groups simultaneously experience oppression and privilege throughout their everyday lives because of their identities make up in relation to where they work, where they attend school, and where they live.

**Conclusion and Future Research**

To conclude this project, I revert to my research questions that have guided this study. The first question I posed was 1) What can be learned from the stories of African American women and girls in Hobson City, Alabama? In general terms, a lot can be learned from their stories. More specifically, I learned that Hobson City is a community steeped in rich culture, built on the backs of brave African Americans who sought political and economic freedom; the town has suffered economically but is actively trying to return to a majority self-sufficient town; Hobson City prides itself on being the location of the only school for blacks in the county for a long period of time; the women played major roles in Hobson City and its surrounding areas; the women also have multiple ties to the community; the girls are knowledgeable about their town
and they, just like the women, have pride in their town yet they envision a better community in the future.

The second question posed was 2) What is the current narrative of Hobson City, Alabama and how can these oral histories disrupt or complement that narrative? The current narrative of Hobson City is centered on the general history of how the town came to be, the same narrative that appears on the town’s website, the HBTSA site, and passed down through people in the community. These oral histories take that narrative and expand it exponentially to include the lesser known stories of the town’s origins, major political and social events that occurred, and stories about everyday life. The only way that the stories disrupt the current narrative that outsiders have of the town is that these stories show that Hobson City is not a bad place, as the girls and women claimed how outsiders perceived it to be, but a place of rich history.

The third question was 3) Are there any current racial tensions between Hobson City, Alabama, Oxford, Alabama and Anniston, Alabama? The findings show that there is no current racial tension between Hobson City and its neighboring towns which are predominately white populated. However, the findings do show that there were strong racial tensions between the towns before and during the Civil Rights era. Also, as an active researcher in the community for the past three years, I have been privy to tensions caused by the allocation of resources, although such tensions do not appear in the data.

The last question I developed after analyzing the data was: What does the data say about the women and girls’ identities? I developed this question in response to the identity theme that emerged from the women’s data and thinking about how both groups’ identities were constructed around their narratives. The data provided key points that speak to the women and girls’ identities. First, both groups were active community members or community contributors. The
girls went to the local schools, were members of the local churches, etc. The women worked in
the town either currently or in the past, contributed resources to the town, taught at the local
school in the past, etc. Second, both groups directly identified with one or more Hobson City
markers, which suggests that their identities were tied to tangible things or places within the
town. Lastly, their identities as women and young girls were made more complex because of
their narratives. In order to understand the narratives, I had to understand how their stories
influenced them under racial, gender, and cultural terms.

To display the connection my research has to the field of rhetoric and composition I
relied on the Conference on College Composition and Communication’s (CCCC) position
statement on Community-Engaged Projects in Rhetoric and Composition, created in April 2016,
that defines community-engaged projects as “scholarly, teaching, or community-developed
activities that involve collaborations between one or more academic institutions and one or more
local, regional, national, or international community group(s)” (Defining and Validating
Community-Engaged Work). I identified my dissertation project as a community-engaged
project because it was a study that developed from a larger community-engaged initiative titled
“Alabama in Hobson City,” a collaborative project between the town of Hobson City and the
University of Alabama. Furthermore, this project qualified as a community engagement one
because it stemmed from the collaborative efforts from the community members and myself.

The statement goes on to provide a list of acceptable artifacts produced as a result of a
community-based project; these artifacts include “rhetorical histories of African American
rhetorics…,” (Grobman; Lathan; Pritchard; Ramirez), “digital humanities projects about local
civil rights efforts,” (Carter and Dent; Mutnick), “oral histories and digital storytelling projects,
and local, historically underrepresented groups” (Carter and Conrad; Jolliffe; “ Arkansas Delta”;

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My project is an artifact situated in African American feminist rhetorics and oral history. This CCCC’s statement gave my project value and merit in the field of Rhetoric and Composition, and it also provided rhetoric and composition scholars with a means of evaluating this type of research.

There are several ways my research can be implemented and taught in rhetoric and composition courses. In reference to composition courses, Cynthia Selfe argues in “The Movement of Air, the Breath of Meaning” that,

the history of writing in U.S. composition instruction, as well as its contemporary legacy, functions to limit our professional understanding of composing as a multimodal rhetorical activity and deprive students of valuable semiotic resources for making meaning. As print assumed an increasingly privileged position in composition classrooms during the late nineteenth century and throughout the twentieth century, aurality was both subsumed by, and defined in opposition to, writing, thus establishing and perpetuating a false binary between the two modalities of expression…encouraging an overly narrow understanding of language and literacy…and allowing collegiate teachers of English composition to lose sight of the integrated nature of language arts…a single minded focus on print in composition classrooms ignores the importance of aurality and other composing modalities for making meaning and understanding the world…The most exclusive dominance of print literacy works against the interests of individuals whose cultures and communities have managed to maintain a value on multiple modalities of expression, multiple and hybrid ways of knowing, communicating, and establishing identity. (114)

I extend Selfe’s argument to include orality as part of the “other composing modalities” she refers to. First year writing continues to incorporate multimodal pedagogy with writing at the core of these practices. I argue that oral history projects are an effective and inclusive way to teach first year writing courses that also include basic and developmental writing. Because oral histories projects are multimodal, one can effectively teach first year curriculum centered around oral history work. For example, The University of Alabama’s first year writing program has a two-sequence course where students learn college level expository writing, critical reading, basic citation skills, principles of formal argumentation, university-level research techniques, and
research paper writing (comp.ua.edu). Oral history can be implemented to teach each of these skills. Choosing an oral history topic presents opportunities to teach the rhetorical situation as well as how to select and narrow a topic for research purposes; when reading transcripts of interviews, students learn about formal argumentation and critical reading; when composing an essay be it a rhetorical analysis or a research paper, they can use all modes of their oral histories to do so (i.e. writing an rhetorical analysis of the transcript, writing a research paper about a main topic uncovered in the interview, incorporating research skills to learn about oral history topics, learning how to cite various sources including interviews, websites, and recordings; and creating a multimodal research paper). My research can also be used to teach visual and digital rhetoric courses. Carolyn Handa edited *Visual Rhetoric in a Digital World* to help instructors and professors in rhetoric and composition to think about how to teach composition that encompasses visual and digital literacy. My research includes both components in the website I created as a digital space for the oral histories, which further connects my research to the field.

My research also helps bridge the gap between community work and academia. Community engagement work done by academics promotes inclusivity, diversity, and learning without borders. When scholars choose to participate in community engaged work, no matter the capacity, they automatically give relevance and privilege to those communities through their research. By meshing community engagement work with academia, the barriers of exclusion deteriorate and open doors for more inclusive practices. Scholars also promote diversity through community research and engagement because we can seek communities and develop projects that serve diverse populations, thus promoting diversity under an institution’s name. Lastly, doing community engagement work is another way to teach and learn without borders because as composition and rhetoric scholars we are taught that teaching and learning can happen anywhere,
not just in the classroom. My research allows me as a scholar to extend my work outside of the academy and into communities, and contrary to bring community research into the academic realm. I am proud that I chose to conduct a project that stems from community engagement work because it has given me a sense of purpose outside of the confines of theory and application. I worked with black women and girls who dealt with real life experiences, experiences that connected me to them in many ways. I hope that I analyzed, interpreted, and presented the stories of the Black women and girls in a way that not only speaks the truth of Hobson City but also their individual truths. I hope I best represented the narratives of the town with the utmost transparency, validity, and in a manner that upholds my standards of being an ethical scholar and researcher.

Future research for this study includes conducting more in depth analyses that focus less on the history of Hobson City and more the individuals’ personal lives. I did not include a lot of personal information about the women if it did not relate to the history of Hobson City because I chose to focus as much as I could on the actual history of the town and less about their personal lives; however their personal experiences are deeply embedded in their narratives. Therefore, a second analysis will allow me to examine their narratives from a different perspective that will develop into life histories\textsuperscript{14} rather than community histories, which I have created here. I have developed a website\textsuperscript{15} that serves as a digital archive for the oral histories and more research not related to this dissertation. I plan to implement the oral history metadata system into the website to provide an interactive experience with the oral histories that have been collected. I also plan to

\textsuperscript{14} Valerie Yow defines life history as “an account by an individual of his or her life” (254) \textit{Recoding Oral History “ Varieties of Oral History Projects.”}

\textsuperscript{15} thehobsoncitycollective.com
conduct more interviews from people in Hobson City in hopes of adding those oral histories to the website to continue the preservation efforts of the town’s history.
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APPENDIX

Questions for Hobson City Oral History Project:

My name is ______. I'm a graduate student in the English Department at the University of Alabama, and I am collecting an oral history that will become a part of the Hobson City, Alabama community archive, the University of Alabama library system, and the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill library system. I am at the home of ______ the Hobson City Public Library or some other designated place conducting an oral history interview.

General Oral History Questions:

- Could you please state your name, birthdate, and place of birth for historical record.
- What can you tell me about the history of Hobson City? How long has your family been in Hobson City?
- Tell me about your parents/grandparents. (What did they wear? cook? sing? do? what stories did they like to tell?)
- Did you grow up in Hobson City? (If not Hobson City, where?) What was your childhood like? or What can you remember about growing up in Hobson City?
- When you were a teenager — and even going into early adulthood — what kind of things did you do to get away from things, or to step back from life? What was a good distraction or a way to blow off steam?
- When you were growing up, what do you remember about the laws in Hobson City? The law enforcement? Is the present-day any different?
- In those days, what were race relations like within the city? Outside the city?
- What do/did you do for a living, and what lessons has your work life taught you?
- What is one thing that makes you feel most connected to Hobson City, AL?
- Did the church play a role in your upbringing? Did/does your family attend any of the churches in the Hobson City community?
- What role has music played in your life in particular and the Hobson City community as a whole?
- Are there businesses that you remember from your youth, ones that were true community institutions, that are no longer in business?
- Are there any ghost stories or legends about Hobson City you want to share?
- Are there any historical events that you lived through that impacted or shaped your life? What events? What do you remember Hobson City being like afterwards?

One of the projects Hobson City and the University of Alabama are working together on is a community cookbook. Money from the sell of the book will go to fund the Hobson City Public Library. I would like to ask you some cooking related questions to be included among cooking stories and recipes in the book.

Food Specific Questions:

- Do you cook? Who first taught you how to cook? How/where did you learn to cook?
- What is your favorite/staple dish to bring to family gatherings? Why?
- What food or recipe do you want to pass on to future generations? Why?
- Who is the best cook you know? What do they make? What does it remind you of?
- Has this person shared any secrets with you?
- As a child, where did you get your food from...grocery store, grown at home, sharing with neighbors, hunting, fishing, etc? Do you continue to do any of these things today?
- What is a cooking disaster/funny story regarding food you may have?
- Does the food in Hobson City differ from other Southern foods?
- How has your cooking evolved over time? Have you made changes over the years for health/cost purposes?

Figure 1: Oral History Interview Guide.
Figure 2: Questions and descriptions from PhotoVoice Sessions. These questions were asked during the girls’ interviews.

1) What do you already know about this image?
2) What about this image makes you want to know more?
3) How can we find out more about this image?

Guiding Question 1: What image comes to mind when you think of Hobson City?
Guiding Question 2: What do you want to know more about in Hobson City?
Guiding Question 3: What would you like to see changed in Hobson City?

Figure 3: Partial view of Hobson City’s cemetery.

Figure 4: The Black Mayor’s 10th anniversary poster.
Figure 5: New Hope Missionary Baptist Church.

Figure 6: Partial view of the park.

Figure 7: The new C.E. Hanna.
Figure 8: partial view of the quilt.

Figure 9: The print shop.

Figure 10: Sharon Caldwell’s classroom door in the old C.E. Hanna.
Figure 11: The trophy case.

Figure 12: James Dunn.