The N-Word:
Comprehending the Complexity of Stratification in
American Community Settings

By

Anne V. Benfield

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ABSTRACT

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The N-word's remarkable durability, combined with American's willingness to find uses for this epithet, illustrate the extent to which racial unease continues to permeate our culture. Its various definitions and spellings are continuously debated by academia, creating a dynamic topic for sociological evaluation. Overall, the N word is alive and mobile, fluid and engraved in the American psyche, as a symbol. Some propose to condemn the word, while others attempt to rehabilitate and convert its meaning from a negative slur to a gesture of solidarity. The controversial debate of the N-word can be examined from multitudinous sociological theories, encompassing elements of conflict theory, symbolic interactionism, DuBois' "double-consciousness" and intersectionality. The purpose of this study is to examine the usage of the N-word as a clue toward comprehending the complexity of stratification in American community settings. The qualitative results of two focus groups and the quantitative data of a generic survey concludes that vectors of race, gender, socioeconomic status and age intersect, affecting the elimination, preservation or rehabilitation of the N-word.

INTROUCTION

How should *nigger* be defined? Is it a more, or less, hurtful than insults such as *kike, wop, chink, honky* and *gook*? Should one race be able to use *nigger* in ways that are forbidden to others? How can the spelling of one word generate such powerful and dynamic reactions? Is it a part of the American cultural inheritance that deserves preservation? Instead of using the euphemism the N-word, does spelling out *nigger* offend you?

The N-word sustains the entwined ideas of white supremacy and black inferiority, supplements the nation's popular culture and influences the scope and direction of its legal system. Although the word has ebbed and flowed with cultural norms, it seeps into American society, affecting everyone in latent and manifest ways. *Nigger* is fascinating precisely because it has been put to a variety of uses and radiated a wide array of meanings (Kennedy 2002: 27). Some propose to condemn the word, while others attempt to rehabilitate and convert its meaning from a negative slur to a gesture of solidarity. The N-word has four diverging definitions and multitudinous uses. First, it is a word whites use to indicate an inferior Black caste, retreating back to the institution of slavery. Second, in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the N-word is used as an affection lever between African Americans, dynamic in regard to people and situations. Third, it is a word designating class differences, referring to lower-class African Americans who do not know how to behave. Lastly, the N-word is a term used by Whites, Asians and Latinos, as a leveling effect, to emulate the coolness and stealth of African Americans (Williams 2004). The debate of the N word can be examined from numerous

perspectives, encompassing sociological elements of conflict theory, symbolic interactionism and intersectionality; yet W.E.B. Dubois' concept of the "double-consciousness" exposes an interesting analysis and duality within the term.

DuBois' theory of "double consciousness" reflects Charles Horton Cooley's concept of "the Looking Glass Self," in which the reactions of others are used to visualize our self-concept. DuBois' concept of dual identity is an attempt to make the African American condition understood, contending that African Americans experience a split identity because they are regarded with contempt and pity by the majority American society. The duality of "two-ness" weakens the identity of African Americans by making them straddle the breach between their African and American identity (DuBois 1903: 215). DuBois believes that the juxtaposition of identity makes African Americans succumb to the conformity of internalized racism, inhibiting them from self-identification and the appreciation of their cultural individuality. DuBois' theory of "double-consciousness" also applies to Caucasian Americans, who continually grapple with the historical white supremacy of the United States and the belief in a genuine democracy. Dubois's perspective can be applied to analyses and critiques of N-word, exposing and highlighting its duality and dynamic definition.

The purpose of this study is to examine the usage of the N-word as a clue toward comprehending complexity of stratification in American community settings. Using focus groups and a generic survey, this study examines how race, gender, age and socio-economic status determine the elimination, rehabilitation or preservation of *nigger*. This thesis is divided into four sections. Chapter One begins with a historical analysis of the N-word, examining its etymology, development and diverging definitions. Chapter Two examines the methodology of the research design, evaluating the validity of the generic survey and focus groups. Chapter

Three discusses the results of the qualitative and quantitative data, revealing how social classifications converge and affect the usage and connotation of the N-word. Chapter Four draws conclusions about the dynamic social constructions of word, determining how it impacts daily-lived experiences of the uses or non-uses.

As W.E.B DuBois, Jabari Asim, Randall Kennedy, Patricia Hill Collins and Joan Morgan have shown, the N-word is certain to provoke strong reactions wherever it is encountered. Its remarkable durability, combined with American's willingness to find uses for this epithet, illustrate the extent to which racial unease continues to permeate our culture. Controversially, modern generations attempt to redefine and transform the concept of the *nigger*, warping its negativity into cultural positivism. Many argue that the N-word, itself, is not an issue; instead it is the social, historical and political racism associated with it. Overall, the N word is alive and mobile, fluid and engraved in the American psyche, as a symbol.

CHAPTER ONE

Etymology

The etymology of the word *nigger* is often traced to the Latin word *niger*, meaning black (Pilgrim & Middleton 2001). *Niger* transformed into the English noun *negro* and other variants, such as *negar, neegar, neger* and *nigers*. Although the word has been part of the English vocabulary as far back as 1555, in 1619, Jamestown colonist John Rolfe noted the first time African captives were brought to British North America. "Twenty *negars*," he wrote, had arrived on a Dutch schooner (Asim 2007:10). The merchant Nicholas Crisp, writing in 1637, described one of his ships as built to "take *nigers* and carry them to foreign parts" (10). Fifteen years later in 1651, two British traders placed orders with the Guinea Company, requesting a new shipment of "lusty *negers*" (10).

Most lexicographers contend that the various spelling of *nigger, negar*, *niger, neger* and *nigor* were initially intended as a neutral term, acquiring a derogatory character over time. No one knows precisely how the N-word attained its prerogative meaning. Dr. David Pilgrim and Dr. Phillip Middleton, Professors at Ferris State University note that the mispronunciation of the word *niger* by southern slave masters catalyzed to current pronunciation and phonetic spelling of *nigger* (Pilgrim& Middleton 2001). Linguist Robin Lakoff speculates that *nigger* became a slur when users of the term became aware that it was "a mispronunciation of Negro and decided to continue using the mispronunciation as a signal of contempt- much as individuals sometime chose to insult others by deliberately mispronouncing their name" (Kennedy 2000:86). Whether

used as a noun, verb or adjective, the N-word reinforces the perpetual stereotype of black

inferiority. The N-word is pervasive, as the following representative list suggests:

> *Nigger*, v. To wear out, spoil or destroy.
> *Niggerish*, adj. Acting in an indolent and irresponsible manner
> *Niggardly*, adj. Miserly
> *Nigger lipping*, v. Wetting the end of a cigarette while smoking it.
> *Nigger lover*, n. Derogatory term aimed as whites who befriend or date a black person
> *Nigger luck*, n. Exceptionally good luck, emphasis on undeserved.
> *Nigger heaven*, n. A designated place, usually the balcony, where blacks were forced to sit
> *Nigger knocker*, n. Axe handle or weapon made from an axe handle.
> *Nigger rich*, adj. Deeply in debt but ostentatious.
> *Nigger shooter*, n. A slingshot.
> *Nigger* steak, n. A slice of liver or cheap piece of meat.
> *Nigger stick*, n. Police officer's baton.
> *Nigger* tip, n. Leaving a small tip or no tip in a restaurant.
> *Nigger work*, n. Demeaning, menial tasks. (Oxford English Dictionary 2008)

The N-word has been used to describe a dark shade of color, *nigger-brown, nigger-black*; the

status of whites who interact with blacks, *nigger -breaker, -dealer, -driver, -killer, - worshipper*;

and anything belonging to or associated with African Americans, *nigger -boy, -girl, -baby, -*

mouth, -love, -music (Oxford English Dictionary 2008). These selected examples do no represent

the hundreds of permutations or multitudinous connotations of *nigger*.

Early Uses

By 1660, legislative statutes distinguished blacks from indentured whites. With the

societal institution of slavery, the notion of black inferiority permeated the American psyche.

Americans created a binary racial hierarchy, supported by racist ideologies. Some scholars credit

Scottish poet Robert Burns as the first person use the spelling *nigger*. Burn's 1786 poem, "The

Ordination" suggests a negative connotation of the N-word, derived from a divine curse,

> Come, let a proper text be read,
> An' touch it aff wi'vigour

> How graceless Ham laugh his dad,
> Which made Cannan a nigger,
> Or Phineas drove the murdering blade,
> Wi' whore-abhorring rigour. (Burns 1786)

Thomas Jefferson, a founding father revered as a patriotic leader of the Revolution,

reinforced the historical fiction of black inferiority with his *Notes on the State of Virginia*. In a

section ostensibly based on the "observation of negroes," Jefferson states that blacks are little

more than childlike, animalistic creatures doomed to lives of permanent subservience,

> I advance it, therefore as a suspicion only, that the blacks, whether originally a distinct
> race, or made distinct by time and circumstances, are inferior to the whites in the
> endowments of both body and mind. It is not against experience to suppose, that different
> species of the same genus, or varieties of the same species, may possess different
> qualifications. (Jefferson 1785:265)

Jefferson was not only the author of the Declaration of Independence, but also an important

symbol of the American Enlightenment. Thus, his ideas and theories established a model of

rationalized racism that would inevitably inflict damage upon the black slaves. Although

Jefferson believed in eugenics and innate white supremacy, he was a gentleman of refinement.

Instead of using the word *nigger*, he commonly engaged in euphemisms, referring to slave as

"that species of property, poor wretches and those who are held in servitude" (Asim 2007:28).

Crude terms, such as *nigger*, probably were not part of his vocabulary because such coarseness

was appropriately left for working class whites. Jefferson's racist observations in *Notes*

established a precedent for numerous examples of racist pseudo scholarship that would follow.

By the 1800s, American scientist began investigating the "fascinating phenomenon of

alleged Negro inferiority" (45). Samuel George Morton, George Combe and Josiah Nott became

the leader thinkers of eugenics and polygenism, promoting white supremacy as biological, "the

brain of a Negro is that of the imperfect brain of a seven month's infant in the womb of the

White" (50). The counterfeit scientific claims of eugenicists catalyzed the perpetual stereotypes

of African Americans, leading to the birth of "Mammy," "Sambo," and "Zip Coon." Sterling

Brown, an American novelist, identified six distinct type of black characters, regularly found in

fiction, "Wretched Freeman, Comic Negro, Brute Negro, Tragic Mulatto, Local Color Negro and

Exotic Primitive" (56). The negative personifications of African Americans were both reflected

in and shaped by everyday tangible objects, such as toys, postcards, ashtrays and children's

books. These items, as well as countless others, portrayed blacks with bulging eyes, red-

oversized lips, white teeth, jet black skin and disheveled clothes (Pilgrim & Middleton 2001).

Theses perpetual and pervasive stereotypes led to the commencement of the minstrelsy,

exploiting African Americans and derogatory nature of N-word.

Among the first white entertainers to blacken their faces in the dubious service of

entertainment was George Washington Dixon in 1827. Overdressed and over-made, Dixon's

character of Zip Coon functioned as a stereotype of the comic Negro, "addicted to the use of big

words, to gaudy finery, to brawling with the razor and to raiding chicken roosts" (Asim

2007:74). The Minstrelsy peaked in the mid-1850s, coinciding with large waves of German and

Irish immigrants. Minstrel songs became mainstream and popular, generating comedy rather than

evoking pathos. In this form, the minstrelsy's racist language and perpetual stereotypes

permeated into the middle class, acquiring a shroud of respectability.

In the last third of the nineteenth century, *nigger* had already become a familiar and

influential insult. According to historian Winthrop Jordan, "Blackness had become so thoroughly

entangled with the basest status in American society that at least by the beginning of the

eighteenth century it was almost indecipherably coded into American language and literature"

(12). In his 1837 treatise, *The Condition of the Colored People of the United States and the*

Prejudice Exercised Towards Them, Hosea Easton devoted considerable attention to the

pedagogical purposes of the N-word, "Nigger is an opprobrious term, employed to impose contempt upon blacks as an inferior race…the practical definition is quite different in England as it is here; for here, it flow from the fountain of purpose to injure" (Kennedy 2000:86).

By the end of the Civil War and with the conception of the Emancipation Proclamation of 1865, more than one-third of the African American soldiers gave their lives to the cause: 2,751 were killed in battle, while over 67,000 died from wounds, disease or accidents (Asim 2007:91). Black soldiers were promised freedom, acreage and a mule, yet Reconstruction decreased the interest in racial equality and increased the longing for enforced black docility. In 1896, the U.S. Supreme Court, by an eight-to-one majority, advanced the "Separate but Equal Doctrine," upholding the constitutionality of racial segregation laws (Bernstein 1962). Thirty years after the passage of the Fourteenth Amendment, which had granted full and equal citizenship to African Americans, *Plessy v. Ferguson* was rudimentary, disabling the societal progress of Black America. Thus, African Americans entered the twentieth century as the three previous centuries: combating rationalized and internalized stereotypes of racial inequality and the derisive word *nigger*.

Fluidity in the Twentieth Century

With the turn of the twentieth century, enlightened minds began to analyze the societal position of African Americans. Such activists as Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois were revolutionary, emphasizing the importance of education and civil rights. Simultaneously, over the next twenty years, conflict and racial strife erupted, resulting in race riots and the "Red Summer of 1919." During this period, the N-word began to evolve into "politically correct" epithets, such as "black" and "negro" (Abolish the N-Word). With the creation of different

acceptable racial labels, *nigger* becomes a derogatory racial slur. The emergence of the 1920s ignited the Harlem Renaissance and a "new" connotation of the N-word. Langston Hughes, along with other luminaries such as Zora Neale Hurston and Wallace Thurman, seemed to be far less uptight about the N-word, as compared to older black writers (Asim 2007:139). Along with the increased neutral usage of the N-word, African Americans started using it to refer to themselves, taking the "–er" off of the word and adding an "a," *nigga* (Abolish the N-Word). Although *nigger* and *nigga* were used in Black communities and ubiquitous in popular speech and culture, it was still pejorative, depending on social circles and classes. My analysis will examine this concept further in Chapter Three.

Almost one hundred years after the Fourteenth Amendment, in 1954 the U.S. Supreme Court ruled unanimously that racial segregation in public schools was unconstitutional (Sanders 1995). *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* declared that separate public educational facilities were inherently unequal, reversing *Plessy v. Ferguson* of 1896. The incremental success of the Civil Rights Movements and the growing influence of progressive whites created a social awareness of the N-word. These changes would affect not only the language of social discourse, but also the ways in which blacks regarded the N-word and its institutionalization (Asim 2007:167). The 1960s and 1970s were dynamic, exposing the social construction fluidity of *nigger*. The Black Power Movement proclaimed "Black is Beautiful," denouncing the use of the N-word, while mainstream celebrities began to slur with love (Abolish the N-Word).

The Commercialization of *Nigger*

Artists in a variety of genres, such as Richard Pryor, August Wilson and Sterling Brown have "effectively critiqued the language of oppression, even as they invoke it, shining a glaring

light on its limitations, its unintended ironies and its relative uselessness" (Asim 2007:172).

Their performance of the N-word, subtly and overtly, alludes to our nation's past, acting as a

barometer of changing social attitudes. During the 1970s, the adjustment of Federal

Communications Commission codes made it possible for words and phrases that had once been

frowned upon to be spat out regularly (175). Such television shows as *All in the Family* and *The

Jefferson's* utilized this ability, creating "a cheap way for tolerant upper middle-class liberals to

escape their own prejudices while the bigots get their views reinforced" (176). This era in

television and pop culture itself is notable for more than its precedent language. It was also a

time when more African American performers appeared on television than ever before.

The emergence of Richard Pryor, in the mid-1970s, brought *nigger in*to the limelight of

stand-up comedy. Pryor's single best performance may be heard on the album, *That Nigger's

Crazy*, winner of the 1974 Grammy Award for best comedy recording; "The album explores

Pryor's professional fears, blacks' alleged ability to avoid certain sorts of danger, black parenting

styles, comparative sociology, racial anthropology and social commentary" (Kennedy 2002:33).

Pryor devised a new, raw and obscene style of comedy, presenting a conundrum to Black

America: he was as embarrassing as he was funny (Asim 2007:205). Although Pryor used *nigger*

in a majority of his routines, he disapproved of whites using the term, putting it in the mouths of

racist authority figures. As an artist, Pryor skillfully manipulated the connotations and meanings

of *nigger*, using it to illustrate the limits of black power and the objectification of black

humanity. Pryor's comedic work established a discourse that would continue well into the

twentieth century.

Although wages and employment gains increase in the late 1960s and early 1970s, there

is little evidence of relative black advancement in the late 1970s and early 1980s (Strait

2001:272). The role of economic transformations and the increasing welfare dependency

catalyzed an increase in metropolitan neighborhood poverty (272). During the twilight years of

the Regan administration, the N-word still contained enough attention-getting power to be

depended on as a revelatory device in culture. At the same time, the notion spread that the N-

word was suitable for conversational uses among African Americans (188). The turbulent

connotations of *nigger* have ebbed and flowed with social attitudes, mirroring the "politically

correct" labels of "negro," "colored," "Afro American," "black," and "African American." The

N-word, unlike mainstream "politically correct" labels, which are accepted by society, conforms

to individualistic social affiliations and community settings.

    In the 1990s, Chris Rock continues to use the N-word, following the blueprint of Pryor.

His most illustrious routine "I Love Black People, But I Hate Niggers," highlights social

stratification with in Black America. From his HBO Special *Bring the Pain*, Rock differentiates

between "Black people" and "*niggas*," exposing the dynamism of the "stereotypical" African

American social identity:

> There's like a civil war goin' on with black people and there two sides....
> There are black people, and there's *niggas* and *niggas* have got to go.
> Every time black people wanna have a good time, ignorant ass *nigga*s fuck it up.
> Can't do shit, without some ignorant ass nigga fuckin it up. Can't go to a movie the first
> week it comes out…Why? 'Cause *niggas* are shooting at the screen…Hey, I love black
> people, but I hate *niggas*... You can't have anything in your house. Why? Because the
> niggas who live next door will break in, take it all and then come over the next day and
> go, "We heard you got robbed." … *Niggas* always want credit for shit they are suppose to
> do. They'll say something like "I took care of my kids" You are suppose to, you dumb
> motherfucker. "I ain't never been to jail." What do you want, a cookie? You're not
> suppose to go to jail, you low-expectation-having motherfucker. (Rock 1996)

Rock's comic skit demonstrates the pervasiveness of the N-word, demonstrating how its

implications can personify a social attitude.

Hip-hop is another genre of entertainment suffused with the word *nigger*. Indeed, over the past quarter of a century, largely in conjunction with the hip-hop culture, *nigger* has grown in usage and popularity. Rap was born "as an incestuous inter-cultural phenomenon of New York's poor suburbs, Harlem, Bronx, Queens and Brooklyn" (Scaruffi 2005). Hip-hop was initiated as a cultural movement by inner city-youth, mostly Latinos and African Americans, in the early seventies (Stith 2007). Hip-hop has two main historical eras, the "old school" era from 1970-1985 and the "golden age" era from 1985-1993. The "golden age" of hip-hop commenced only when it entered mainstream music and consolidated the sounds of the West and East coast (Stith 2007). A brief survey of titles from the "golden age" yields Dr. Dre's "The Day the Niggas Took Over," A Tribe Called Quest's "Sucka Nigga," DMX's "My Niggas," TuPac's "Strictly 4 My N.I.G.G.A.Z." Jay-Z's "Jigga My Nigga" and Cypress Hill's "Killa Hill Nigga" (Kennedy 2002: 35). Correlating with the rise of gangster rap is the notion that incorporating the N-word into everyday speech somehow deconstructs it and removes the offensive power of the term. Rappers and others have chosen to indicate their efforts to turn insult into affection by giving it a new spelling. According to some such thinkers, *nigga* can be used without malice as a neutral term between blacks (Asim 2007:224). Many people are drawn to rappers and comedians despite their many faults because they exhibit a bracing independence, "They eschew boring conventions, including the one that maintains, despite massive evidence to the contrary, that *nigger* can only mean one thing" (Kennedy 2006:267).

The Millennium

In the public sphere, the debate continues. Gender and class stratification within the Black America lays a foundation for various uses and non-uses of the term. The unique status of

nigger was voiced in the midst of the infamous O.J. Simpson trial. Christopher Darden protested

that N-word was the "dirtiest, filthiest, nastiest word in the English language," while Johnny

Cochran argued that it could be heard and encountered without destroying civilization (Kennedy

2000:87). The O.J. Simpson trial is attributed as creating the euphemism the N-word or the N-

bomb (Abolish the N-Word). NAS, a commercial rapper, attempted to title his recent 2007

album *Nigger*. Like many other artists, he faced discontent and controversy releasing the album

as *Untitled*. NAS' song *"Nigger,"* exposes the past, present and future of the term,

> They say we N-I double G-E-R, we are
> Much more, still we choose to ignore
> The obvious, man this history don't acknowledge us
> We were scholars long before colleges
> They say we N-I double G-E-R, we are
> Much more, but still we choose to ignore
> The obvious, we are the slave and the master
> What you lookin for? You the question and the answer. (NAS 2007)

Within the last two years major television shows such as *Oprah, Dr. Phil* and *The View* have

hosted shows or discoursed the N-word, continuing the controversial debate. Recently, in the

summer of 2008, activist Jesse Jackson created a major firestorm on Fox News saying, "Barack

Obama...he's talking down to black people...telling *niggers* how to behave" (Ducios 2008). As

exemplified by these public events, the N-word is still fluid and active, engraved in the American

psyche.

Historically, *nigger* defined, limited and mocked African Americans. As for the future,

the N-word is still active, adapting to different connotations, depending on race, gender, age and

socio-economic associations. Can *nigger* be rehabilitated and transposed into anything other than

a racial epithet? The continual debate of *nigger* can be examined through the sociological

paradigms of conflict theory, symbolic interactionism, intersectionality, feminism and

multiculturalism. These perspectives shine light on the pliability of the N-word, examining if it

can be considered an indication towards comprehending the complexity of stratification in community settings. Social classifications of gender, race, socioeconomic status and age expose the dynamism and density of the N-word.

Race as a Determinant

Although the N-word has ebbed and flowed with cultural norms, it seeps into American society affecting everyone in latent and manifest ways. Conversations of race are juxtaposed with historical, social, cultural, political and economic perceptions, creating a fuzzy and complicated interpretation. The N-word bears a dubious distinction, adapting to more generalized usages. Hence, the coinage of the term "sand *nigger,*" to refer to Arabs, "timber *nigger*," to refer to Native Americans and "white *nigger*" to refer to white people (Kennedy 2000:87). Some argue that *nigger* sustains the entwined ideas of white supremacy and black inferiority, while others believe that it can be used with positive or neutral meanings, ignoring racial associations. This dualistic idea formulates three imperative questions: Can Caucasians, Latinos, Asians and other ethnicities use the word *nigger?* If so, does the word still carry the socially charged negative connotation? Does racial association determine the elimination or rehabilitation of the N-word?

Some critics argue that African Americans are the only ethnic group entitled to use the N-word. Due to the socio-historical context of the *nigger*, some believe since blacks suffered through the negative, derogatory connotation of the word, they have gained the right to use the word. Professor Todd Boyd believes that may blacks "have chosen to adopt a nuance form of the word as a vital aspect of their own cultural identity" (Kennedy 2000:90). Exploring the use of the N-word, to institute and reaffirm cultural identity, is both gendered and classed to young males.

To expand this argument, some African Americans maintain they use *nigger,* not in subjection to racial subordination, but in triumph defiance to it, "a defiance that included saying what one pleases regardless of how it strikes the sensibilities of… any arbiters of taste and respectability" (91). Simultaneously the playful use of the N-word can be self-defeating and hypocritical, creating an atmosphere of acceptance, "if blacks themselves can use it, why can't others" (90)?

Randall Kennedy expands on this idea, constructing a discourse, analyzing the fluidity of the term. Kennedy grapples with the diverse connotations of the N-word, demonstrating that historically, it has been employed as an insult, probably the most notorious racial epithet. However, he also demonstrates that numerous races use the term *nigger* in other dynamic ways. As a linguistic landmark, Kennedy argues that *nigger* is being renovated,

> Blacks use the term with novel ease to refer to other blacks, even in the presence of those who are not African American. Whites are increasingly referring to other whites as *niggers*, and indeed, the term both as an insult and as a sign of affection is being affixed with to people of all sorts. (Kennedy 2002:137)

Kennedy contends that everyone, including Caucasians, can use the term as long as the context of its use is clear and appropriate, "There is nothing necessarily wrong with a white person saying *nigger*, just like there is nothing necessarily wrong with a black person saying it. What should matter is the context in which it is spoken" (75). Kennedy proactively examines the controversial debate, contending that the word *nigger* is value-neutral to all races, depending on usage and situational experiences, "*Nigger* as a harbinger of hatred, fear, contempt and violence remains current to be sure. But more than ever before, *nigger* also signals other meanings and generates other reactions, depending on the circumstances" (Kennedy 2003:138). Kennedy argues that as the N-word is more widely disseminated and its complexity is more widely appreciated, censuring its use will become more difficult (138).

Others urge to eradicate *nigger*, believing that it is solely a racial and derogatory slur. This perspective argues that no race should be allowed to utilize the N-word as a value-neutral term. Such organizations as *Abolish the N-Word* contend that *nigger* cannot be redefined or embraced. They believe that no one should rightfully use the term, "until the pain of this word no longer lingers in society" (Abolish the N-Word). *Abolish the N-Word* decries the dependency of the N-word as a greeting, to complete sentences and start conversations, is a total disregard for its socio-historical context. This organization challenges viewers to make a personal commitment and join the movement to abolish the N-word (Abolish the N-Word). Eradicating the N-word is a controversial issue itself. Some critics feel that the elimination of the term will require erasing valuable aspects of culture, such as novels, plays, jokes and songs, "white-washing" history. Others want the N-word to be limited to a place "in the museum of language," while denying its viability as part of our "living and evolving" speech (Kennedy 2000:91).

These three perspectives demonstrate the adverse relationship of race and the N-word. Therefore, the social classification of race correlates with the dynamism of *nigger*, attempting to determine perseverance, rehabilitation and elimination of the term.

Gender Binary

The gender binary has divided our nation for centuries. Although women have obtained their inalienable rights, chauvinism and bigotry continually plague our society. Many argue that the societal differentiation between the sexes has diminished with time, technological advancements and progress; yet women are still captive to the gender binary in numerous circumstances. Thus far, the majority of literature reviewed in this chapter has been the work of male scholars. The reality of the gender binary adds another dimension to the discussion of the

N-word, catalyzing two questions: Is one gender more inclined to use the N-word? If so, what social factors contribute to this?

Males seem to use the term more, both neutrally and offensively. Although this assumption generalizes the correlation of men and the N-word, women are not excluded from this equation. As cited earlier, comedians such as Richard Pryor and Chris Rock; television shows such as *All in the Family* and *The Jefferson's*; directors such as Spike Lee and Quinten Tarentino; and hip-hop artists such as TuPac and NAS, reinforce the relationship of gender and the N-word. In all of these medias, listeners adopt the artists' style and language; *nigger* is virtually interchangeable with words like "guy," "man," or "brother" (Marriott 1993). Women, similar to men, use the N-word, in vernacular speech, movies, songs and numerous other things; yet historical accounts and modern-day forms of media present males as the primary users and targets of *nigger.* As stated earlier, the sociological theory of intersectionality interweaves the social classifications of gender, class and race; therefore, one cannot study the gender binary without confronting racial and social hierarchies. The examination and study of the N-word cannot disregard the social, political and cultural struggle of African American men and women. This concept of gender stratification can be examined through the black feminist paradigms of Angela Davis and Deborah Gray White.

Angela Davis, the author of *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism*, analyzes the blues careers of Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, Bessie Smith and Billie Holiday through a feminist lens. Davis contends that slavery, which often required women to work alongside men, established a distorted form of gender equality, leading to "gender politics within the slave community that were radically different from those operating in the dominant culture" (Davis 1998). After the abolishment of slavery, black women began to grapple with "ideological expectations of

domesticity and subordination, emanating from the dominant white culture" (Davis 1998). As quoted by Davis, "black social consciousness has been over determined by race," with little or no attention paid to gender or class (Davis 1998).

Angela Davis provides the historical, social and political contexts with which to reinterpret the performances and lyrics of Rainey, Smith and Holiday, as "powerful articulations of an alternative consciousness profoundly at odds with mainstream American culture" (Jazz Script). Davis demonstrates how Rainey, Smith and Holiday's candor and audacity laid the groundwork for an aesthetic that allowed for the celebration of social, moral and sexual values, outside the constraints imposed by middle-class respectability. Davis writes, "Women's blues provided a cultural space for community-building among working-class black women… in which the coercions of bourgeois notions of sexual purity and 'true womanhood' were absent" (Davis 1998). Through meticulous transcriptions of the lyrics of Rainey and Smith, Davis shows how the roots of blues extended beyond a musical tradition to serve as "a consciousness-raising vehicle for American social memory" (Jazz Script). According to Davis, women's blues derived from the rejection of standards of propriety, instituted by the emerging black middle class. As exemplified by Davis' study, the intersectionality of race and class has become hopelessly confused within the United States.

Contrary to Davis's paradigm of black feminism, Deborah Gray White illuminates the painful struggle of middle-class black women to hold their racial and gender identities intact, while feeling the inexorable pull of the agendas of white women and black men (Gray White 2000). Gray White's essay "The Cost of Club Work, the Price of Black Feminism," focuses on the tensions produced by black women's club's feminist commitments and middle-class status as they "sought to define a race politics that addressed the needs of the entire African American

community" (Hewitt & Lebsock 1993: 244). Gray White's essay highlights the dynamics and complexities of race, class and gender, in regard to the late nineteenth and early twentieth century club movement (Gray White 1993). She is especially sensitive to examine the ways that racism and sexism shaped and sometime misshaped, club women's agendas and the role that "the relative affluence of women leaders played in their definitions of respectability and race progress" (244). She argues that the National Association of Colored Women, a federation of black women's clubs, adopted a feminism well suited for race work. It shows, however, that black club women, had difficultly synchronizing race, class and gender, "so that the needs of black men and women were addressed in a just and equitable way" (247).

Although the Club women were attempting to create a social discourse about racism and sexism, their political aims were regarded as secondary, "Black women might have made life for black men psychologically uncomfortable, but white supremacy made the black male's life pure hell" (Gray White 1993:257). White argues that gender tension was the price black women paid for their feminism, "No matter how much they succeeded in synchronizing race and gender in ideology, there would always be blacks, particularly black men, who would regard female leadership with suspicion and resentment (257). In tackling racism, black women did not only battle with white America, but with black men as well.

The black feminist paradigms of Davis and White, demonstrate the complexity and intersectionality of social classifications. As observed by these prominent theorists, in conjunction with Patricia Hill Collins and Joan Morgan, class, gender and race are interwoven, juxtaposing women, particularly African American women, into narrow social spaces. This ideology demonstrates that the gender binary is socially constructed by many factors, similar to the construction of the N-word.

Class Stratification and the Talented Tenth

Race, according to current academic thought, is "a smokescreen that has drawn discussion away from the more crucial issue of class" (Davis 1998). As theorized by social scientists, the United States is a nation of inequality and separatism. The theory of intersectionality complicates socio-economic solidarity; yet, class is an important determinant. In regards to N-word, different connotations, understandings, and opinions are based on socio-economic associations: Is one social stratum more inclined to use the N-word? If so, what social factors determine this?

To commence the discourse of race and class, one must approach W.E.B DuBois' theory of the "Talented Tenth." Although DuBois opted for more public articulation of political rights, he insisted that the most talented blacks were obligated to uplift there less fortunate counterparts (Gray White 1993). According to DuBois original theoretical formulation, the "Talented Tenth" are obligated to sacrifice their personal interests and endeavors, to provide social, political and economic leadership for the African American community (Battle & Wright 2002). The "Talented Tenth" were not designed to be an exclusionary group, but rather as "an assemblage of African Americans uniquely prepared to lead their race during the post-slavery days" (655). DuBois did not see race and class as accidental or dependent upon individual feelings; for him, these were part of the basic foundation of capitalist social relations. In 1948, he wrote,

> My Talented Tenth must be more than talented, and work not simply as individuals. Its passport to leadership was not learning, but expert knowledge of modern economics as if affected African blacks; an in addition to this and fundamental, would be its willingness to sacrifice and plan for such economic revolution in industry and just distribution of wealth, as would make the rise of our group possible. (Green & Smith 1983: 269)

Contrary to misconception, the "Talented Tenth" and the Black middle class are not synonymous terms.

The 'Two Nations' of Black America refers to different social milieus. The economic institution of capitalism promotes the ideal of profit and revenue, creating gaps within socio-economic status and wealth. Although Black America is misconceived as a monolithic sociological group, the occupations, incomes, neighborhoods and classes of African Americans diversify and differentiate social status. As reflected by Benjamin Disraeli, there is a social, racial and cultural divide in society, "Two nations, between whom there is no intercourse and no sympathy; who are as ignorant of each others habits, thoughts, and feelings, as if they were dwellers in different zones, or inhabitants of different planets" (Hacker 2003: ix). Although sociological explanation of 'Two Nations' refers to the division of Black America into middle and working classes near and below the poverty line (Gates 1998).

As exemplified by the nationalistic Civil Rights Movements of the 1960s, the efforts of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. inversed the activism of the Black Panther Movement. Dr. King represented middle class African Americans, promoting the individualistic nature of capitalism and the equality of races in a nonviolent and peaceful manner. Contrasting the method of Dr. King, the Black Panther Movement supported the sociological theory of Marxism, believing in the emancipation of working people (Gates 1998). Although the efforts of Dr. King oppose and contradict the ideas of the Black Panthers, both groups centralize their efforts on obtaining the civil rights of African Americans within the sub-nation of Black America.

Expelling the monolithic interpretation, the distinction between middle and lower classes of Black America disintegrates the sense of a solidified community. Middle classes are centralized in different neighborhoods and communities, with no physical relation to the lower classes (Gates 1998). The division of Black America is attributed to money. A visible distinction exists between the middle and working class, creating a breach of understanding. Contrary to

common opinion, the 'Two Nations' of Black America diminishes racial solidarity and the sense of a unified African American community. This division within Black America mirrors the 'twoness' of DuBois' "double-consciousness" and the fluidity of the word *nigger.*

DuBois' theory of the "Talented Tenth" and the 'Two Nations' of Black America, greatly affect and mold the connotations of the N-word. General assumptions lead many to believe that working or lower class individuals utilize the N-word more commonly. As exemplified by Chris Rock's, "I Love Black People, But I Hate Niggers," a social divide and associative attitude, whether it be racial or socio-economic, affects the definitions and usage of the N-word. This pop culture exemplar demonstrates the dualistic and conflicting African American social identities.

Generational Difference

Age is an important social classification that is often considered secondary to race and gender. Generational difference is an important variable to consider, while discussing the fluidity of the N-word: Can generational gaps determine the usage, acceptance, or rehabilitation of the N-word? Does the fluidity of *nigger* signal a new progressive step toward a new level of understanding or a regressive step backwards into the racist past?

The duality and dynamism of the N-word has ebbed and flowed over the past century. Initially commencing as a derogatory slur, *nigger* has adopted new meanings of neutrality, conforming to generational shifts. The "politically-correct" labels for African Americans can exemplify this concept. The progression of labeling from *nigger,* "darkie," "negro," "colored," "Afro-Americans" to "African Americans" mirrors the fluidity of the connotations of *nigger*. Different cohorts of people, raised in various decades, have developed different social attitudes,

regarding the meaning and severity of the N-word. Although this theory makes logical sense, the numerous definitions and meanings of the N-word complicate this concept. An individual's values and morals, in addition to their age, determine how and why they use *nigger*. If a person is conflicted by racism or prejudice, they will use the N-word as a negative, racial slur, disregarding their age association.

On a more generalized level, younger cohorts, as opposed to older, seem to associate the use the N-word as a value-neutral or positive term. The media's continually usage and exposure to *nigger* has desensitized younger generations. The genre of hip-hop and rap is the new arena, in which *nigger* can audaciously parade itself through the psyche of a new generation,

> "By the early 1990s the American pop consciousness was well aware of the Los Angeles Gansta Ethos. Artists like Ice-T introduced the concept, but it was the collective of DJs and MCs know as Niggaz With Attitude, N.W.A., who would define and redefine it… Dr. Dre and Ice Cube articulated the style, stance and raw ghetto rhetoric that would not only capture the imagination of young people worldwide, but also permanently transform American pop culture, searing their unsettling image onto the American psyche. (Akbar 1996: 47)

For younger generations, the continuation of the fertile use of the word has undermined and eroded the negative connotation of the N-word, as an ethnic slur. The change of spelling from *nigger* and *nigga* has become ubiquitous in popular speech and culture, depending on social circles and classes. Rap and hip-hop artists have increasingly used *nigger* in their lyrics, repackaging it and selling it not just to their own inner-city neighborhoods but also to the largely white suburbs (Marriott 1993). This idea can be examined through present-day paradigms. In a concert in 2005, Kayne West, an acclaimed producer and rapper, motivated his audiences to say *nigga*, when singing along with his Billboard 100 song "Gold Digger." According to Robert Hilburn of *The Los Angeles Times*, "West paused playfully at one point in the song Saturday to tell whites in the racially mixed audience that it is OK- this one time- to shout the N-

word…After West's comment, the volume jumped several decibels" (Hilburn 2005:3). Although this parable does not relate to everyone of a younger generation, its message resonates. Some youths argue that their open use of the word will eventually demystify it, strip it of its racist meaning (Marriott 1993). Kris Parker, a leading rap artist in the 1990s, predicted that through black culture's ability to affect popular American culture through its media output, *nigger* will become just another word, "In another 5 to 10 years, you're going to see youth in elementary school spelling it out in their vocabulary tests… It's going to be that accepted by the society" (Marriott 1993).

As stated earlier, the movement to band the N-word is gaining steam with politicians, activist organizations and African American public figures. Most of these participants, of older generations, contend that *nigger*, no matter who uses it, is such as hideous pejorative that it should be stricken from the English vocabulary (Marriott 1993). This perspective supports the idea that popular usage can only make bigotry and discrimination more socially visible and acceptable.

The purpose of this study is to examine the usage of the N-word as a clue toward comprehending complexity or stratification in American community settings. Using a generic survey and several focus groups, this study examines how race, gender, age and socio-economic status determine the elimination, perseverance or rehabilitation of *nigger*. Chapter Two will continue this discourse, examining the validity of methodology and the sociological paradigms of conflict theory, symbolic interactionism, feminism, intersectionality and "double-consciousness." Chapter Three will discuss the results of the qualitative and quantitative data, revealing how social classifications converge and affect the usage and connotation of the N-

word. Chapter Four will draw conclusions about the social constructions of word, determining

how it impacts daily-lived experiences of the uses or non-uses.

CHAPTER TWO

Sociological Theories

As stated earlier, the purpose of this study is to examine the usage of the N-word as a clue toward comprehending the complexity of stratification in American community settings. Exemplified by Chapter One, the N-word's remarkable durability, combined with America's willingness to find uses for this epithet, illustrate the extent to which racial unease continues to permeate our culture. Many argue the N-word itself is not an issue; instead it is the social, historical and political racism associated with it. Overall, the N word is alive and mobile, fluid and engraved in the American psyche, as a symbol. *Nigger* is fascinating precisely because it has been put to a variety of uses and radiated a wide array of meanings (Kennedy 2002: 27). Some propose to condemn the word, while others attempt to rehabilitate and convert its meaning from a negative slur to a gesture of solidarity. The study of sociology attempts to understand and define the N-word, grappling with social changes and cultural currents. The debate of the N-word can be examined from multitudinous sociological theories, encompassing and rejecting elements of functionalism, conflict theory, symbolic interactionism, intersectionality and feminism.

Functionalism, a perspective developed by the classical theories of Emile Durkheim, scientifically studies the relationship between societal structure and moral fact. Functionalism is a macro-sociology, explaining group and societal characteristics, with reference to the functions

and dysfunctions of other parts of society (Durkheim 1893). According to Whitney Pope,

functionalists are people who,

> 1) view society as a whole composed of interrelated parts
> 2) assume a tendency toward system equilibrium
> 3) considers how society or the social order is possible
> 4) view structure in terms of their contributions to the perpetuation or evolutionary development of society
> 5) see pervasive commonalities or consensus as the ultimate basis of social order
> (Pope 1975:361)

Durkheim's theory of functionalism categorizes society as mechanical or organic solidarity.

Mechanic solidarity is synonymous with traditional society, in which individuals conform to a

shared and strong collective consciousness. Mechanic solidarity practices punitive law,

repressing and punishing nonconformists for their deviance. Contrasting mechanic solidarity,

organic solidarity is synonymous with modern society, in which individuals are interdependent

and diverse, forming a structured division of labor. Unlike mechanic solidarity, it has a more

diminished and secular collective consciousness. Organic solidarity has a non-contractual

element of contract, allowing individuals to share societal norms and abstract beliefs. It practices

resitutive law, allowing deviance and correction (Durkheim 1893). Durkheim's sociological

theories of mechanic solidarity and organic solidarity reflect the evolution of the N-word. *Nigger*

commenced as a racial epithet, a social fact degrading African Americans; yet, as the word ebbed

and flowed with cultural trends of the twentieth century, its connotations became more diverse

and subjective. This correlates with the collectiveness of mechanic solidarity and the diversity of

organic solidarity. Although functionalism can be applied to the N-word, its rudiments do not

complement this specific study and research design.

Conflict theory, supported by Karl Marx, observes society as a conglomerate of

conflicting groups, struggling for hegemonic power. Conflict theory is a macro-sociology,

explaining group and social characteristics, through the competition for socially valued

resources. Marx hypothesizes that classes continually grapple for social resources. The dominant

group, who obtains those valuable resources, creates an ideology of beliefs and values that

justifies and maintains the position of power. This theory applies to his concept of alienated

labor,

> The worker becomes a slave to his object in two ways: firstly he receives an object of labor, that is he receives labor, and secondly, he receives the means of subsistence. Thus is it his object that permits him to exist first as a worker and secondly as a physical subject…political economy, capitalism, hides alienation in the essence of labor by not considering the immediate relationship between the worker and their production. (Marx 1844:8)

Conflict theory, removed from Marx's capitalistic paradigm, mirrors the history and existence of

white hegemonic society. Since the commencement of the United States in 1776, Caucasians

have held majority power with societal structure. With the advent of the Civil Rights Movement,

African Americans finally received their inevitable rights; yet, their progress is curtailed by the

ideologies and values instituted by historical white hegemony. The fundamentals of the conflict

theory were considered during the construction of this study's research instrument. Each

participant was specifically chosen for the focus group, depending on his or her race, social class,

gender and age. The recreation of a hegemonic environment, mirroring mainstream society, tests

the validity of the conflict theory.

Symbolic interactionism, contrary to macro-sociology, examines the small-scale

exchange of symbols between individuals in social interaction. Herbert Blumer coined the term

symbolic interactionism to describe a micro theoretical approach, different from the leading

orthodoxies of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, such as functionalism and conflict

theory (Blumer 1962:241). Branching from the philosophical roots of John Dewy's pragmatism

and George Herbert Mead's psychological behaviorism, symbolic interactionism refers to,

> The particular and distinctive character of interaction as it takes place between human beings. The peculiarity consists in the fact that human beings interpret or define each other's actions, instead of merely reacting to each other's reaction. Their response is not made directly to the actions of one another, but instead is based on the meaning, which they attach to such actions. (241)

Blumer theorizes that human interaction is mediated by the use, the interpretation, or by the ascertaining meaning of symbols and actions. From this sociological perspective, *nigger* can be analyzed as a dynamic symbol, with fluid meanings.

According to George Ritzer's integrated sociological exemplar, people can modify the meanings and symbols they use in action and interaction, based on their interpretation of the situation. Therefore, people can adapt and change the connotation of the N-word, depending on the people they are with, the subject of the conversation and the situational interaction. People can make these different modifications because of their ability to interact with themselves, which allows them to examine relative advantages and disadvantages (Ritzer 2006). This concept is manifested by the interaction of the participants in the focus groups and the exchange of *nigger* for *nigga*. The research of Jabari Asim and Randall Kennedy concludes both *nigger* and *nigga* are used within black communities and ubiquitous in popular speech and culture; yet they are pejorative, depending on social circles and classes. The fundamental theory of symbolic interactionism begins to explain the multiple connotations and density of the N-word.

Feminism, another sociological paradigm, advocates and emphasizes women's ideas, perspectives and thoughts into mainstream psyche and society. It attempts to describe the social world from the standpoint of women. Feminism challenges the whole system of knowledge as male-centered, calling for a major reorganization of societal structure. It is a diverse perspective, evaluating gender difference, gender equality, gender oppression and structural oppression. Feminism can be explored through the lenses of various social classifications, creating the

companion sociological theory of intersectionality. Rather, than examining race, gender, age and class as distinctive social hierarchies, intersectionality examines how they mutually construct one another (Hill Collins 1998:62). In the United States, naturalized hierarchies of gender and age are interwoven with corresponding racial hierarchies. It is difficult to exclusively analyze one social classification, without recognizing the effects of others. Vectors of oppression and privilege produce a particular experience of oppression; the privilege of one group catalyzes the oppression of another. Hierarchies of gender and age that exist within racial groups mirror the hierarchy characterizing relationships among groups. Current assumptions see "African Americans as having race, white women having gender, black women experiencing both race and gender and white men experience neither" (Hill Collins 1998:77).

Using Hill Collin's theory of intersectionality, women experience oppression in varying degrees and ways. They create interpretations and strategies for resistance, to which theory attempts to give voice. Women, juxtaposed in the vectors of intersectionality, aspire for social justice. The "third wave" of black feminism, led by writers such as Joan Morgan, has produced a hybrid of academic writing mixed with aspects of popular culture. Morgan confronts the complexities of being "black girls now- sistas of the post-Civil Rights, post-feminist, post-soul, hip hop generation" (Brown & Junn 2008:73). This "third wave" of black feminism adds a generational component to the sociological theory of intersectionality, emphasizing the significance of cultural forms and the interaction of class, race and gender, "The explicit intersections inherent here emphasize the importance of analyzing simultaneously and, in dynamic fashion, these overlaying categories of oppression" (74). Consistent with Hill Collins' black feminist theory, "third wave" black feminism and hip-hop feminism draw from the lived experiences of black women by producing perspectives that are accessible to non-intellectual and

everyday women (75). To amend the vectors of intersectionality, Hill Collins recommends that women and other subjects of oppression create "safe spaces," places of discourse for resisting objectification of the other (Hill Collins 2000:101). "Safe spaces" allow re-identification within the world, finding a voice to address oppression and make changes. Intersectionality directly addresses the usage of the N-word as a clue toward comprehending the complexity of stratification in American community settings. The complexity of intersectionality correlates with the dynamism of the N-word; therefore, the social classifications of race, gender, age, and socio-economic status cannot be exclusively analyzed.

W.E.B DuBois' "Double Consciousness"

William Edward Burghardt DuBois was one of the foremost scholars of the late nineteenth and twentieth century black experience in the United States. DuBois as a propagandist, sociologist and theoretician examined and explored problems with politics, economics and racial and class oppression. Sociology, he wrote, was a "vast and fruitful field of inquiry into the mysterious phenomena of human action" (Green & Driver 1976:310). As a social theorist, DuBois followed the empirical tradition; yet his sociological scheme was built upon the method of deductive analysis, unifying theory and empirical observation (Green & Smith 1983:262). By virtue of his superior education, DuBois was ahead of him time with regard to the conceptualization of the dichotomy between race and class. Of the two concepts, race and class, DuBois was much more explicit on the subject of race. The concept of race was the central importance to all of his work, "The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line- the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea" (DuBois 1903:221). Overall, DuBois favored integration, as opposed to

separation for African Americans. He favored a "non-racial as opposed to an approach based solely on skin color as the appropriate manner with which to confront the complex problems of black Americans" (Green & Smith 1983:269). DuBois promoted equal opportunity, respect and full citizen's rights urging for society to abolish the "color line" of racism.

DuBois' *The Souls of Black Folk*, is a fundamental text in sociological study, confronting the contradictions of his own bourgeoisie education and the escalation of racism. According to James Weldon Johnson, *Souls* has had "a greater effect upon and within the black race in American than any other single book published in this country since *Uncle Tom's Cabin*" (Brodwin 1972:305). DuBois intertwines a variety of literary techniques such as allegory, symbolic patterns, personal confession, biography and musical motifs to propose his vision of how and why color poses such a dilemma at the turn of the twentieth-century. DuBois awoke ideas of black pride, while simultaneously guiding Caucasians, who had little awareness of the strivings and realities of black Americans (Brodwin 1972: 307). His assertion is casual and provides insight into the ways that the African-American culture is intrinsic to the larger American culture, and how history has made that relationship innately problematic. In *Souls*, DuBois discusses insurmountable color line, the metaphorical veil and the "double-consciousness" of the black American's identity.

According to DuBois, the African American is born with a metaphoric veil and displaced from mainstream American society. He alludes that this displacement forces African Americans to see themselves through "the revelation of the other world," inhibiting them from obtaining a true self-awareness and consciousness (DuBois 1903:215). Therefore, the "history of the American Negro is the history of this strife- this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self" (215). DuBois' theory of "double-

consciousness," the sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, contends that African Americans experience a dual identity because they are regarded with contempt and pity by the majority of American society (215). DuBois' theory of "double consciousness" reflects Charles Horton Cooley's concept of "the Looking Glass Self," in which the reactions of others are used to visualize our self-concept.

DuBois highlights this "double-consciousness" as conflicting ideologies, "One ever feels his twoness- an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two un-reconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps if from being torn asunder" (215). This powerful depiction of dual consciousness delineates the conscious perception of people of color, as they are perpetually reminded that, "their lives, their existence and their concerns are valued differently by the white majority" (Barnes 1990:1866). African Americans are urged to adopt mainstream cultural values and embrace the perspectives of dominant society, to accommodate the demands of existing social, economic and political order, creating a psychic breach (1866).

DuBois attributes the persistence of "double-consciousness" to patterns of economic exploitation and social degradation. The examination of "double-consciousness" must consider at least three critical issues addressed by DuBois:

> 1. The extent to which "double-consciousness" provides blacks with vantage points unavailable to non-blacks and whether this vision exists universally among blacks
> 2. The nature and strength of the cultural ties that bind blacks together
> 3. The process by which liberation of the psyche of blacks is achieved
> (Stewart 1983:93)

DuBois hypothesizes that double lives, thoughts, duties and social classes give rise to double ideals, tempting the mind "to pretence or revolt, to hypocrisy or radicalism" (DuBois 1903:346).

DuBois highlights and extenuates the paradox identities of African Americans, commenting that the social constructions of the worlds with and without the metaphorical veil are changing rapidly, but not in the same way or at the same rate (346). For DuBois, "twoness" is a universal phenomenon among African American, varying among personality types and individual circumstances.

On a different level of sociological thought, DuBois's theory of "double-conscious" also applies to Caucasian Americans, who continually grapple with the historical white hegemony of the United States and the belief in a genuine democracy, "Euro-Americans have moved back and forth between their two perspectives on Africanity, now seeing blacks as less than human, now recognizing their membership in the family of man" (Jones 1992:174). White "double-consciousness" was born of the awareness of Euro-Americans, their dependence on their slaves, and their awareness that without African American labor, expertise and intelligence America would have be a different and lesser place (181). Rhett Jones suggests that Caucasians live a double racial life, one colorblind and one race conscious (190). As exemplified by this alternative perspective, there are larger implications of the "double-consciousness."

Although DuBois uses the word *nigger* contextually, *The Souls of Black Folk* does not specifically evaluate or analyze the duality and controversy of this dynamic word. Rather, DuBois' theory of "double-consciousness" can be applied to the social construction, connotations, usages and effects of N-word. Although *nigger* has ebbed and flowed, commencing as a derogatory slur, warping into a neutral term to express collectiveness, the term *nigger* is affected by its conflicting connotations. Jarvis Deberry maintains that *nigger* is, "beautiful in its multiplicity of functions. I am not aware of any other word expressing so many contradictory emotions… It might just be the most versatile sand most widely applied intensifier

in the English language" (Kennedy 2000: 90). The theory of "double-consciousness" proactively examines how age, socio-economic status, gender and race determine the contradictory connotations, uses and opinions of the N-word.

Qualitative Research Instrument: Focus Groups

This study utilizes qualitative and quantitative research methods, to evaluate the usage of the N-word as an indication toward comprehending the complexity of stratification in American community settings. Focus groups were selected as the primary qualitative research instrument examining how race, gender, age and socio-economic status determine the elimination, preservation or rehabilitation of *nigger*. Instead of conducting research in the homogeneous community of Union College, two focus groups were conducted at the Norwalk Public Library in Norwalk, Connecticut on December 4th and 11th 2008. Norwalk, Connecticut was chosen as the sample location due to its racial, generational and socio-economic diversity. The city is located forty miles northeast of New York City and borders Darien, New Canaan, Westport and Wilton in Fairfield Country, along the Long Island Sound.

According to the 2005-2007 American Community Survey, Norwalk is the sixth largest city in the State of Connecticut, with a population of approximately 90,431 people, 32,711 households and 20,967 families. There were 33,753 housing units at an average density of 1,480 per square mile (Norwalkct.org 2008). 50.9% of the general population is female, while 49.1% is male. The racial makeup of Norwalk was 73.3% Caucasian; 22.5% Latino; 13.7% Black or African American; 3.4% Asian; 0.7 % Native American; 0.01 % Pacific Islander; 7.5% from other races and 1.3 % from two or more races (American Community Survey 2007). The population of Norwalk is distributed with 22.1% under the age of 18, 7.0% from 18 to 24, 35.5%

from 25 to 44, 22.6% from 45 to 64 and 12.8% who were 65 years or older. The median age was 37 (US Census 2000). According to a 2006 estimate, the median income bracket for a household in the city was $70,672 and the median income for a family was $83,695 (American Community Survey 2007). The per capita income for city was $39,715. About 4% of families and 6.3% of the population were below the poverty line (2007).

Initially, fifteen members of the Norwalk community were chosen to attend the group sessions. The focus groups were held at the Norwalk Public Library, in Norwalk, Connecticut on December 4th and 11th 2008. All fifteen of the participants were cordially invited with a formal invitation. The invitation did not disclose the subject of the focus groups. It told the participants the date, time, location and the requirements: compensation for roughly one hour of discussion (Appendix 1). They were asked to RSVP their acceptance of the invitation. The participants were not randomly selected from the Norwalk population. As the facilitator, I knew each on either a personal or formal level. They were selected due to their gender, race, age and socio-economic class. Unfortunately, three participants cancelled, diminishing the research sample to twelve participants, six in each group. Before commencing the focus group discussion, each participant was asked to fill out a brief, generic survey (Appendix 2-4). Each focus group was recorded for transcription purposes. As the facilitator, my discussion questions were adapted from the generic survey. They were general and somewhat vague, allowing the participants to lead the discussion in numerous directions (Appendix 5). Each participant was compensated twelve dollars for their attendance. The compensation was provided by a grant from the Internal Education Fund.

Unlike the majority of ethnographic sociological research, I decided to select my own participants to artificially create a diverse environment of discourse. If I had advertised for focus group participants, I would have had no control over the research sample. The purpose of this

study is to evaluate the usage of the N-word as a clue toward comprehending the complexity of stratification in American community settings; therefore, I attempted to recruit representatives from different races, age groups and socioeconomic classes. There are penalties and benefits for this kind of selection. Firstly, the sample represented in the focus groups, does not wholly represent the population of Norwalk, Connecticut. Secondly, as the facilitator, I knew each participant. Although this variable cannot be empirically analyzed, the honesty and sincerity of the participants could have been negatively affected by our rapport. On the other hand, since each participant knew me, and not each other, they could have felt more comfortable and secure with my facilitating questions. The benefit of selecting my own participants for the discussion allowed me to create a specialized sample.

Initially, I aimed to construct the most diverse group of races, ages and socioeconomic statuses to participate in my research. As I went through the process of selecting individuals, I began to re-evaluate my hypothesis and prospective goal. Using the fundamentals of DuBois', I decided to design my focus groups to specifically analyze the "double-consciousness" of the Caucasian participants. As stated earlier DuBois's theory of "double-conscious" also applies to Caucasian Americans, who continually grapple with the historical white hegemony of the United States and the belief in a genuine democracy. Scholars suggest that Caucasians live a double racial life, "one colorblind and one race conscious" (Jones 1992:190).

To examine this variable, the focus groups were created to artificially reproduce white, hegemonic society. African Americans and Latinos were also represented in the sample, yet the majority of the participants were Caucasians. I wanted to examine how the racial construction of the focus groups affected the participant's opinions and ideologies of the N-word. The rudiments of conflict theory were also considered during the conception of this research instrument. As

denoted by Marx, dominant groups create an ideology of beliefs and values that justifies and maintains the position of power. Since the majority of the participants were Caucasian, mirroring mainstream society, my focus groups aimed to see if their beliefs, ideas and opinions about the N-word dominated the discussion, curtailing the opinions and values of the minorities. As the facilitator, I wanted to see how the Caucasian participants experienced a "double-consciousness," grappling with the connotations of the N-word and the belief in a genuine, racially equal society.

On the micro level, I selected the research instrument of focus groups to evaluate the small-scale exchanges of the participants. The sociological theory of symbolic interactionism allowed the focus groups to be mediated by the use, interpretation and by the ascertaining meaning of the word *nigger*. Using Ritzer's integrated sociological paradigm, I wanted to see how the participants, in this small group setting, modified the meanings of the N-word, based on their interpretation of the situation. The staged diversity of the focus groups allowed the participants to interact with themselves, examining the advantages and disadvantages of the situation. This concept is manifested by the interaction of the participant's exchange of *nigger* for *nigga*. Chapter Three continues this discourse, qualitatively paralleling the transcriptions of the focus groups to the sociological paradigms of conflict theory, symbolic interactionism, intersectionality, feminism and DuBois' "double-consciousness."

CHAPTER THREE

Demographics

As stated earlier, twelve participants were selected to participate in two focus groups held

at the Norwalk Public Library in Norwalk, Connecticut on December 4th and 11th, 2008. Both

groups were 66.7% female and 33.3% male. According to the generic survey, 50% of the

participants were from 18 to 24 years old, 16.7% from 25 to 44 years old, 25% from 45 to 64

years old and 8.3% 65 years or older. The overall median age was 36 years old. The median age

of Focus Group One was 28, seventeen years younger than the median age of Focus Group Two.

The racial composition of the sample was 66.7% Caucasian, 25% African American and 8.3%

Latino. 50% of the participants make $50,000 or less a year, 25% make $50,000 or more a year

and 25% make $100,000 or more a year (Benfield 2008).

From the commencement of each discussion, both focus groups set the tone and direction

of their discourse. Group One admitted the use of the word *nigger, nigga* and the euphemism, the

N-word. This inclusion of the N-word and its variants allowed a more open conversation, in

which the majority of the participants wanted to explore and expose the frivolity of the word.

Contrary, Group Two immediately refuted the use *nigger* and *nigga*, only allowing the

euphemism to be spoken during the discussion. These different responses established the tone of

each focus group; overall, Focus Group One adopted a more liberal view of the word, while

Focus Group Two conservatively analyze its connotations. 75% of the participants felt

"uncomfortable" about the word *nigger*, while 25% felt "neutral" (Benfield 2008).

Generational Difference

Generational difference is an important variable to consider, while discussing the fluidity

of the N-word. The duality and fluidity of the N-word has ebbed and flowed over the past

century, as discussed earlier in Chapter One. Initially commencing as a derogatory slur, *nigger*

has adopted new meanings of neutrality, conforming to generational trends. Different cohorts of

people, raised in various decades, have developed different opinions, regarding the meaning and

severity of the N-word. As stated previously, research theorizes that older generations contend

nigger, no matter who uses it*,* is a negative pejorative that should eliminated from mainstream

culture. This opinion assumes the derogatory nature of the word is rooted in history, as an epithet

for African Americans. Contrasting, the commercialization of the N-word has allowed younger

cohorts to interpret *nigger* as a value-neutral or positive term.

In Focus Group One and Two, the participant's opinions and initial experience with the

N-word were based on their generational cohorts. Each could generally recount the first time

they heard the word *nigger* and how it affected their conceptions. Confirming the literature cited

in Chapter One, participants over the age of forty had a drastically negative experience with

nigger, specifically remembering the details and social climate in which they first heard the

word. Lauren recounts,

> The first time I heard it I was five, in Brooklyn, New York. My mother and I went into
> King Cullen Super Market. We were standing on line to check out and a black man was
> in front of us. When he approached the register, the cashier said he had to go in the other
> line. She said that she couldn't help him because he was a *nigger*. That was the first time
> I heard it. This was in the late 1950s, so it had a very different meaning. It had a very
> negative connotation then… It was not a nice thing to say. (Appendix 7)

Similarly, Julia recollects when she first heard the word,

> The first time I heard the word being used, I think was when I was very young in the
> 1950s and there was an old rhyme that was used. I don't even know if they understood
> the derogatory nature. I don't even remember how it went…I think it was 'Inny, miny,

miney, mo…Catch an N-word by the toe. If he hollers let him go, inny, miny, miney, mo…' I don't think anyone understood the meaning. It was something pervasive. When I think back on it now, it puzzles me. (Appendix 19)

Both Julia and Lauren precisely remembered the first time they heard the word and the derogatory nature of its usage. The verbal impact of the N-word was cemented into their memory. Due to the social climate of the 1950s and their respective ages, the historical context of the N-word affected their opinion of the term. Arthur also had an experience comparable to Julia and Lauren. He specifically remembers hearing the N-word for the first time in second grade,

I remember this instance in particular because I went to a school with eighteen in a class. We had one black family, Howard Wood's family. It was a fishing and farming community and a boy brought a nut into class and called it the "N-nut" right in front of the whole class. Howard was there and remember, this was in the middle of the 1960s. The teacher said, "We don't say that." I remember talking to my mother about it that night and we had a long discussion about racism and segregation. It was something that was unheard of, to use that word during that time. (Appendix 20)

Arthur is the product of his generational cohort, a person molded by the intersection of the social, political and cultural currents of his lifetime. These variables have a distinct affect on his opinion of the N-word. Although this theory seems to hold ground within the sociological paradigm, the opinions of Lauren, Julia and Arthur cannot be generalized to the secular population. An individual's morals and values, in addition to their age, determine how and why they use *nigger*. If a person is conflicted by internalized racism or prejudice, they will use the N-word as negative, racial slur, disregarding their age affiliation.

Younger cohorts also succumb to their own individualistic experiences. For younger generations, the continuation of the fertile use of the N-word has eroded the negative connotation of *nigger* as an ethnic slur. The younger participants of the focus groups, who accept the various connotations of the N-word, had a harder time recounting the first time they heard *nigger*. They

had trouble singling out their personal conception of the N-word, regarding it as a trivial

occurrence. Most of these experiences were generalized to peer interactions in high school.

Margot recounts hearing the N-word for the first time in school, "As soon as you walked the

halls, you heard it being said everywhere. It wasn't like 'I am judging you or I am a racist.' First

I remember being afraid of the word, but then everyone told me it was okay" (Appendix 7).

Morgan, similar to Margot cannot recall her initial encounter with the N-word, yet she

generalizes it to high school,

> Yeah, in Norwalk High School the word lost its value. One day everything is going to
> lose its value. Like the dollar. It's the same thing…Because growing up we didn't
> experience the racial term, as our parents did…They take it offensively in different
> ways…But for us, we don't think of it as racial, we brush it off. (Appendix 8)

Dan continues the discourse of Morgan and Margot, stating, " I think it is a younger movement.

When we first heard the word it didn't have the same negative connotation that it used to… as

long as we have known the word it has adapted a second meaning" (Appendix 10). Although

Dan, Morgan and Margot accept the neutralized value of the N-word, their opinions cannot be

generalized to satisfy the opinions of all younger people. Many young adults have decided to ban

the N-word from their vocabulary, due to its historical heritage. Lauren refutes the generalization

of younger cohorts accepting the N-word, exposing a new dimension to the connotative

implications of *nigger*.

> My son graduated in 2006. He never used the N-word. He has all kinds of friends, black,
> Hispanic and Indian, and they don't use it either. He went to Norwalk High. He heard it
> people using it, but he just walked away, disgusted with them…Rap songs come on and
> my kids know that if there are too many N-words in it, then they have to turn it off. They
> know that my blood pressure goes up. At least it gets my kids to realize that this is
> something that really does affect me… for us, my generation, this is a step going
> backwards. I don't want to go backwards. We already fought that fight. My grandmother
> was a hundred years old and every time she saw someone who was black she said, "Oh,
> there's a *nigger*." You can't say that anymore. She would always apologize later saying,
> "Oh, I'm sorry. I just remember that I am not allowed to call you *nigger*. She grew up in
> the early 1900s, I grew up in the 1950s, when we fought so hard to make sure that those

> rights were given back and not taken away… It's Pandora's box. People, my age, wonder why we are going backwards. (Appendix 12)

Lauren, reflecting upon experiences of her own life, demonstrates that an individual's values and morals, in addition to their generational cohort, determine how and why they accept, refute or aim to rehabilitate the N-word. Comparable to scholarly research, the participants attribute the changing connotation of the N-word to the commercialization and popularity of rap, hip-hop, comedians and the lack of historical education. With the changing cultural tides of the late twentieth century and the emergence of contemporary media, younger generations have matured with a different interpretation of the N-word. The media's continual usage and exposure to *nigger* has been said to desensitized younger generations. Elyse believes that the diverging connotations of the N-word is an issue of education,

> Younger people who don't like the word know the history…I still feel like a lot of people who use the word, as friendship, really don't know the history behind it…They don't have a household to learn where the word came from and how hard they fought for it…People still don't know. (Appendix 12,13)

The results from survey question number twelve; "Do younger generations use the N-word more that older generations?" supports this theoretical perspective (Benfield 2008). Of the 18-24 year old cohort 83.3% answered "No," while 26.7% answered, "Yes." Contradicting the answers of the younger participants, 83.3% of the participants over age of 25 answered "Yes," while 26.7% were "Undecided." This evidence creates a rigid dichotomy between older and younger generational cohorts. The findings of this study demonstrate that there is a correlation between age and the usage and acceptance of the N-word. The older participants represented in this study refute the use of the N-word, due to their social, political and cultural experiences as Americans. They believe younger generations are responsible for the continued use of *nigger*. Contradictory, the majority of the younger participants, under the age of 25, accept the neutral

value of the N-word; yet, they deny the over usage of the term by young cohorts (Benfield 2008).

Although these results appear to be conclusive, generational difference cannot be analyzed

exclusively; rather, it must be explored by the sociological theory of intersectionality. The

variable of age cannot entirely determine the various connotations of the N-word.

Social Stratification and the "Talented Tenth"

Social stratification is an important variable to examine, while discussing the complexity

and dynamism of the N-word. The theory of intersectionality complicates socio-economic

solidarity, yet many sociological perspectives believe that social circles and stratum correlate

with the acceptance or rejection of *nigger*.

The relationship between the N-word and socioeconomic status commences with W.E.B.

DuBois's theory of the "Talented Tenth." As mentioned in the literature review, the "Talented

Tenth" were considered to be a superior representation of Black America; a select group of

educated individuals, who were obligated to sacrifice their own endeavors and personal interests

to provide social, political and economic leadership for the African American community (Gray

White 1993). Contrary to misconception, the "Talented Tenth" and the Black middle class are

not synonymous terms. The 'Two Nations' of Black America refers to different social milieus.

Although Black America is misconceived as a monolithic social group, the occupations,

incomes, neighborhoods and classes of African Americans diversify and differentiate social

status. The sociological explanation of 'Two Nations' refers to the division of Black America

into middle and working classes, near and below the poverty line. Expelling the stereotype, the

distinction between the middle and lower classes of Black America erodes the caring and

nurturing solidarity of the African American community. Middle classes are centralized in

different neighborhoods and communities, with no physical relation to the lower classes (Gates 1998). This division within Black America mirrors the 'twoness' of DuBois' "double-consciousness" and the fluidity of the word *nigger*. General assumptions lead many to believe that working or lower class individuals utilize the N-word more than high socioeconomic echelons.

The participants of Focus Group One and Focus Group Two were aware of the divide within Black America. Their responses confirmed the sociological theories of Andrew Hacker and they were quick to comment, misinterpreting and overlapping the theory of the 'Two Nations.' Aaron's reaction directly reflects mainstream society's misinterpretation of the N-word,

> It was used to refer to a certain type of black person. And it wasn't necessarily the derogatory way, but even amongst the black community, where I went to school, it was used. I feel like the kids that wanted to be tough, were more from the streets and of poorer backgrounds. Those kids either wanted to be referred to in that way or referred to each other in that terminology. Black kids who didn't have that background weren't referred to in that way. In fact, that was a distinction. It wasn't that they wanted or didn't want to be called by that term, but it actually had another meaning. It had another meaning that is closer to the glorifications of thug life. It refers to someone who is in the 'in-crowd,' more real and authentic. Somehow, because they were poor or disadvantaged, it made them more real and they encompassed the word. It allowed them to be tough and show where they have come from. It wasn't used widely and it wasn't used by anyone in an upper socioeconomic group, whether they be white or black. (Appendix 10)

Aaron, similar to other participants in the groups, associates the N-word with lower class African Americans. He believes African American usage is attributed to authenticity and the glorification of ghetto thug life. Paul exposes another dimension of this argument, highlighting the duality and the falsity of stereotyping African Americans, who encompass aesthetics and external elements of thug life.

> It's almost like there is a black community and there is an N-community... I think a lot of black kids, at least the ones I have been exposed to, will say to me, "That kid is an N-word." Not being positive, but describing a certain negative attitude...I can give you a

perfect example. I get on an airplane and I sit down. This young black fellow comes up to me and sits next to me. Here's where the prejudice comes out. The way he was dressed, the way he was acting, his attitude and everything made me think, "This person is a N-word." Five or ten minutes into the flight, we started talking and I was so way off. I went home and I was telling my wife the story and I felt like a real asshole because this kid sat down next to me and I already pegged him one way. After I spoke to him and stripping away that persona that would imply this person is a N-word, I realized I was wrong. (Appendix 21)

Paul, similar to many others, succumbs to the media's perception and embodiment of the N-word. He personifies the N-word relative to socioeconomic class affiliation. Paul associates the word *nigger* with the thug-life, gangster attitude of lower class African Americans. His observation can be dissected as internalized racism, yet his statement highlights the parallels of class and the various connotations of the N-word. Paul's interpretation of *nigger* directly mirrors Chris Rock's "I Love Black People, But I Hate Niggers." This parallel of pop culture exposes the dualistic and conflicting African American social identities, divided by social stratification.

Dan expands this concept, addressing the relationship of authenticity, social class and the word *nigger*.

I think that social standing and economic class affect the word. You don't find affluent African Americans using the word. You don't see Barack Obama and his friends saying, "That's my *nigga*." More educated people of high-income brackets do not use this word. It's almost a status symbol. It is used to define your place. Barack would never use the word. He is the product of the Civil Rights Movement. But, at the same time, many rappers use the word as street credit. People want to associate with the ghetto…I think there is this idea and it happens in all classes and all races; that if you use the word it is cool. It means you are from the ghetto, a thug. For the most part, I think people use it as a coping mechanism No one truly wants to be in the ghetto. (Appendix 13)

As interpreted by Dan, the acceptance and usage of the N-word depends on the intersectionality of socioeconomic affiliation. Social class cannot be exclusively analyzed as an independent variable because it is affected by intersecting vectors of race, gender and age. Socioeconomic brackets include the latent and manifest variables of income and education, which determine various interpretations of the N-word. Instead of using the word *nigger*, upper social echelons

engage in less derogatory euphemisms. Blatantly crude terms, such as the N-word, are eliminated

from their vocabulary because such coarseness is believed to be appropriate for lower class

individuals.

The sociological paradigm of conflict theory can also be applied to the discussion of

socioeconomic stratification; yet, its rudiments are somewhat inversed. Although middle and

upper classes control socially valued resources, the focus groups believed lower classes have

adopted the various connotations of the N-word word as symbolic collateral. As stated by Arthur,

> This is where I always get confused. Because now, all of a sudden, it is almost as if
> blacks own the word…Now you have taken the ownership of a word that is derogatory
> and insulting and you are using it for yourselves, on yourselves. There are a lot of black
> intellectuals that will say that that's what's going on. It's is as if you are taking on the
> most negative term and saying, " We own that now. We have taken it. We can use it the
> way we want to." Some folks might use the word, but it still has its negative
> roots…Sometimes I wonder about that. (Appendix 23)

This grappling of *nigger* is perpetual and pervasive, creating a competitive struggle. Although

middle and upper classes are considered dominant groups, relative to material social resources,

lower classes have embraced the N-word, implementing and creating mainstream ideologies,

beliefs and values. Ironically, contradicting the traditional model of conflict theory, lower

classes, more so than other classes, maintain the position of power, greatly affecting the

relationship of media, social class, authenticity and the N-word. Rappers, comedians and others

embrace ghetto glorification and turn insult into affection by giving *nigger* new spelling,

replacing the "-er" with an "–a." The ambiguous spelling and connotative value of the N-word

will be explored more in depth later in this chapter.

Statistical data retrieved from the generic survey supports this assumed relationship

between the acceptance and usage of the N-word and socioeconomic affiliation. As stated, 50%

of the participants make $50,000 or less a year, 25% make $50,000 or more a year and 25%

make $100,000 or more a year. Compared to these statistics, 50% of the participants who make less than $50,000 a year "Sometimes" use *nigger* and "Always" hear it being used at either, home, school or social events; while the other 50% "Rarely" or "Never" use the N-word and "Sometimes" hear it being used at school or social events. Participants, who made more than $50,000 a year, had a variety of answers, demonstrating the diversity of the middle class. 100% of these participants "Sometimes" or "Never" use the N-word and "Sometimes" or "Rarely" heard it being used at school, work or social events. Paralleling the responses from the focus group discourses, the participants of upper social class had drastically different statistics. All of the participants who made over $100,000 a year "Never" used *nigger* and "Rarely" heard it being used social events (Benfield 2008). These statistics complement the "double-consciousness" of DuBois and the fluidity of the word *nigger*, supporting the general assumption that working or lower class individuals utilize, preserve and accept the N-word more than middle and upper classes.

Gender Binary

Many argue that the societal differentiation between the sexes has diminished with time, technological advancements and progress; yet, women are still captive to the gender binary in numerous circumstances. Although this assumption generalizes the correlation of men and the N-word, women are not excluded from this equation. Women, similar to men, use the N-word, in vernacular speech, movies, songs and numerous other things; however, historical accounts and modern-day forms of media present males as the primary users and targets of *nigger*. As stated earlier, the sociological theory of intersectionality interweaves the social classifications of gender, class and race; therefore, one cannot study the gender binary without confronting racial

and social hierarchies. The examination and study of the N-word cannot disregard the social, political and cultural struggle of African American men and women. The black feminist paradigms of Davis, Gray White, Hill Collins and Morgan demonstrate the complexity and intersectionality of social classifications. As observed by these prominent theorists, class, gender and race are interwoven, juxtaposing women, particularly African American women, into narrow social spaces. This ideology demonstrates that the gender binary is socially constructed by many factors, similar to the composition of the N-word.

Overall, the participants discussed the manifest variables of age, socioeconomic class and race, yet the issue of gender was latent. The social classification of gender was not highlighted as a determinant of the N-word; rather it was considered secondary. The research sample of the focus groups was 66.7% female and 33.3% male (Benfield 2008). Since the sample was two-thirds female, the focus group discussions revealed an overtly feminist paradigm. Participants referenced male politicians, comedians, writers and musicians and their relationships with the N-word, excluding female exemplars. According to Paul, "I guess it is more prevalent with black males that have been over my house. Football players. They will just use it like, 'Hey guy, what's happening'" (Appendix 19). Dan also referenced the gender dynamic and its influence on the usage of the term, "Men seem to use it more than girls. Black boys specifically. I don't think girls use it nearly as much" (Appendix 14). It is interesting to closely examine Dan's word choice. Dan substitutes the word women, adult mature females, for the word girls, female children. Although this choice of language could be considered a minor mistake, it provides noteworthy evidence of concealed sexism. Dan, as one of two men in Focus Group One, is a minority representative in a majority setting. He generalizes women saying they do not use the N-word as much as men; conversely, he has no evidence to support his statement. To further this

analytical evaluation, Dan makes a similar mistake, referring to African American men as boys. Although he could easily be talking about younger cohorts of males, his statement is emasculating to African American males. Dan's statement can be attributed to the sociological theory of intersectionality. Hierarchies of gender and age that exist within racial groups mirror the hierarchy characterizing relationships among groups.

Dan's assumptions about the relationship of the gender binary and the N-word are not fully supported by the statistical results. Of the eight female participants, 50% said they "Never" use the N-word, 12.5% said they "Rarely" use the word and 37.5% said they "Sometimes" use *nigger*. Of the four male participants, 75% said they "Never" use the N-word, while 25% said they "Sometimes" use the term. The research sample was two-thirds female and one-thirds male; therefore, the mentioned statistics cannot be generalized to larger populations. Since all four of the male participants were Caucasian, their responses do not represent the male population. 75% of the participants said they hear women use the word, while 25% said they do not hear women use *nigger*. Survey question number ten, "Do you hear young black men use *nigger*?" attempted to examine the overlapping vectors of race, gender and age (Benfield 2008). 83.3% of the participants respond "Yes" to the question, while 16.7% answered "No." Generally evaluating these statistics, one could conclude men use the N-word more than women, but the covert variables of race and age, compounded into the question, complicate its results. If the question eliminated the word "young" and substituted the word "black" for "white," the results would be drastically different; therefore, the inclusion of age and race demonstrates the intersection of social vectors.

To further examine the relationship of gender and intersectionality, it is important to examine the events that followed the focus groups. Abiding by the ethics of sociological study,

each participant was compensated twelve dollars for their hour of participation. Before attending the focus group, each participant was told they would be compensated for their time. They were fully informed that the allocated money was not from a personal fund, rather a grant from the Internal Education Fund. The members of Focus Group One took their compensation, without qualms or discussion. The participants of Focus Group Two reacted differently to the compensation. As the facilitator of the discussion, I administered the money to each of the six participants. Comparable to Focus Group One, there were four females and two males. Everyone took the money, but with some hesitation. As the group was exiting the conference room, the two older women gave their twelve dollars to the younger women, who were under the age of twenty-five. One cannot examine this situation without considering the social classification of race. The two older women, who gave their compensation, were Caucasian, while the younger women were African American. Although the focus groups were conducted during the holiday season, stereotyped as a time of kindness and giving, it was obvious that the older women were experiencing guilt: guilt from their social position as white, middle to upper class females. The younger African American women accepted the money without contemplation, completing a cycle of social inequality.

This exchange can be examined from numerous perspectives. The "third wave" of black feminism, led by the Joan Morgan confronts the generation of young women of color who have "internalized negative self images, suffer from a lack of self-esteem and are victims to materialism that glorifies rap music" (Brown & Junn 2008:74). The personalities of the two younger women cannot be generalized and conformed to this paradigm; nonetheless, "third wave" black feminism provides an interesting theoretical approach. Would the older women have given the younger girls their twelve dollars if the younger participants where Caucasian? As

exemplified by this unique exchange, it is extremely difficult to exclusively analyze one social classification without recognizing the effects of others.

This unique exchange between the participants was unexpected. It did not directly address the various connotations of the N-word and its relationship with the gender binary; yet, it was insightful. It reinforces the notion that social categories are not monolithic assemblages, but unstable and dynamic groupings. Although the women, who gave their money, were Caucasian and of a higher social stratification, they share a commonality with the younger African American recipients: their gender. All women, disregarding their race, succumb to male hegemony within societal structure.

Race as a Determinant

Conversations of race are juxtaposed with historical, social, cultural, political and economic perceptions, creating complicated interpretations. Some argue that *nigger* sustains the entwined ideas of white supremacy and black inferiority; while others believe that it can be used with positive or neutral meanings, ignoring racial associations. Some critics argue that African Americans are the only ethnic group entitled to use the N-word. Others contend everyone, including Caucasians, can use the term as long as the context of its use is clear and appropriate to the situation. Lastly, some want to terminate and eradicate the N-word, believing it will always be captive to its historical and derogatory context. This perspective argues that no race should be allowed to utilize the N-word. The social classification of race correlates with the dynamism of *nigger*, revealing the "double-consciousness" of white hegemonic society.

The relationship between race and *nigger* was the most conversed and obtrusive topic in Focus Group One and Two. The racial composition of the research sample was 66.7%

Caucasian, 25 % African American and 8.3% Latino (Benfield 2008). The most obvious debate

centralized around the ownership of the term. Participants had individual opinions about what

race could use *nigger* and why they were allowed to use it at their own discretion. Three different

perspectives were expressed, mirroring the academic research presented in the literature review.

Firstly, some participants argued that African Americans are the only ethnic group

entitled to own and utilize the N-word. Jackie believes African Americans are allowed to use the

term,

> I think the N-word is something we (the black community) cannot joke about, but it is a slang word. You don't call a white person, you call a black person that. I think you can use the word in the black community, not outside. The "-er" is just slavery. That's bringing us down, that's derogatory. (Appendix 22)

Due to the socio-historical context of *nigger*, some believe they have gained the right to use the

word. Professor Todd Boyd argues that African Americans "have chosen to adopt a nuance form

of the word as a vital aspect of their own cultural identity" (Kennedy 2000:90). Dan, agrees with

Jackie, believing African Americans have historically earned entitlement of the term,

> I think, from my knowledge, black people call themselves that…They negate the negative connotation of the word. Not that anyone is forgetting about the past, but they are trying to strip the word of its past roots… Personally, I just feel awkward using it, but when black people say it, it doesn't bother or upset me. If they don't feel offended by using it, then its fine for me. (Appendix 9)

This grappling of *nigger* is perpetual and pervasive, creating a competitive struggle. Some

African Americans maintain they use *nigger*, not in subjection to racial subordination, but in

triumph defiance to it (Kennedy 2000). Dan believes African Americans are entitled to the

ownership of the N-word because of their cultural connection and assumed authenticity,

> It's just like that other song by Jay-Z, "*Nigga What, Nigga Who*." I can't believe that I am going to say this, but sometimes when Dan Chapelle and Chris Rock use it, it flows very easily. It almost makes it feel like they are more real… I don't know why. It's just the way they use it. (Appendix 14)

Simultaneously, the playful use of the N-word can be self-defeating and hypocritical, creating a dubious atmosphere of acceptance. As commented by Arthur, the N-word can perpetuate internalized racism and white hegemony,

> I think that the word itself is a buy-in in the black community. Me being white, I think the buy-in to that word is internalized racism. I think it's an internalized self-hatred that has continued and perpetuated for a long time. I can't tell you how many times I have told young black folks not to use that word in front of me. I do not like hearing it. (Appendix 20)

These various interpretations demonstrate the complexity of the N-word. Although some argue that African Americans have gained ownership of the word, the continued use of *nigger* can perpetuate internal and external forms of racism and prejudice. The historical rapport of the N-word and African Americans is challenged by the widespread usage of the world in today's society. As a result, this exposure complicates the relationship of race and the N-word. Academic scholars, such a Randall Kennedy, assert everyone, including Caucasians, can use the term as long as the context of its use is clear and appropriate to the situation (Kennedy 2000). As reflected by Morgan,

> When the word was first evolving, white people didn't use it. Now, gazing into the black culture they see that it is okay to say. At first, it was something offensive to black people and then it became okay with black people, but they didn't like when white people said it. Now it is to the point where it doesn't matter who says it... More so, with the rest of cultures, *nigga* is developing and everyone is allowed to say it. (Appendix 10, 15)

Various forms of commercial media circulate the pervasive usage of the N-word. As the N-word is more widely disseminated and its complexity more widely appreciated, censoring will become more difficult (Kennedy 2000). Jackie addresses the commercialization the N-word,

> I think that having comedians go up there and use the word is making us feel better. It desensitizes us. People are just saying it to make us laugh; we are not really thinking about it right at that moment. Everybody knows what the word means, but it is used to entertain us. (Appendix 22)

Although Jackie's argument is valid, commenting on the entertainment value of the N-word, the issue of race permeates the mainstream usage of the term. This issue becomes more pertinent when the participants were asked the question "If it was a white comedian using the same material as Richard Pryor or Chris Rock, would that be funny" (Appendix 14)? Each participant verbally or physically responded "No." This response commences the discussion of the "double-consciousness" of the Caucasian identity.

As stated in Chapter Two, the focus groups were designed to specifically analyze the "double-consciousness" of the Caucasian participants, who grapple with the historical white hegemony of the United States and the belief in a genuine democracy. Of the eight Caucasian participants, 87.5% have listened to music that uses the N-word; 87.5% have watched TV that uses or references the N-word; 75% have read books that use *nigger*; and 100% have heard jokes or comic skits that use the term (Benfield 2008). Although these statistics cannot be generalized, the participants are continuously exposed and receptive to the N-word, through these various forms of media; conversely, they simultaneously contradict the acceptance of the word.

Dan, one of the Caucasian participants, seemed aware of his conflicting identities. As Dan recalls, "For me, personally, I have never used it in conversation. I use it when repeating what someone said, singing a song or repeating a joke I heard on TV… It's never something I have self-generated, that is my thought" (Appendix 11). In this statement, Dan openly admits his use of the N-word. His usage claims to be innocent and non-derogatory. Later in the discussion, he contradicts himself,

> Obviously it makes more sense when black people say it to each other. I don't think there is as much meaning for white people. White people lack the cultural connection. I truly feel like it is something unique to the black community. I think the word has lost its value because people are willing to use it on each other. I'm not going to use it. (Appendix 15)

This contradiction demonstrates that Dan, as a Caucasian male, is confused and juxtaposed by racial identity. He struggles with his innate hegemony, wanting to believe in a genuine democracy of racial equality. Although Dan reflects that "white people lack the cultural connection" and "I'm not going to use it," he admits earlier "I use it when repeating what someone said, singing a song or repeating a joke I heard on TV" (Appendix 11,16). Dan, as a hegemonic member of the dominant group, is jaded by his conflicting identities as a Caucasian American. Although he believes Caucasians should not use the N-word, he succumbs to the pervasive connotations of the N-word. Dan's opinion of the N-word emphasizes the "double consciousness" of the Caucasian racial identity.

As stated, African Americans and Latinos were also represented in the sample; yet, the majority of the focus group participants were Caucasians. The racial composition of the focus groups affected the participant's opinions and ideologies of the N-word. The Caucasian participants obtrusively vocalized their opinions, overriding the ideas of the minority group members. This outcome can be attributed to individual personalities, but overall, the four minority participants were, on average, quiet and less argumentative. Importantly, one must consider the intersectional social classifications of these participants. 100% of the ethnic minority participants were females, under the age of twenty-five, who make less than $50,000 a year (Benfield 2008). According to the theory of intersectionality, three social vectors oppressed these four participants: their age, class and gender. As exemplified, implications of the conflict theory were lucid in this study. Since the majority of the participants were Caucasian, mirroring mainstream society, their beliefs, ideas and opinions about the N-word dominated the discussion, curtailing the opinions and values of the minorities. The discourse of race is highlighted by the symbolic value of the N-word.

According to George Ritzer, people can modify the meanings and symbols they use in action and interaction, based on their interpretation of the situation; therefore, people can adapt and change the connotation of the N-word, depending on the people they are with, the subject of the conversation and the situational interaction (Ritzer 2006). Dan contends, " I have heard people say, who aren't black, 'Did you see that *nigger* come in here?' In this situation it is not used as a term of endearment. It wasn't their friend. I still think that there are different connotations depending on different situation" (Appendix 9). Ritzer's paradigm mirrors DuBois theory of "double-consciousness" and the confliction of identities. People can make these different modifications because of their ability to interact with themselves, which allows them to examine relative advantages and disadvantages of the situational interaction.

Since the majority of the participants were Caucasian, discussing a racially charged topic in a racially integrated setting, they adapted to their respective environment. Ironically, as the majority, the Caucasian participants attempted to avoid controversial topics and ideas. Overall, the Caucasian participants were affected by Charles Horton Cooley's theory of "Looking Glass Self." According to this theory, the Caucasian participants imagined how they appeared in the group setting and the judgment catalyzed by that appearance. In order to conform to the standards of the group, they developed their self-image through the judgment of others. If they said something mildly offensive, they immediately revoked their comment and attempted to amend the impact. They were cautious of the minority judgments and the effect of their internal and external image. DuBois' theory of "double-consciousness" and Cooley's "Looking Glass Self" exhibit the complexities of racial affiliation and the connotations of the N-word. Race is a determinant of the usage and acceptance of *nigger;* yet, its implications do not negate the influence of age, gender and socioeconomic affiliation.

The Ambiguity of *Nigger* vs. *Nigga*

During the commencement of the twentieth century, the N-word began to evolve into "politically correct" epithets, such as "black" and "negro" (Abolish the N-Word). With the creation of different racial labels, *nigger* becomes a derogatory racial slur. The emergence of the 1920s ignited the Harlem Renaissance and a "new" connotation of the N-word. Along with the increased neutral usage of the N-word, African Americans started using it to refer to themselves, taking the "–er" off of the word and adding an "a," *nigga* (Abolish the N-Word). Although *nigger* and *nigga* were used in Black communities and ubiquitous in popular speech and culture, it was pejorative, depending on social circles and classes. The dichotomy between *nigger* and *nigga* is perpetual and pervasive, affecting cultural trends today. How can the manipulation of two letters change the meaning of a word?

Media continually grapples with the *nigger* and *nigga*, creating autonomous and collective connotations. As exemplified by the results of this study, the social classification of age is an important variable to exclusively analyze when discussing *nigger* vs. *nigga*. This result can be attributed to younger generations continuous exposure to dynamic forms of media, including comic routines and hip-hop songs. Elyse reflects,

> I don't necessarily hear the word *nigger*, but I heard, 'Oh that's my *nigga.*' With the '-a'… If you ask someone, in school or around the streets, if they know the difference between *nigger* and *nigga*, they would probably say that *nigger* is a racial thing, but *nigga* means 'my friend, my homie.' The word is used differently. I hear it in school, on TV and in a lot of places. (Appendix 8).

Dan expands this analysis, denoting that the "-er" spelling ignites a racially derogatory connotation, while the "-a" promotes a neutral or positive meaning, "I think when you hear it, the word *nigger*, makes your feel uncomfortable. No matter how it is used, it sounds offensive. But it you add the "-a" at the end of the word, it obviously comes off as a more friendly, cool term of

endearment" (Appendix 8). Margot agrees with Elyse and Dan, believing *nigger* has a racial

connotation, "You know what it means, as far as the '-er.' I hear it everywhere. It's in rap songs;

it's on TV. It's common. I don't think twice about it with the '-a.' If I ever heard some one use

the '-er' I would be taken aback" (Appendix 9). An analysis of this exposes Margot's "double-

consciousness" as a Caucasian individual. She rebels *nigger* as a racially derogatory word, while

simultaneously accepting its dualistic connotation. She admits using and hearing *nigga* without

contemplation; yet she is offended by the spelling of *nigger*. Margot wants to believe in a

racially equal society, but is plagued by her innate white hegemony.

As the facilitator, I asked, "Even though one word comes directly from the other, they are

different words with totally separate meanings" (Appendix 9)? 66.7% of the participants, in

Focus Group One, responded "Yes" (Benfield 2008). Dan comments,

> I think the word ending in an '-a' s a different word. Obviously it comes from the
> derogatory word, but it doesn't have any connection, besides the spelling…the '-er'
> makes it a derogatory term; the '-a' is culturally accepted. They are still both used"
> (Appendix 9,13).

Morgan reflects,

> If I hear someone use the word with the "-er" it would catch my eye. It would be an
> awkward moment. But if someone said it with the "-a" it really doesn't mean anything.
> When you said, "Should we feel the same way about *nigga* because it evolved from the
> other word?" There are a lot of words that evolved from another word. Words get broken
> down into smaller words. It's not just with this situation. (Appendix 9)

The majority of the older participants were not aware of the dualistic spellings and connotations

of the N-word. Paul was enlightened by this discussion, not understanding that the change of

spelling morphs the definition of the N-word,

> "The '-a' word you use with each other the acceptable word, but the '-er' is unacceptable
> for anybody to use. Okay, that makes sense… I think that is has to do with the '-a'
> because the '-er' isn't even welcomed or accepted in the black community no matter how
> you are going to use it. I think that the problem is that it has morphed. I just don't see it

as being positive. No ethnic group has ever taken an ethnic slur and embraced it as a joking way to converse with each other. (Appendix 22,23)

Paul recognizes the metamorphosis of the N-word, but attributes its dualistic connotations to Black America. Previous to the focus group discourse, he was unaware the change of spelling impacted and redefined the N-word. Paul, similar to 41.7% of the participants, believes there is no difference between *nigger* and *nigga.* Contrasting, 58.3% of the participants believe that there is a difference between *nigger* and *nigga* (Benfield 2008). The dichotomy between *nigger* and *nigga* is directly reflects the sociological paradigm of symbolic interactionism.

Symbolic interactionism, contrary to macro-sociology, examines the small-scale exchange of symbols between individuals in social interaction. Human interaction is mediated by the use and interpretation of symbols and actions. From this perspective, *nigger* can be analyzed as a dynamic and fluid symbol, ebbing and flowing with cultural trends. Initially the N-word embodied a symbol of degradation, juxtaposing African Americans within Caucasian hegemonic society. With the modernity of the twentieth century, the N-word adopted a new meaning of brotherhood, friendship and solidarity, not only for African Americans, but also for numerous ethnicities. The ambiguity of *nigger* versus *nigga* embodies the changing of a societal symbol. In general, this modification of the N-word diminishes the historical value of the term. Morgan reflects,

> The word has lost its value. More so, people don't use the '-er' they use the '-a.' Looking in the dictionary, you won't find it spelled with an '-a,' you will find it with the '-er.' That's the definition you get for it. There is really no definition that defines it with an '-a.' Just the one we created, which is okay… *nigga* is developing. (Appendix 10,15)

Nigga is a socially constructed symbol. Although it is a derivative of *nigger*, it has encompassed its own social meaning within society. Dan expands on this concept, "There are always going to be people that use the word. It is never going to go away. I think that what will happen is that

over time it will lose more and more of its value. It will still be part of our vocabulary"

(Appendix 14). Contrasting the opinions of Dan and Morgan, the older cohorts represented in the

focus groups, did not believe that *nigga* was autonomous from *nigger*; rather, they denoted that

the collective value of the word can never escape its historical roots. As expressed by Lauren,

> I personally find it offensive, no matter what. And I listen to the rap music with my children and let them know what's going on. I personally find it offensive and I challenge my own children and their friends to find better words to express that. Enrich your vocabulary, find something else, and use a new word. Find something else that is less offensive and endearing that will put a smile on people's faces. For me personally, it is a slap in the face. But it is interesting listening to the comments about how you people see it, which is quite a different impression. (Appendix10)

The theory of intersectionality intervenes with the symbolic value of the N-word. Race, gender,

socioeconomic class and age intersect and impact notions of *nigger* and *nigga.*

The Future

Historically, *nigger* defined, limited and mocked African Americans. As for the future,

the N-word is still active, adapting to different connotations. Of the participants, 75% believe

that the N-word cannot be rehabilitated or changed into a neutral or positive word (Benfield

2008). As argued by Aaron,

> I think there is an awful lot of discrimination out there, but we are not teaching and learning about it. We don't understand where the history came from. It's cliché to say, but we are going to repeat ourselves. If we are not careful, we will repeat ourselves. Anytime we have a conversation like this, it is very important to read the word in its original text and understand its content…I have a huge problem telling people what they can and can't say…I will teach my children not to use the word because I was raised that way. (Appendix 16)

Others argue that the N-word is too deeply engraved into our psyche to disappear. Elyse reflects,

"That word, I think it is always going to be here. No matter what…The only way it is going to go

is if everyone is one hundred percent. The rappers, everybody. I don't know if we are ever going

to get that" (Appendix 14,16). Jackie agrees with Elyse, "It think there is a future behind it. I think it is always going to be around. No matter how many time you say it, you always know what that word means and the history behind it" (Appendix 23). As explicated by these predictive statements, Americans for many generations will continue to wrestle with the N-word and its various connotations. Can *nigger* be rehabilitated and transposed into anything other than a racial epithet? Only time will tell

CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusion

The purpose of this study is to examine the usage of the N-word as an indication toward comprehending the complexity of stratification in American community settings. Many argue that the N-word, itself, is not an issue; instead it is the social, historical and political racism associated with it. Overall, the N word is alive and mobile, fluid and engraved in the American psyche, as a symbol. To qualitatively analyze the complexity of stratification, two autonomous focus groups were conducted. Twelve participants were personally selected, due to their gender, race, age and socioeconomic class. The focus groups provided interesting and dynamic results, complementing the sociological theories of DuBois' "double-consciousness," intersectionality and conflict theory. In addition, aspects of symbolic interactionism and feminism permeated the results, exposing a new and alternative dimension to my initial research design. The transcriptions and generic survey provided qualitative and quantitative data, evaluating how the N-word marks social and cultural identity constructs.

In conclusion, the usage of the N-word is not an indication toward comprehending the complexity of stratification in American community settings. Although this study has exposed the layering of social classification, one cannot determine or directly analyze the correlative relationship between social classifications and the acceptance, perseverance or rehabilitation of the N-word. Firstly, vectors of race, gender, socioeconomic class and age intersect, complicating the stratification of American community settings; therefore, social affiliations cannot be

exclusively or autonomously analyzed. Opinions of the N-word are formulated by the juxtaposition of these classifications. This finding directly emulates the theories of Hill Collins and Morgan. Naturalized hierarchies of gender and age are interwoven with corresponding racial hierarchies. Innate hierarchies create vectors of oppression and privilege; the social position and privilege of one group catalyzes the oppression of the other. Secondly, the racial construction of the focus groups affected the participant's opinions and ideologies of the N-word. Since the majority of the participants were Caucasian, mirroring mainstream society, their beliefs, ideas and opinions about the N-word dominated the discussion, curtailing the opinions and values of the minorities. The Caucasian participants experienced a "double-consciousness," grappling with the connotations of the N-word and the belief in a genuine, racially equal society. Paralleling the research of academic scholars, the focus group discourses exposed the double racial life of Caucasians, "one colorblind and one race conscious" (Jones 1992:190). Simultaneously, the African American participants confronted their conflicting racial identities. As young African American females, making under $50,000 dollars a year, they were juxtaposed by the intersection of their race, gender and social class. As reflected by DuBois, these participants wrestled with their American and ethnic identity, assimilating to mainstream cultural values and embracing the perspectives of hegemonic society. The "double-consciousness" of the participants was highlighted by the small-scale exchanges. Examined through the sociological lens of Ritzer's integrated sociological paradigm, the participants, in this small group setting, modified the meanings of the N-word, based on the environment and their interpretation of the situation.

The complexity of stratification in American community settings cannot be understood by the usage, preservation or acceptance of *nigger*. Although the various connotations and

usages of the N-word can affect social stratification, *nigger* cannot be considered an indication

rather, it can provide various insights into the social construction of the term. As exemplified by

DuBois' "double-consciousness" and the ambiguity of *nigger* and *nigga*, the fluidity and

pliability of the N-word is dynamic, conforming to individuals and situations. The transcriptions

of the focus groups and the generic survey statistics contribute to fields of sociology, Africana

and cultural studies, and women and gender studies. Although these research tools are

specialized to my design and qualifications, they expose a "new dimension" of the N-word, as an

interchangeable symbol in society. This study expels the normative and linear views of the N-

word, demonstrating that race is not the sole determinant of the usage, preservation and

acceptance of the N-word. Variables of gender, race, age and socioeconomic class intersect,

creating diverging opinions and ideas of *nigger*. The N-word is neither direct nor simplistic; it is

a complex and volatile social construct.

Although this study qualitatively analyzes twelve individuals and their views of the N-

word, the debate and controversy permeates numerous sectors of society (Benfield 2008). The

findings of this study do not have blatant practical or political implications, however, they can be

generally applied to different social facets. The opinions and views of the participants can be

used to further evaluate ongoing arguments of literature and censoring. Monumental pieces of

literature such as Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and Wilson's *Fences*

are littered with the N-word; yet, they taught and read in educational institutions. Some argue

that these works of literature are safely locked in their historical context and that the expurgation

of the word would create building blocks for prejudice and discrimination. Others believe that

the word should be eradicated from the text or the entire books removed from the curriculum.

Although this idea seems to directly address the problem, removals of the N-word from historical

literature will "whitewash" our American history, creating a pseudo past of racial equality. My research is significant because it has approached a public and taboo topic, attempting to comprehend the N-word as an indication towards comprehending the complexity of society. Although my research and findings are specific to my sample and design, the transcriptions and survey results can be used to support or refute the continuing debates surrounding the N-word.

I researched, designed and conducted my study to the best of my ability, yet as experienced by all social scientists, my work has limitations. As mentioned in Chapter Two, the participants of the focus groups were not randomly selected from the Norwalk population; I knew each on either a personal or formal level. Unlike the majority of ethnographic sociological research, I decided to select my own participants to artificially create an environment of discourse. There are penalties and benefits for this kind of selection. Firstly, the sample, represented in the focus groups, does not wholly represent the population of Norwalk, Connecticut; therefore, the findings gathered from the focus groups cannot be generalized on a local, state or national level. Secondly, as the facilitator, I knew each participant. The honesty and sincerity of the participants could have been negatively affected by our rapport. The benefit of selecting my own participants for the discussion allowed me to create a specialized sample. Thirdly, the racial construction of the focus groups could be considered a limitation. Although they were created to address the "double-consciousness" of the Caucasian participants, the minority participants were not able to voice their opinions to their maximum capacity. Fourthly, the availability of the participants was affected by the advent of the holiday season. Three of the invited participants cancelled last minute, diminishing my sample to twelve participants. These four limitations impacted this study, yet they did not negatively disturb or trivialize the results.

Based on my conclusions and findings, future research should attempt to isolate social classifications, to individually examine if the N-word can be used to comprehend the complexity of stratification. Due to time constraints, my research was unable to exclusively analyze race, gender, age and social class. It would be insightful to isolate these variables into separate focus groups. Sub-studies could diverge from my generalized study. For example, it would be interesting for a social scientist to analyze the relationship of race and class. A focus group could be constructed with a sample of African Americans from different socioeconomic classes. With the variable of race isolated, one could examine how the Two Nations of Black America view the N-word. Unfortunately, the theory of intersectionality will always pervade sociological examinations of social affiliations. Although specialized focus groups could contribute to the field of sociology, it would still succumb to various limitations. On a macro level, I hope this study motivates social scientists to explore other facets of language, specifically the word queer. Queer, similar to *nigger*, has various connotations, ebbing and flowing with the cultural tides of the twentieth century. Recently, the word queer has lost is homosexual sting with mainstream culture. In addition, the words queer and gay have always had other meanings that have no correlation with sexual identity. *Nigger*, in stark contrast, has always and will always be tethered to notions of racial inferiority. Although the N-word and queer are different, it would be interesting to compare their histories, implications and affects on the American psyche.

As we approach a "new" era, led by the Obama Administration, the United States still grapples with and succumbs to racism. We have not yet escaped our historical past, as exemplified by the continuation of the racial "double-consciousness." The establishment of Black History Month, the Harlem Renaissance, the Civil Rights Movement and the commercialization of hip-hop have exposed an alternative, positive connotation of the N-word;

yet, *nigger* is still associated with its historical roots. Most people in this generation do not realize the power and history that couples with *nigger*. Currently, there are supporters on both sides of the argument; some want to expunge the term, while others support its rehabilitation. Ironically, the N-word is not the problem; instead it is the external and internal racism associated with it. On February 1st, 2009, the New York Post published a cartoon, comparing President Obama to a chimpanzee. According to Al Sharpton's statement,

> The cartoon in today's New York Post is troubling at best, given the racist attacks throughout history that have made African-Americans synonymous with monkeys. One has to question whether the cartoonist is making a less than casual inference to this form of racism when, in the cartoon, the police say after shooting a chimpanzee, "Now they will have to find someone else to write the stimulus bill." Being that the first legislative victory of President Barack Obama and has become synonymous with him it is not a reach to wonder whether the Post cartoonist was inferring that a monkey wrote it? Given that the New York Post cartoonist has come under heavy fire in the past for racially tinged cartoons, one cannot ignore that history when looking at this morning's cartoon. (Sharpton 2009)

This current event is an example of racism perpetually and pervasively affecting our present-day society. Organizations, such as Abolish the N-Word, are dedicated to expunging racism and the N-word from modern language. Using a billboard effect of t-shirts, the Internet and a contract, Abolish the N-word challenges the usage, preservation and acceptance of *nigger*. As written on the website,

> The dependency of this word as a greeting, to complete sentences and start conversations is a total disregard for every movement that gave us the many freedoms we enjoy today. This site is our answer to a call to duty. We now challenge you to make a personal commitment and join us in the movement to abolish the N-word.
> (Abolish the N-Word)

Although the member's racial affiliation, gender and socioeconomic status are not specified, they are of an older cohort, affected by the intersection of cultural and social attitudes of the twentieth century.

As reflected by Bryant Gumbel, the N-word is a demon of regularity, "We decry the use, yet it is sung" (Williams 2004). We cannot escape this epic struggle until we adjust our attitude and approach. As long as the N-word is fluid and engraved in the American social and cultural psyche, we cannot move towards a racially equal society. I hope and dream that one day we will escape this enigma, expunging the N-word from our practiced language. *Nigger* does not belong to this generation and should be confined to the fetid white supremacy of the past.

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Appendix

You are Cordially Invited to Participate
in Annie Benfield's:

Research Focus Group

December 4th or 11th 2008

7:00 PM

Norwalk Public Library (Belden Ave.)

Conference Room

Please RSVP: (203) 216-7034

Requires an hour of discussion

Participants will be compensated

THESIS SURVEY

1.   **Circle your sex:**   Male   Female

2.   **Circle your age group:**   18-24   25-44   45-64   65- 84

3.   **Circle your ethnicity:**   Asian   African American   White

Latino   Native American   Other

4.   **Circle your income bracket:**

$ 50,000 or less $ 50,000 or more $ 100,000 or more

5.   **How would you describe your town or city?**

Urban   Suburban   Rural

6.   **How often do you use the word *nigger*?**

Always   Sometimes   Rarely   Never

7.   **How often do you hear the word *nigger*?**

Always   Sometimes   Rarely   Never

8.   **Where do you hear it being used?**

Home   School   Social Events   Work

9. **Which ethnicity uses the N-word the most?**

      Asian   African American   Caucasian

      Latino   Native American   Other

10. **Do you hear young black men use *nigger*?**

      Yes   No

11. **Do you hear women use the N-word*?***

      Yes   No

12. **Do younger generations use the N-word more than older generations?**

      Yes   No

13. **Do you think word *nigger* is offensive?**

      Yes   No

14. **Instead of using the euphemism the "N-word", does spelling out *nigger* offend you?**

      Yes   No

15. **How does the word *nigger* make you feel?**

      Comfortable   Neutral   Uncomfortable

16.   **Is there a difference between *nigger* and *nigga*?**

>   Yes   No

17.   **Have you listened to music that uses the N-word?**

>   Yes   No

18.   **Have you watched television shows that use or reference the word *nigger?***

>   Yes   No

19.   **Have you read books that use the N-word?**

>   Yes   No

20.   **Have you heard jokes or comedians that use the word *nigger?***

>   Yes   No

21.   **Do these forms of media affect your opinions of the word *nigger/nigga*? If so, how and why?**

_____

_____

_____

_____

22.   **Do you think *nigger* can be rehabilitated or changed into a neutral or positive word?**

>   Yes   No

Facilitator Outline: Focus Groups

Norwalk Public Library
1 Belden Ave
Norwalk, CT 06850
(203) 899-2780

- Introductions

    o Introduce Facilitator and Participants (Nametags)

    o Explain the significance of focus group

    o Briefly explain subject, research and anticipated outcomes

    o Inform the participants that they will be recorded

    o Explain the role of the facilitator

- Questions

    o Is anyone offended if I interchange the word *nigger* with its euphemism the N-word?

    o To start conversation, let's commence with a commonality. How would you describe Norwalk? Do you think it is homogenous or heterogeneous?

    o Does anyone want to share a story of how they first heard the N-word? Where were you? How old were you? Did you understand its meaning?

    o How often do you use the word *nigger?* Why or why not?

    o How does the N-word make you feel?

    o Do you think the N-word is offensive? Why?

    o Is there a difference between *nigger* and *nigga?* Does the spelling change it's meaning?

    o Do you listen to music, watch television shows, read books or hear jokes that use *nigger/nigga?* Do you think they are entertaining? Why or why not?

    o Do these forms of media affect your opinions of the word *nigger/nigga*?

    o Do you think *nigger* can be rehabilitated or changed into a neutral or positive word?

Thesis Focus Group 1
December 4th, 2008, 7:00PM
Norwalk Public Library, Norwalk Connecticut

Facilitator: Annie Benfield

Participants: Morgan
                     Elyse
                     Dan
                     Margot
                     Aaron
                     Lauren

Annie: For ethical reasons, does everyone understand that this discussion will be recorded for transcription purposes?

(Participants respond with head nods)

Annie: Is anyone offended if, during this conversation, we use the word *nigger*, *nigga*, and the euphemism the N-word?

(Participants respond no)

Annie: First guided question. It's always easier to start with a commonality. We all are connected to Norwalk, either through family, school or work. We all know something about Norwalk. How would you describe this city? Is it a homogenous or heterogeneous community? What kind of social factors impact Norwalk?

(Moments later)

Aaron: Anyone can go?

Annie: This is a free conversation. No one has to raise their hands. We not going to go around in a circle and make everyone talk. This is a fluid discussion.

Aaron: My experience is very much different. Norwalk is very much associated through neighborhoods. I wouldn't categorize the city as homogenous because there are a lot of different types of people represented in this community. At the same time, I wouldn't argue that it is heterogeneous because the neighborhoods, in a large part, are defined by the race that inhabits them. It is difficult to define Norwalk by either of these terms because it falls in the middle.

Dan: I think that an important idea for me is the perspective of our neighboring houses. Compared to greater Fairfield County, where everyone shares a similar background, Norwalk is

diverse. We have some people who are extremely wealthy, living by the beach and you have housing projects less than a mile away. But at the same time, I think compared to the rest of the world and the rest of the country we are still in Connecticut and Fairfield County. I think that we are the handles of the melting pot.

Annie: Any other thoughts or ideas?

Morgan: Going along with that, in New York, everyone gets along and lives together. Here, where you live is where you stay. There are a lot of people who have never left Norwalk. Where you grow up and live is usually where you stay.

Annie: Now we are going to plunge into the topic of this focus group. Does anyone want to share a story about the first time they heard or recognized the word *nigger*? Where were you, how old were you and how did this impact your life? Does anyone have a first reference of the word?

Margot: I wouldn't say a specific time, but I remember Norwalk High School. When I attended Norwalk High, it was extremely diverse. As soon as you walked the halls you heard it said everywhere. It was being thrown around as a friend reference. It wasn't like, "I'm judging you or I'm a racist." It was a reference to companionship. That was the first time that I honestly heard the word. First, I remember being afraid of the word, but then everyone told me it was okay. It was how you referred to a friend. So, I would say high school.

Morgan: Yeah, in Norwalk High School the word lost its value. One day everything is going to lose its value. Like the dollar. It's the same thing. Back then, it was a racial term, but now its not. It's a friendship term. It doesn't have a negative meaning anymore. If someone asked me what I really mean when I use the word, I would tell him or her that it's seriously not about race, only about friendship.

Annie: So, as the word has changed throughout history, it's meaning has also changed?

Margot: Um hum.

Lauren: Absolutely. The first time I heard it I was five, in Brooklyn, New York. My mother and I went into King Cullen Super Market. We were standing online to check out and a black man was in front of us. When he approached the register, the cashier said he had to go in the other line. She said that she couldn't help him because he was a *nigger*. That was the first time I heard it. This was in the late 1950s, so it had a very different meaning. It had a very negative connotation then.

Dan: Really in Brooklyn?

Lauren: Yup, Brooklyn New York. That's the first time I heard it. It was not a nice thing to say. Very racially derogatory.

Morgan: That's why this generation now, that's growing, we take it as "Oh its nothing." It really doesn't have any meaning to it. Because growing up, we didn't experience the racial term, as our parents did. They experienced it when it had racial meaning. They take it offensively in different ways. When they were growing up, that's what it meant. But for us, we don't think of it as racial; we just brush it off.

Annie: Any other stories?

Aaron: The first time I heard the term was in high school. I went to school in New Haven, a city similar to Norwalk. I heard it in rap music. That's when I first recognized that some people use the word in a positive way. The gangster rap of the 1990s.

Annie: Does anyone know the specific historical context of the N-word? Where does it come from? Can anyone recount the story of how the word has ebbed and flowed with cultural trends?

Dan: Doesn't it mean dark or something about a dark person?

Annie: Well, the Latin root stands for black.

Aaron: Didn't the word come from Nigeria?

Annie: I haven't found any evidence of that in my research. I was just wondering if anyone knew the specific history of the word and if it affected your interpretation.

(Participants shake their heads "No")

Annie: So, how often do you hear the word *nigger*? Where do you hear it? At social events, work, media, songs? If you don't hear it often, where have you heard it?

Elyse: I don't necessarily hear the word *nigger*, but I hear, "Oh, that's my *nigga*." With the "-a."

Margot: Never with the "-er". I would never say it with the "-er."

Elyse: If you ask someone, in school or around the streets, if they know the difference between *nigger* and *nigga,* they would probably say that *nigger* is a racial thing, but *nigga* means "my friend, my homie." The word is used differently. I hear it in school, on TV and in a lot of places.

Margot: There is a difference with the spelling of the word.

Dan: I think when you hear the word *nigger*, it makes you uncomfortable. No matter how it is used, it sounds offensive. But, if you add the "a" at the end of the word, it obviously comes off as a more friendly, cool term of endearment. I think, from my knowledge, black people call themselves that or friends call each other the word. They negate the negative connotation of the word. Not that anyone is forgetting about the past, but they are trying to strip the word of its past roots. I think the problem is that there is a division within the black community about the word. I know Bill Cosby doesn't like for black people to use it, even with the "-a". He thinks it would be

better if the word disappeared from our everyday language. He thinks that it can never be a positive word because it came from a negative source. As a white person, I hear white people say it sometimes, boys say, "That's my *nigga*," too. They use it the same way, not meaning, "That's my black friend." Personally, I just feel awkward using it, but when black people say it, it doesn't bother or upset me. If they don't feel offended by using it, then its fine for me.

Morgan: Now, it's grown into a word that just flows. Like somebody will just come around and be like, "What's up my *nigga*?" It doesn't mean anything. That's how we were raised and brought up. As far as back when the word meant something negative, it wouldn't hear "That's my *nigga*." It didn't flow, it was awkward. The word, nowadays, just doesn't mean the same thing at all. You can basically say that the word is two different words.

Annie: Even though, one word comes directly from the other, they are still different words with totally separate meanings?

Morgan: Yeah.

Margot: I really think that if I was out, in terms of me saying one or heard the other, I would be like "whoa." You know what I mean, as far as the "-er." I hear it everywhere. It's in rap songs, it's on TV, it's just common. I don't think twice about it with the "-a". If I ever heard someone use the "-er" I would be taken aback.

Morgan: If I hear someone use the word with the "-er" it would catch my eye. It would be an awkward moment. But if someone said it with the "-a" it really doesn't mean anything. When you said, "Should we feel the same way about *nigga* because it evolved from the other word?" There are a lot of words that evolved from another word. Words get broken down into smaller words. It's not just with this situation.

Dan: From my experience now, when I hear the word, if I ever hear it said, ending with an "-er," it would be a derogatory word from a white person. If it ends with an "-a" it most likely comes from a black person. The "-er" makes it a derogatory term; the "-a" is culturally accepted. They are both still used.

Annie: Do you think solidarity of the word is confined to the racial binary?

Dan: I think that the original term still holds it's meaning and can still be used to bring people down.

Morgan: It's the way you say it.

Dan: I have heard people, who aren't black; say "Did you see that *nigger* come in here?" In this situation it is not used as a term of endearment. It wasn't their friend. I still think that there are different connotations, depending on different situations.

Lauren: In my experience, it's a very negative term. It's been very negative right from the beginning and it always has had a negative connotation. Going back to the 1920s, it was used

talk about black people who worked on the farms. It was also used to degrade people who did menial labor and things. It's always had a negative connotation. It was a word that was never allowed in my house. Growing up as a child, it wasn't allowed amongst my friends. Our parents refused to buy into it. We had friends of all colors and all races. What I have seen happen, over the years, is that the term *nigger* was used in music, when hip-hop started. That quickly went from *nigger* to *nigga*. Any then it became more highly used and more widely accepted. Somebody of my age and my bracket, I find that very offensive, too. There are plenty of other words to use. There are plenty of other things people can say to friends that are endearing to them. When I hear that, it makes me sad that people can't find something better to latch onto. Like homogenous, that became *homie*. Okay, that's fine because it doesn't have a negative connotation to start with. I personally find it offensive, no matter what. And I listen to the rap music with my children and let them know what's going on. I personally find it offensive and I challenge my own children and their friends to find better words to express that. Enrich your vocabulary, find something else, use a new word. Find something else that is less offensive and endearing that will put a smile on people's faces. For me personally, it is a slap in the face. But it is interesting listening to the comments about how you people see it, which is quite a different impression.

Dan: I think a big thing to do with it is probably the experiences you had and I think, obviously, if you talk to older African American people they probably still don't like to use that word. I think that it is a younger movement. When we first heard the word it didn't have the same negative connotation as it used to. When it was introduced to you it was this horrible thing, but as long as we know the word it has adapted its second meaning.

Aaron: If I am remembering correctly, back when I was in high school, it wasn't just widely used. It was used to refer to a certain type of black person. And it wasn't necessarily the derogatory way, but even amongst the black community, where I went to school, it was used. I feel like the kids that wanted to be tough, were more from the streets and of poorer backgrounds. Those kids either wanted to be referred to in that way or referred to each other in that terminology. Black kids who didn't have that background weren't referred to in that way. In fact, that was a distinction. It wasn't that they wanted or didn't want to be called by that term, but it actually had another meaning. It had another meaning that is closer to the glorifications of thug life. It refers to someone who is in the 'in-crowd,' more real and authentic. Somehow, because they were poor or disadvantaged, it made them more real and they encompassed the word. It allowed them to be tough and show where they have come from. It wasn't used widely and it wasn't used by anyone in an upper socioeconomic group, whether they are white or black. Maybe that was the time when it was changing. But it definitely used to refer to any black person and a white person would never say that, even if they were trying to use it in a friendly manner.

Morgan: When the word was first evolving, white people didn't use it. Now, gazing into the black culture they see that it is okay to say. At first, it was something offensive to black people and then it became okay with black people, but they didn't like when white people said it. Now it is to the point where it doesn't matter who says it. The word has lost its value. More so, people don't use the "-er" they use the "-a." Looking in the dictionary, you won't find it spelled with an "-a," you will find it with the "-er." That's the definition you get for it. There is really no definition that defines it with an "-a." Just the one we created, which is okay.

Annie: So do you think that because of the neutral or almost positive meaning of the N-word, that anyone can use it? Disregarding their race?

Elyse: Yeah, it's the way you say it.

Annie: This is a more personal question, but I hope everyone can answer it honestly. If you use the word, how often and why do you say it?

Dan: For me, personally, I have never used it in conversation. I use it when repeating what someone else said, singing a song or repeating a joke I heard on TV. It's never something I have self-generated, that is my thought.

Margot: If I use it, in conversation, it's the same thing like "Oh that's my friend." Anybody that knows me knows that's how I am. I try to be with everything. I would never use the word, thinking black, white, purple and blue. I would never ever use it like that. I use it as far as comradely. If anyone ever used it in the other way, I would cringe. If anyone used it with the "-er."

Aaron: I grew up in a family that was very civil rights oriented. I wouldn't even dare to think the word. It would be abhorrence to my family and to my friends.

Margot: It is also about your age. We went to Norwalk High School, where you heard it around the hallways. That's what you said. That's how you would refer to friends a lot of the time. Whatever color you are, we are all in the same boat. You have white, Spanish, black, Indian, everything. We are all the same. So I never thought of it like that.

Morgan: I don't latch onto the word too much, but I use it here and there. Growing up, I never heard it being used as harmful. I never experienced that; therefore, the only experience I have is with it as a neutral word. So when I do use it or when I do hear it, that's how I take it.

Annie: How does the word make you feel?

Morgan: I don't have any feelings about the word. It just rolls with the conversation.

Aaron: It's like a finger on the blackboard for me. When I think about how it is being used, my jaw drops. I understand how it is used, in a non-negative way, but I am hypersensitive. My job is to investigate discrimination. I was talking to some people today, from the NAACP, and we were talking about a discrimination case. I was saying, " There is no smoking gun here, we are not going to find anything, like a document that has the N-word in it." That's the ultimate example of discrimination that you can find. It fascinates me that the word can be turned around and not have that connotation.

Margot: Ultimately, it comes down to the different generations. If you really think about it…

Lauren: No, I'll tell you what.

Margot: See, you are older.

Lauren: What year did you graduate from Norwalk High School?

Margot: 2004.

Lauren: So you have been out four years?

Margot: I just graduated college in May.

Lauren: My son graduated in 2006. He never used the N-word. He has all kinds of friends, black, Hispanic and Indian, and they don't use it either. He went to Norwalk High. He heard it people using it, but he just walked away, disgusted with them. This word has such a negative connotation. We fought so hard, when I was growing up, to not allow that to happen. For us, my generation, this is a step going backwards. I don't want to go backwards. We already fought that fight. We already had people not liking us because we were playing with black children. I don't want to see society go backwards. History is very important. You have to learn from history. I would like people to understand where that history has come from and how the word does not have a positive connotation. My grandmother was a hundred years old and every time she saw someone who was black she said, "Oh, there's a *nigger*." That's how she was raised. From the early 1900s, when white people called black people *niggers*. You can't say that anymore. She would always apologize later saying, "Oh, I'm sorry. I just remember that I am not allowed to call you *nigger*. She grew up in the early 1900s, I grew up in the 1950s, when we fought so hard to make sure that those rights were given back and not taken away. I don't want to see our country go back. I want to see it move ahead. Rap songs come on and my kids know that if there are too many N-words in it, then they have to turn it off. They know that my blood pressure goes up. At least it gets my kids to realize that this is something that really does affect me. It's interesting that it is not a problem. If I work with someone, who curses, I have very little respect for them. There are other words to use, to express emotion. I want to take everyone to a higher level and treat everyone with respect.

Annie: Specifically regarding what you just said, do you feel that the usage of this one derogatory racial slur, would digress our society? Regarding civil rights?

Lauren: I think that what happens is that it gets so watered down. It opens the door for a lot of other things.

Annie: Are you saying that it desensitizes people?

Lauren: It desensitizes people so much that people are going to start using other words like *kike*. Let's go back to that. That's what I am worried about. It's Pandora's box. People, my age, wonder why we are going backwards. It was terrible then, but all of a sudden, it's not. It came back with rap music.

Elyse: I still feel like a lot of people who use the word, as friendship, really don't know the history behind it. They don't have a mom or they might not have a grandmother. They don't

have a household to learn where the word came from and how hard they fought for it. They just don't see it. In school, they tell you a little bit about they history, but they really don't go deep down into it. People still don't know.

Aaron: Do they refer to white people with the same word?

Elyse: Yeah. For me, personally, you can call anyone it.

Morgan: Commonly, what you hear is "Oh, that's my *nigga*." It's not used in a derogatory way.

Margot: That's what I meant. Obviously, you (Lauren) are going to have different opinions because you and my mom were there during segregation. You had to fight for it. Now, there is no thought. We are all in the same schools together. You don't even think twice about it. When I hear it, I don't think of a black person. Unless it is used with the "-er." With the "-a" it's just a friend.

Morgan: It's more so about the generations. When you were younger, you experienced the bad use of the word. For us it is cool. We were exposed differently.

Annie: Do you think this is just an issue of generational difference or do you think that other social factors affect the meaning of the word?

Elyse: Younger people who don't like the word, know the history. But, a lot of people don't know that is was a word that black people were called.

Morgan: As you said earlier, if we use the word, other racial slurs are going to come back into use. Other racial terms are starting to come back. I'm Spanish, and a lot of people will joke around and call me the *spic*. I don't take it as an offense. All of these words are changing into different meanings. I wasn't exposed to *spic* growing up. When I first heard it, I didn't even know that it meant. My mom told me what it meant. It's nothing bad.

Dan: I think the word, ending in an "-a" is a different word. Obviously it comes from the derogatory word, but it doesn't have any connection, besides the spelling. Secondly, I think that social standing and economic class affect the word. You don't find affluent African Americans using the word. You don't see Barack Obama and his friends saying, "That's my *nigga*." I think there is this idea, and it happens in all classes and all races, that if you use the word it is cool. It means you are from the ghetto, a thug. For the most part, I think people use it as a coping mechanism. Comparable to white trash, people who live in trailer parks. More educated people of high-income brackets do not use this word. It's almost a status symbol. It is used to define your place. Barack would never use the word. He is the product of the Civil Rights Movement. But, at the same time, many rappers use the word as street credit. People want to associate with the ghetto. No one truly wants to be in the ghetto. If someone could escape those circumstances, they would. I'm just torn. I also think that the word has a different meaning. I don't really know how I stand. I just contradicted myself. Growing up, there were two words that I would never say: the F-word and the N-word. They were always words that would sting your ears. Now, I have become more accustomed to them. I have a lot of black friends. When we are playing

basketball, it is used as a term of endearment. Men seem to use it more than girls. Black boys especially. I don't think girls use it nearly as much as boys. I understand that we don't want to reverse progress and history. This is a bit confusing.

Elyse: The only way it is going to go is if everyone if 100%. The rappers, everybody. I don't know if we are ever going to get that.

Dan: I don't know either. Even within the black community. Dan Chapelle loves to use it. He puts a positive spin on it. When he had his show, he had a skit with a white family with the last name *Niggar*. He made fun of everything. The name still had a negative meaning, but it was used in a funny way. I don't think that you are ever going to get unification to eliminate the word. There are always going to be people that use the word. It is never going to go away. I think that what will happen is that over time it will lose more and more of its value. It will still be part of our vocabulary.

Morgan: We all go to school now. Everyone is learning about it and going through it. I don't think we will ever go back and repeat history. We do use the word, with an "-a." We do also understand and know the meaning with the "-er". We understand how bad and hurtful it was. I don't think we are going to go back and repeat history. It's not an issue. The word is just going to stay with the "-a." I don't think it will ever go back and be used as a racial term.

Annie: So now that we started talking about media, how do shows, books, and comedians like Dan Chapelle and Chris Rock affect the usage of the N-word? Do you listen to these forms of media and how do they affect your interpretation?

Morgan: It just flows.

Margot: T.I's new CD has a song with Justin Timberlake. It has it so many times. I just happened to notice the other day how many times it was said.

Dan: It's just like that other song by Jay-Z, "*Nigga* What*, Nigga* Who." I can't believe that I am going to say this, but sometimes when Dan Chapelle and Chris Rock use it, it flows very easily. It almost makes it feel like they are more real.

Annie: Do you think it is a matter of authenticity?

Dan: Kind of, and I don't know why. It's just the way they use it.

Annie: If it was a white comedian using the same material as Richard Pryor or Chris Rock, would that be funny?

Margot, Dan, Morgan: No

Annie: So is it an issue of race?

Elyse: Yes.

Morgan: I don't know. I'm not saying that it is right for someone to sit there and dog someone. If you take it out of context, it's something different. People are still going to have their opinions one way or another. More so, with the rest of cultures, *nigga* is developing and everyone is allowed to say it.

Dan: You look at the black culture. I think black people are more inclined to hate on each other. Asian comedians make fun of Asians; Jewish comedians make fun of Jews. A lot of the material of black comedians centers on making fun of themselves. Maybe that's a cultural theme. Maybe it's a coping device. African Americans were second-class citizens for so many years.

Morgan: Talking about media, NAS' new album was set to be released as *Nigger*, but the record company wouldn't let him release it. Some people looked at it as a racial album, but it just shows his perspective on the word. Different people, different ideas.

Aaron: I think there are some communities have taken back certain words. For example, the gay community has taken back a lot of words that used to be considered derogatory. When they took them back, they transformed them into words of pride. That's not what we are seeing here. We don't want to ignore the past. That's what doesn't work for me. You can try to actively change the past, but you can't ignore it. It's not like the word queer. I have a hard time saying it, but the words *nigga* or *nigger* it doesn't ever mean pride. It's not something to be proud of.

Dan: I think there is a pride. It's a substitution for the word brother. I think there is a brotherhood connection to it. Obviously it makes more sense when black people say it to each other. I don't think there is as much meaning for white people. White people lack the cultural connection. This is completely off topic, but when I play basketball and kids hate on each other, making fun of their skin color. It's meant in fun. It's not meant to cause pain or hurt. It's gentle ragging. I truly feel like it is something unique to the black community. I think the word has lost its value because people are willing to use it on each other. I'm not going to use it, but I don't have a problem with it.

Margot: I have studied journalism for four years and I feel the term can be used in such various ways. When you think about the media today, it focuses on different words. Today, you hear *nigga*. Ironically, you would never hear anyone say, "You're a *nigger*."

Annie: Based on what you have said, do you think that other racial slurs can be manipulated or transformed into a more positive word?

Morgan: I think they could. Of course, in school we have learned about the Holocaust and other events in history, but we mostly learn about black culture.

Annie: Recently, there have been a lost of movements concerning literature, mostly regarding classics such as *Huckleberry Finn, Uncle Tom's Cabin, Gone with the Wind* and *Fences.* There is a movement to eliminate the N-word from these monumental texts. Do you think that this is valid and that the N-word should be eliminated and substituted with another word? Or is the word safely locked in its historical context?

Lauren: I think that the word is safely locked in its historical context. Eliminating the word loses the whole meaning of the story. In that period of time, that's what it was. I am very much against banning books. It contradicts freedom of speech. It contradicts our culture. I am not in favor of changing the literature. People should be exposed to things and make their own decisions.

Aaron: I think that freedom of speech is not only important, but if we whitewash the history we lose the context and perspective. I think there is an awful lot of discrimination out there, but we are not teaching and learning about it. We don't understand where the history came from. It's cliché to say, but we are going to repeat ourselves. If we are not careful, we will repeat ourselves. Anytime we have a conversation like this, it is very important to read the word in its original text and understand its content.

Annie: I think we have tackled a lot and our time has crept away. Before we conclude, I would like everyone to briefly reflect on the N-word. Do you think the word can rehabilitate, should it be preserved or should we terminate it?

Morgan: I feel that we shouldn't take it out of schools because it think we should learn about it. We should understand our history and our past. People should know why society is the way it is.

Elyse: That word, I think it is always going to be here. No matter what. If people do, just terminate it, I wouldn't have a problem with it. It's not going to harm anyone.

Dan: I don't really think there is a place in society to use the "-er" unless you are referring to how it was once used. I can't see the word *N-I-G-G-A* going away. At the same time, I don't think the use of the word is going to reverse our societal progress. It's helping, but it's not hurting. As more and more generations are produced, they are going to lose the meaning.

Aaron: I have a huge problem telling people what they can and can't say. I think personal choice is important. I will teach my children not to use the word because I was raised that way.

Annie: Well, thank you for your time. I truly appreciate it.

Ended at 8:12.

Thesis Focus Group 2
December 11th, 2008, 7:00PM
Norwalk Public Library, Norwalk Connecticut

Facilitator: Annie Benfield

Participants: Arthur
                Jackie
                Shannon
                Irene
                Paul
                Julia

Annie: For ethical reasons, does everyone understand that this discussion will be recorded for transcription purposes?

(Participants respond with head nods)

Annie: Is anyone offended if, during this conversation, we use the word *nigger*, *nigga*, and the euphemism the N-word?

Jackie: Yes. I would prefer if we use the N-word.

Arthur and Julia: I agree.

Annie: First guided question. It's always easier to start with a commonality. We all are connected to Norwalk, either through family, school or work. We all know something Norwalk. How would you describe this city? Is it a homogenous or heterogeneous community? What kind of social factors impact Norwalk? Anyone can answer.

Julia: I think it is a suburban/urban community. I think it is very heterogeneous because there is a mix of so many cultures, races, ethnicities and religions. That's why I moved to Norwalk. I don't want to live in a homogeneous community where everyone is the same. I came from White Plains, which was also heterogeneous and I enjoyed that. Mixed people and ideas. It's a growing experience for most people.

Paul: I think in the Norwalk community, a lot of it has to do with what section of the town you live in. Urban or Suburban. I live a more suburban area. I think it has a lot to do with the school system. I have been exposed to a lot more interracial situations, then say someone living closer to New Canaan or Wilton area. I think you have a big group of diversity in Norwalk.

Arthur: I live and work in Norwalk, so I agree that there is diversity, but I don't think, racially, ethnically and economically, that we are integrated. I think there is a great disparity. I think it also goes to the pockets of where you live. What I have always found striking is the amount of

times I have heard young people say that there is a natural falling off with peers. Kids, as they are younger, integrate with each other, yet as they approach high school they segregate. It's there we have that diversity, but how much time is actually spent in the realm of another race. Sometimes we are forced to be in those pockets, but maybe not by choice.

Annie: Now we are going to plunge into the topic of this focus group. Does anyone want to share a story about the first time they heard or recognized the word *nigger*? Where were you, how old were you and how did this impact your life? Does anyone have a first reference of the word?

Irene: Well, I just want to say that I don't live in Norwalk, so I am out of the flow of what everyone is talking about. Although I have worked in Norwalk, it is different because of my age. I am a little older than everybody. When I was growing up, we really, truly, didn't have any black people in the town where I grew up. Not because it is more affluent and people couldn't live there. We did bus people in from Bridgeport, CT. That was very difficult because in school they got along very well and then they had to go home to their own environment. I really didn't think this was such a good idea. As the kids got older, as you said, it was okay in the elementary grades and the parents invited the blacks into their homes. But as the kids got older, this was no longer the case. I agree with you. If they are both interested in the same things, I don't think there is diversity, they just get along better. If they both want to do some sport, they all get along much better and they tend to group together. And socialize together.

Paul: You know it's interesting. I come from an Italian family and Italians for the most part, I don't like to speak in generalities, but Italians are pretty prejudiced people. I think a lot of that has to do with how most Italians were treated when they came over to this country. I remember my grandfather telling me stories. He was the first Italian to work in the post office in Stamford, CT back in the early 1920s. There were derogatory phrases. They were called *whops* and *guineas*. The Irish, who had come before, used to throw money on the floor, hoping he would pick it up and be fired. I think that every nationality that came over, everyone had problems assimilating to society. For Blacks, it's different. It's a situation where they weren't necessarily coming here on their own accord. Many of them came over on slave ships. It wasn't a personal decision. My grandfather said, "I want to go to America." I think that a lot of black roots didn't have that option. I think what happened is that most of the time the N-word is used in anger. The first time I heard the word I was probably in grade school; people fighting each other used it. It was a white kid and a black kid. I think that the word is something that seems to be accepted more in the black community. I think the African American society is the only society that will use a derogatory phrase to each other and its not insulting. In other words, if I am sitting with a bunch of Italians and I say, "You stupid *guinea*." That's not acceptable. Whereas, in a black community, they will banter back and forth, like "I'm just calling you a jerk." I think it is very hard for non-blacks to hear blacks use it. If a non-black uses it, its now has taken on a whole different meaning and connotation. I think that a lot of the confusion comes from the fact that, "You call him that, why can't I?" My daughter's best friend from grade school was black. She was like our daughter. She was her friend, not her black friend. I can remember when my family came to a function at my house and when Courtney and her parents walked in, my family stood up and said, "What's going on here?" It didn't register, until that moment, that there is a line, within my own family. I crossed the line that I didn't know existed. It's a very complex issue.

Julia: It's a term that I have never used. I can't remember any instance when I heard the word being used in a non-derogatory way.

Irene: Me too.

Julia: To me, it's insulting. And it makes someone feel horrible.

Irene: Very insulting. It makes people uncomfortable.

Julia: Whether it's referring to an Italian man as a *guinea* or an Irish man as a *Mic*. If it's that hurtful, then why would anyone use it. And I know that it is used in music and it just frustrates me because I think if people don't want anyone of us to be insulted by their national heritage then why continue to promote or use it. Maybe it is used in music just to sell records, but I don't know. To me, I just don't understand it. The first time I heard the word being used, I think was when I was very young, and there was an old rhyme. I don't even know if they understood the derogatory nature. I don't even remember how it went…

Paul: "Inny, miny, miney, mo…"

Julia: "Catch an N-word by the toe. If he hollers let him go, inny, miny, miney, mo…" I don't think anyone understood the meaning. It was something pervasive. When I think back on it now, it puzzles me. My brother-in-law, his mother has Alzheimer's. And she is ninety something years old. She has used that rhyme recently, in front of him, and he said, "Mom, what are you talking about?" She is completely out of it and she doesn't realize the effect of it. To me, the word is something from so long ago. She's 92.

Paul: I think it is very much a generational thing.

Julia: I think most of us in this day and age find it very offensive. I know I do.

Paul: My grandfather on one side of the family never used it and my grandfather on the other side of the family always used it. He got questioned about it one time and his answer was, "Oh, they don't mind it." When you think about the time period you are talking about, the 20s or 30s, a black man wasn't going to complain about it, in those days. So if a white man called a black man the n-word, he didn't think there was anything wrong with it because it was never challenged. It wasn't until we get into the 1960s and Civil Rights that people started to wake up and say, "You know what you don't like being called a *guinea right*? It's the same thing." But again, I think that, and I ask you gals this, have you ever used that word to each other, not meaning any insult? I guess it is more prevalent with black males that have been over my house. Football players. They will just use it like, "Hey guy, what's happening?" It gets thrown out there. There is a feeling of, "If you can say it, why can't I?"

Annie: It's interesting, in the previous focus group, we approached this hurdle and we came to the consensus that the majority of the participants vouched that the N-word had a positive meaning, as a synonym for companionship and friendship. Some argued that the word has lost its negative connotation and its value…

Paul: In the black community, not in the white community…

Annie: We were a racially mixed group and the consensus was, even though most of the participants were of a younger generation, that it's not a matter of race anymore.

Julia and Paul: Really?

Julia: It has to be generational.

Paul: It has to be.

Arthur: I completely disagree with that. I think that the word itself is a buy-in in the black community. Me being white, I think the buy-in to that word is internalized racism. I think it's an internalized self-hatred that has continued and perpetuated for a long time. I can't tell you how many times I have told young black folks not to use that word in front of me. I do not like hearing it. The first time I ever heard it was in the second grade. I am sure I heard it before then, but I remember this instance in particular because I went to a school with eighteen in a class. We had one black family, Howard Wood's family. It was a fishing and farming community and a boy brought a nut into class and called it the "N-nut" right in front of the whole class. Howard was there and, remember, this was in the middle of the 1960s. The teacher said, "We don't say that." I remember talking to my mother about it that night and we had a long discussion about racism and segregation. We talked about Howard, my friend, who is still my friend today. It was something that was unheard of, to use that word. The next time I heard it was when George Wallace was running for president. George Wallace was a flat our racist from Alabama and I remember guys who said that their parents were going to vote for him because he wanted to keep blacks down. I was maybe 13 or 14. I don't think the word can be a positive word and I hope that it never becomes one because it almost is to me as if the Holocaust becomes a different situation. The word is part of genocide. I completely disagree with that. I do not think there is a way for that word to be used in a positive way. Again, that is coming from a white male perspective. If I let kids use the word, I would be scared. I would be scare because it crosses the line to what is uncomfortable for me. I hear it all the time. These two Latino boys, Juan and Santiago, they will use that word all the time. I am like, "Fellas, what are we talking about?"

Paul: I think the other thing that happens is that the word takes on a negative connotation. Most of the time it is in anger. I would be lying if I said I didn't say it in anger at a person who is acting a certain way that… I know I am getting into a gray and touchy area…. When a person uses it, in my situation, its in response to an attitude or a demonstrative presence, for lack of a better term that is very negative.

Julia: You would use, or they would use, the N-word as opposed to some other derogatory term, that had nothing to do with race or ethnicity? I can see the F-word, but the N-word…

Paul: I have heard people, black, white, Chinese, whatever being called the N-word because of the connotation of that particular word. It's almost like there is a black community and there is an N-community. And the black community and the white community is the same community,

but there is a line that gets crossed. I think a lot of black kids, at least the ones I have been exposed to, will say to me, "That kid is an N-word." Not being positive, but describing a certain negative attitude. A destructive presence, even within the black community, who differentiates between people who are described as the N-word. Does that make sense, what I am saying? Or am I way off?

Annie: I understand what you are aiming at. There is another socio-economic theory called the Two Nations of Black America, the black middle class versus the black lower class. This theory analyzes the different ideas and morals of each class and how they often conflict. I can parallel what you are saying to that sociological theory.

Paul: I can give you a perfect example. I get on an airplane and I sit down. This young black fellow comes up to me and sits next to me. Here's where the prejudice comes out. The way he was dressed, the way he was acting, his attitude and everything made me think, "This person is a N-word." Five or ten minutes into the flight, we started talking and I was so way off. I went home and I was telling my wife the story and I felt like a real asshole because this kid sat down next to me and I already pegged him one way. After I spoke to him and stripping away that persona that would imply this person is a N-word, I realized I was wrong. We had a great conversation and we exchanged business cards, the whole deal. But, it was eye opening to me; I had already type-casted him, from the way he walked. Originally, I thought, this is going to be a long trip, but it turned out to be a fantastic trip and we spoke the whole time. I think it was more eye opening for me, than for him, because he had no idea what I was thinking. I am just happy that I am not so set in that in my prejudice that I can sit down and get past that.

Arthur: I am curious. Jackie and Shannon, when was the first time you heard the N-word?

Jackie: I don't remember; well, I do. I think I was probably seven or eight. I heard it on the streets from older kids. I didn't think of what the word meant until sixth grade, when I actually learned the history behind it. I didn't really know what it was and I never said it. But I think, for our generation, it is different. The word is bad, period, but I think it is okay for black people to use it because we were called that. For black people to say it, its not a problem, but for white people to say it to us is bringing us back to slavery. That's what I think. The "-er" and the "–a" are two different words.

Paul: That's a generational thing because I have no clue.

Annie: That leads me to my next question. You were just approaching that yourself…

Arthur: Jackie, when you said you were seven, how old were the kids using the word? What age were you talking about?

Jackie: Like thirteen.

Arthur: Not your mom's age or anything.

Jackie: No.

Annie: That's another question that you jumped into yourself. Does the spelling of the N-word change its connotation? Is there a difference between the "-er" and the "-a"?

Jackie: Yes, I think there is.

Paul: I'm lost.

Jackie: I think the N-word is something we can, not joke about, but it is a slang word. You don't call a white person, you call a black person that. I think you can use the word in the black community, not outside. The "-er" is just slavery. That's bringing us down, that's derogatory.

Julia: When you guys talk amongst yourselves, between each other in a non-derogatory way, it's the "-a" word, not the "-er?" If you use the "-er" it would be derogatory?

Jackie: Yeah, it would be derogatory. Nobody would say that.

Paul: So, what I was saying before about the two words, there is actually only one word. The "-a" word you use with each other is the acceptable word, but the "-er" is unacceptable for anybody to use. Okay, that makes sense.

Shannon: I don't remember how old I was when I first heard the word. I never really used it, to tell you the truth, until I got older into high school. My mom, my aunts and my family don't use it.

Annie: Does media affect the nullification of this word? With music? For example, N.A.S' new album. Does everyone know about that? This rap artist wanted to title his album the N-word itself, but record labels prohibited him. What about comedians, Chris Rock, Dan Chapelle? They are mainstream entertainers, who are prevalent within our current culture. Does this make the N-word more accessible?

Jackie: I think that having comedians go up there and use the word is making us feel better. It desensitizes us. People are just saying it to make us laugh; we are not really thinking about it right at that moment. Everybody knows what the word means, but it is used to entertain us.

Annie: For those of you who don't know, Kayne West is a rapper. He had a hit song called, "Gold Digger." As anyone can guess, there is a lyric that rhymes with the N-word. If you go to his concert you see racially mixed audiences signing along with the song, not recognizing the significance of the word. Is this okay?

Paul: I don't think it is. I have to agree with Arthur that I think that the more the word is used, the more mixed messages are going out. I think life would be a lot better if it wasn't used. I often tell my son and daughter, "I can't believe you are listening to this!" But you can't, or at least I don't think you can, in mixed company, sing along with that. If I am not mistaken, Richard Pryor, was the first one to use the word and when he used it, everybody was like "Whoa!" After Eddie Murphy it got used more and more in mixed audiences. It is interesting. In the mixed audiences everybody laughs. I think if a white comedian got up and used the word, I don't think

too many black audience members would think it was funny. It just something that non-blacks should not use.

Arthur: This is where I always get confused. Because now, all of a sudden, it is almost as if blacks own the word.

Paul: I think they do.

Jackie: We were called it.

Arthur: True. So now you have taken ownership of "This is how I view it." Now you have taken the ownership of a word that is derogatory and insulting and you are using it for yourselves, on yourselves. There are a lot of black intellectuals that will say that that's what's going on. It's is as if you are taking on the most negative term and saying, " We own that now. We have taken it. We can use it the way we want to." Some folks might use the word, but it still has its negative roots. That's what some people say. Sometimes I wonder about that.

Julia: I think for a lot of people that aren't as integrated, people of some other generations or from different towns, use the word, making it very confusing. If some people accept the word, it confuses others. As Arthur was saying, I understand taking ownership of something, but I haven't been in your shoes. To be able to use it and feel comfortable and yet it is confusing for others. I think a lot of it is generations and what people have been exposed to.

Annie: I understand. It is one of those conversations that doesn't reach an end. Do you think that the N-word can be rehabilitated or changed? Is it in the process of transformation right now?

Paul: Well, I think it has to do with the "-a" because the "-er" isn't even welcomed or accepted in the black community, no matter how you are going to use it. I think that the problem is that it has morphed. I just don't see it as being positive. No other ethnic group has ever taken an ethnic slur and embraced it as a joking way to converse to each other.

Annie: Do you see a future of the word? Do you see the N-word going anywhere? Is it going to stay in society as a derogatory word?

Irene: Why can't you just say black?

Jackie: I think there is a future behind it. I think it is always going to be around. No matter how many times you say it, you always know what that word means and the history behind it.

Julia: I think that is why, someone like me, cannot imagine using it in a positive way.

Paul: Only in anger.

Julia: It reminds me of growing up in the 1960s and 1970s when there was so much tension, not like there isn't tension today, in schools and cities. I know we have gotten past some of that, but there is still a lot of inequalities, obviously. I think the use of the N-word contributes to it.

Paul: You can take that one step further and using the phrase of "boy." As a white person I feel uncomfortable saying to my son's friends "Hey boys, come on in." I don't mean it that way.

Irene: But you have an "s" on it. When they said it the other way, it was "boy."

Paul: The reason that I bring this up is that "boy" was very prevalent in the 1940s and 1950s. This term has basically disappeared. I think that it came from white people becoming more and more embarrassed or uncomfortable saying it and being challenged on it. In the days of the 1920s and the 1930s, especially down south, when someone said "boy" they black man would probably not confront him. As we go closer to the Civil Rights Movement, the answer would have been, "Who you calling, boy?" That has really kind of gone away. Maybe there is hope that it will.

Annie: Does anyone else have any conclusive thoughts, ideas or comments? All set? Thank you for your participation. I truly appreciate your time.

Ended 8:02.