AFRICAN-AMERICAN ATTITUDES TOWARD HIGHER EDUCATION
AND THEIR STRUGGLE WITH COLLECTIVE IDENTITY AND THE
BURDEN OF “ACTING WHITE”

by

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ABSTRACT

This project explores the cultural shift from the value African-Americans during the time of Washington and DuBois placed on industrial and higher education to the value placed by contemporary African-Americans. This cultural shift is linked to African-American collective identity and the contemporary burden of “acting White.” In an effort to understand the severity of the cultural shift, this project explores the debate between Washington and DuBois, explores how collective identity was formed within African-American culture, and provides a possible solution to eliminating the contemporary burden of “acting White” through cultural pluralism.
INTRODUCTION

The issue of industrial education versus higher education in the Black community has existed since both options were available to African-Americans after emancipation. Both forms of education play a vital role in African-American collective identity, because they both serve as one of many cultural symbols. According to the late Dr. John Ogbu, a former professor of anthropology at the University of California (Berkley), collective identity refers to “people’s sense of who they are, their ‘we feeling’ or ‘belonging’” (Ogbu 3). He further states that collective identity is expressed with “emblems or cultural symbols which reflect their attitudes, beliefs, feelings, behaviors, and language or dialect” (3). Determining which form of education serves as a cultural symbol of African-American collective identity seems to be the heart of the contemporary debate, and this project explores this issue in more detail.

Education is one ideological tool African-Americans used to improve their social status in the United States shortly after emancipation. During the time of Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois, the form of education sought by African-Americans was the center of intense debate. Washington was an avid supporter of vocational/industrial education and DuBois supported both industrial and higher education, but with a greater emphasis on the latter. Many people in the Black
community believed DuBois’s position on higher education was the better approach, because it was supposed to uplift the race. They believed that Washington’s accommodative approach was ineffective and left the entire race vulnerable to mistreatment by White Americans.

The value placed by some contemporary African-Americans on higher education has shifted from a positive perspective to something that is saturated with negative connotations. According to Ogbu and others, many people, currently within the African-American community, believe higher education sacrifices a person’s Black identity in an effort to adopt a White identity, which ultimately leads to the accusation that they are “acting White.” Higher education is no longer seen as a necessity to uplift the race. Instead, it currently seems to be something that caters to uplifting the individual versus the collective/community. For this reason, contemporary African-American collective identity, with respect to education, has experienced some degree of fragmentation, because the perspective of higher education appears to be split based on socioeconomic class. One can easily postulate that African-Americans who are members of the upper-middle to higher classes would see great value in higher education, because it is mostly likely responsible for their economic success. Contrarily, based on many studies conducted by Ogbu, Fordham, and others, African-Americans with lower socioeconomic statuses seem to devalue higher education, and associate the support of this educational form with running the risk of losing one’s Black identity. However, this project tends focus the value that African-Americans with lower socioeconomic statuses have toward
higher education, because it represents the cultural shift from the time of the Washington and DuBois debate.

The shift of greater cultural value on industrial/vocational education over higher education is what this project attempts to address. It seeks to establish a causal link between the value of education and African-American collective identity. However, in an effort to fully understand the severity of the shift, I thoroughly explore the education debate between Washington and DuBois in the first section. The second section assesses and addresses the debate between academic scholars regarding contemporary African-Americans’ academic success as well as their peer networks and the burden of acting white in academic settings. The third section evaluates how the collective identity of African-Americans plays a large role in their response to White cultural norms, which includes attending an institution of higher learning—especially a predominately White institution. The last section addresses how cultural pluralism, an idea referred to by Alain Locke, is an approach that is not only the best position, but also the most viable choice for interracial/cultural relations, because it allows different cultures to co-exist without one culture assimilating to a dominating culture. This would therefore allow African-Americans to openly achieve academic and economic success without carrying the burden of “acting White.”

The issue of higher education for African-Americans has been of much debate since the late nineteenth century. In fact, two of the most well known African-American leaders had intense differences about the education of members of their
race. Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois were both prominent African-American leaders concerned with “lifting up the Negro race.” Both men valued education; however their views were diametrically opposed with respect to the type of education provided. Washington believed concentrating on industrial and vocational education was the best way to uplift the race, while DuBois believed that higher education and political activism were the best course of action.

According to several scholars such as Signithia Fordham and John U. Ogbu, many African-Americans today have attached a stigma to academic success. Obtaining a higher education is often seen as a sacrifice of one’s internal blackness or collective racial identity. Attempting to engage or participate in higher education is seen as subscribing to the “white” ideals and thus surrendering the black social identity. Some critics may question how African-Americans with low socioeconomic statuses would react to students enrolled in historically Black colleges and universities (HBCU’s). However, based on the research conducted by Fordham and Ogbu regarding a predominately Black high school in Washington, D.C. (discussed in more detail later), the peer groups of African-Americans are not concerned with “where” a student goes to college as much as they are concerned with the “idea” of attending a college or university. The “idea” of studying hard and attempting to go to college is seen as a potential sacrifice of African-American collective identity. Ironically, during the time of great debates between Washington and DuBois, many in the African-American community viewed Washington’s support of industrial education while sacrificing higher education as the wrong approach; whereas
DuBois’s support for both industrial and higher education was seen as the better
course of action, because his support of higher education was intertwined with
political activism, which could have aided the community in obtaining their civil
rights.

Further exploration of the history between Washington and DuBois can
outline some of the major arguments regarding the form of education chosen.
Additionally, highlighting the problems with both arguments should provide a
causal link between contemporary African-Americans and some of the negative
attitudes toward participating in (and obtaining) a higher education within the
community, because a greater understanding of the debate will not only illustrate
that a shift in the value of industrial and higher education has definitely occurred,
but it also may provide some insight as to why the shift occurred in the first place.
THE WASHINGTON AND DUBOIS DEBATE

The debate between DuBois and Washington over the approach to advance African-Americans socially and economically became well known when DuBois publicly criticized Washington in an essay that he later revised and included in his book, *Souls of Black Folk*, which is a collection of essays that depict the lives of African-Americans, or Blacks, after Reconstruction from a sociological perspective. DuBois discusses several topics in *Souls*, including his perspective on how to improve the lives of Blacks in America. He believed that the best way to advance the Black race within American society was through political activism and higher education. DuBois’s position put him opposite to Washington, who believed that the best way to advance the race was to temporarily refrain from engaging in politics and primarily focus on industrial and vocational education. The opposition between DuBois and Washington, eventually led to DuBois’s public critique of Washington’s position on advancing the Black race, in arguably the most controversial chapter of *Souls of Black Folk* entitled: “Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others.”

DuBois critiques Washington’s position by pointing out several fallacies and inconsistencies in the argument with respect to politics and education. Washington maintained his position however, by putting forth more effort into providing industrial education for Blacks and speaking against exercising political power.
Although both DuBois and Washington were passionate about their beliefs to uplift African-Americans, neither man provided a solution that would be completely beneficial to the entire race. On the contrary, DuBois’s position seemed more viable and left African-Americans less vulnerable to potential exploitation from some Whites, but it left them more vulnerable to a few members of their own race (the elite) who would be placed in positions of power and therefore susceptible to corruption. The approach of both men was equally important and effective at garnering a positive change for Blacks. An in-depth analysis of both positions, as well as alternatives, is crucial to gain a better understanding of why DuBois’s position seemed to be the better approach, but an alternative to both approaches would be best. Equally important, however, is to first observe the personal histories of Washington and DuBois individually, because it will provide a greater understanding of their positions, since the past of both men heavily influenced their political perspectives.

Washington was born in a crude cabin in Franklin County, Virginia in 1856 to a mother that was a slave and an unknown white father. He was freed toward the end of the Civil War, and taught himself how to read during the Reconstruction era, which was a time “when blacks emphasized education, voting, and politics as the keys to improving their position” (Wolters 40). According to W. Fitzhugh Brundage in an edited version of Washington’s *Up from Slavery*, at the age of 16, Washington traveled “by foot, across Virginia to the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute, a school founded in 1868 to uplift and educate former slaves”
The institute taught “habits of morality, hard work, and service along with a mixture of industrial and liberal arts” (2). Washington’s opinion about the positives of industrial education was well supported at the institute. He excelled at the school, and eventually after Washington graduated and had been teaching for a brief period, Samuel C. Armstrong, the school’s principal, invited him to teach full time. Later, Washington was recommended by Armstrong and “hired to lead the Tuskegee Institute in Tuskegee, Alabama…[where] he championed industrial education and made Tuskegee its showcase” (2). Washington believed that vocational education “would both nurture individual self-confidence and transform blacks into people of property” (3). Later Washington would publicly express his opinion about vocational education, along with his methodology of increasing the socioeconomic status of Blacks in the United States, in a speech he made at the Cotton States Exposition in Atlanta in 1895, which later became known as his Atlanta Compromise speech.

The Atlanta Compromise solidified Washington’s position as the spokesman and leader of the Black community from the perspectives of members of the White race. In his speech, Washington announced his belief that industrial education and temporary deferment of obtaining and exercising civil liberties were essential. He began by telling of a ship lost at sea that suddenly sighted a friendly ship and signaled for help, because it needed water. The vessel responded to the distressed ship four times to “cast down your bucket where you are.” Eventually the distressed ship capitulated, and cast down its bucket to find that the water was fresh and safe.
to drink, because it was from the mouth of the Amazon River. Washington related this metaphor to Blacks by insisting they “cast [their buckets] down in agriculture, mechanics, in commerce, in domestic service, and in the professions” (Washington 142). In other words, Washington suggested that Blacks focus on industrial education such as common labor and therefore engage in friendly relations with the Southern Whites. He further states:

Our greatest danger is that in the great leap from slavery to freedom we may overlook the fact that the masses of us are to live by the productions of our hands, and fail to keep in mind that we shall prosper in proportion as we learn to dignify and glorify common labour, and put brains and skill into common occupations of life (142).

Notably, Washington suggests that common labor is far more important than higher learning, because labor is something not only familiar to Blacks who were ex-slaves, but also a skill they were capable of learning. In some instances, Washington even intimated that he was not interested in Negro colleges and in some instances even disliked them. His emphasis on the mistakes and shortcomings of Blacks during this time suggested that Negroes themselves were responsible for their status (Wolters 56). Ironically, Washington sent his daughter to Wellesley College, a women’s liberal arts college, and later sent her to Berlin to study music. Even more ironic is the fact that Tuskegee was also one of the largest employers of black college graduates (Moore 61). Washington’s actions appear to indicate that he was not completely opposed to higher learning for Blacks. Instead, he seemed to have
believed that the majority of Blacks should focus more on industrial education. He believed that industrial education should be the primary focus so that southern Blacks could obtain basic education and useful skills that would aid them in their attempt to provide for themselves. His belief was clearly influenced by his experiences at Hampton as well by his relationship with Armstrong, and later developed into his mission to help advance Blacks based on an industrial educational approach, which eventually created opposition from others with different backgrounds such as DuBois.

Washington’s position on the education of Blacks illustrated the fact that his views were not entirely different from his biggest rival, W.E.B. DuBois, because both men mutually believed that it was important for at least some Blacks to obtain an industrial education. However, they differed in the degree of focus they placed on their individual methods, because DuBois believed higher education should be given priority, whereas Washington believed vocational training was more important. Similar to Washington, DuBois’s preference to focus more on higher learning, as well as his view on politics was heavily influenced by his past.

DuBois was born in 1868 in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, and was known as Willie.¹ Unlike, Washington, DuBois was born free, which leads one to believe DuBois does not completely see the value of industrial education as a primary way of life to exercise upward social mobility. Similar to Washington however, DuBois also had no relationship with his biological father Alfred DuBois

¹ To prevent confusion in this section, Alfred and Mary DuBois will be addressed by their first name and W.E.B. DuBois by his boyhood name Willie.
(37). His mother, Mary was a member of the Burghardt family, which was a free black family due to the fact that Mary’s ancestor, Tom Burghardt, was rewarded his freedom “for serving with Colonel John Ashley’s regiment during the American Revolution” (Wolters 5). They were never wealthy, but did garner a great amount of respect in their community. Mary briefly left her family after giving birth to her first child, Adelbert, because there was a scandal surrounding the father, “who didn’t meet Burghardt standards of propriety” (Moore 39). Mary met Alfred DuBois in upstate New York during this time, and eventually “eloped to the nearby village of Housatonic—a runaway marriage, but one duly attested and published in the Berkshire Courier,” and Willie was born a year later (Wolters 6). Alfred eventually exhausted his finances and was forced to live with the Burghardts. After three years of marriage, he left the family when Willie was two years old. The Burghardts thought Alfred DuBois was ‘too good looking, too white’” (Wolters 7). Later, Willie blamed the Burghardt family for his father’s departure, due to their color consciousness of Blacks.

The story of Alfred’s desertion alerted Willie (DuBois) to the color consciousness and discrimination within the Black community. Eventually DuBois would meet his grandfather, Alexander DuBois, who had worked as a steward on a ship that ferried passengers between New York and New Haven, Connecticut, but was retired by the time DuBois actually met him. Alexander was well educated and told DuBois “about ‘schools and books and far-off places, of a world quite different from the Burghardt farms’” (Wolters 7). Alexander owned property, read
Shakespeare, wrote poetry, and yet was more militant than any of the Burghardts. He also unknowingly influenced DuBois’s passion for education and scholarship.

Eventually, DuBois’s passion would lead him to Fisk University located in Nashville, Tennessee. The fact that Fisk University was in the South did not deter DuBois’s motivation for attending. In fact, he was more motivated to attend, because he would have the opportunity to meet Blacks that were his age and had a similar education and great ambitions. Also, DuBois believed that there were more opportunities for college-educated Blacks in the South, and believed that the freed slaves had a great future, if they were properly led, so when he left for Fisk in 1885, he was excited at the idea of being among so many people of his own race for the first time (Wolters 11).

Fisk was unlike many other traditional schools for Blacks during this time, because it had no courses in industrial education. DuBois studied ethics and philosophy with Fisk’s president, Erastus Milo Cravath, Greek and choral music, Latin, German, chemistry and physics to name a few. More important than specific courses however, DuBois discovered his purpose, because his experiences at Fisk replaced his egocentric world with a world more focused on race. He believed that Fisk was “training leaders who would uplift the [B]lack masses” (Wolters 13). According to David Levering Lewis, “Fisk was basic training for combat and Fiskites were to provide the officer corps. If [DuBois] had not coined his most famous term, the concept of the ‘talented tenth’ must already have been gestating” (13). DuBois eventually coined the phrase “Talented Tenth” which is a group of
educated Blacks that would lead the Black masses. However, a higher degree of education for Blacks, as well as a call for Blacks to be proactive in their attempt to obtain social equality, would be required to accomplish such a provocative idea. Such a course of action clearly contradicts Washington’s belief, and serves as the central conflict between Washington and DuBois.

Washington and DuBois both believed that part of the responsibility of Blacks achieving any type of social equality was on all members of the race. However, both men were opposed to each other’s methods. Washington, for example, believed that it was important for Blacks, especially in the South, to establish good relations with Whites. He believed Blacks should temporarily refrain from exercising the new rights granted to them by the Reconstruction Amendments: the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth amendments, which abolished slavery, created due process and equal protection, and gave voting rights to all men regardless of race respectively. Washington believed that Blacks needed to “learn to dignify and glorify common labour, and put brains and skill into the common occupations of life,” which was achievable by focusing on industrial education (Washington 143). According to DuBois in his critique of Washington:

Mr. Washington distinctly asks that black people give up, at least for the present, three things,—

First, political power,

Second, insistence on civil rights,
Third, higher education of Negro youth,

—and concentrate all their energies on industrial education, the accumulation of wealth, and the conciliation of the South (DuBois 40).

Washington believed giving up these three things temporarily would significantly reduce the opposition from Whites who felt threatened by the new privileges granted to Blacks. He placed emphasis on personal responsibility and self-help for Blacks; and believed in doing so would illustrate why Blacks deserved to be treated similar to any hard working White person that was willing to help themselves before asking for assistance. After this goal was accomplished, Blacks had truly earned their rights to their new privileges, and Whites would be less resistant.

The problem with Washington’s position is that it left Blacks in a position to be victimized even more so than they have in the past. Requesting that many Blacks give up their political power could be detrimental to the entire race, because they would have no voice or voting power to challenge any laws that could severely harm them. For example, if congress enacted a law that prevented any Blacks from owning land, but allowed them to rent from Whites, Blacks would have forever been indebted to Whites, and have very little, if any, political power to change the law. Investing in industrial education is not a bad thing, because the economy at the time placed a high value on it. However, it is not the only option that Blacks had and should not have been considered as such.
Washington’s position correlates with his past experiences as mentioned earlier. Industrial education played a very important role in his life. It was through this form of education that he received his opportunity for success; so it is understandable why he championed industrial education so intensely. Had it not been for his success in his industrial education program, Washington would not have been given the opportunity to work at Tuskegee, and therefore eventually catapult himself as a prominent Black leader. DuBois, however, believed that a complete focus on industrial education would be detrimental to the advancement of the race, and eventually felt compelled to criticize Washington’s position.

DuBois believed that a focus on higher education was the best way Blacks could achieve social equality; and an absence of this form of education would hinder intellectual thought and therefore would serve as a catalyst for molding the race into subservient beings. He believed that Washington’s suggestion of refraining from political power, insistence on civil rights, and higher education of the Black youth would also force blacks into submissive roles.

DuBois believed that if Blacks did not exercise their political power, it would lead to “the disfranchisement of the Negro” (DuBois 40). Many whites in the South were adamantly against allowing ex-slaves to exercise their right to vote, and created several obstacles that made it difficult or even impossible for free Blacks to vote. For example “between 1896 and 1903...Louisiana, North Carolina, Alabama, and Virginia amended their constitutions to require voters to pass literacy tests and pay poll taxes” (Hauser). The literacy tests were designed so that Blacks would fail
by employing tactics such as forcing them to write the U.S. Constitution verbatim. Even if some Blacks accomplish such tasks, they were still denied their right to vote due to “technicalities.” To prevent disenfranchising poor Whites however, several states implemented loopholes such as the “grandfather clause,” which allowed poor whites to vote under any circumstances as long as they “had a forebear—in most cases a grandfather—who had been qualified to vote on January 1, 1867” (Hauser). The creation of literacy tests served as one form of proof that DuBois was correct in wanting Blacks to exercise their political power, and not temporarily relinquish this privilege, because it would have proven to be devastating to Blacks.

DuBois also criticized Washington’s suggestion that Blacks should temporarily give up their insistence on civil rights. DuBois claims that Washington’s suggestion would lead to “the legal creation of a distinct status of civil inferiority for the Negro” (DuBois 41). DuBois is referring to Plessy v. Ferguson, where the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that separate but equal accommodations with respect to race was constitutional. The ruling came less than one year after Washington’s speech at the Atlanta Exposition, in which Washington supported racial segregation stating “In all things that are purely social we can be separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress” (Washington 143). DuBois initially agreed with Washington, stating, “I thought it was a good general statement,” but later realized that such an idea could only exist in theory and not practice (Wolters 53). It is well documented that the quality of life for Blacks was substantially diminished once the Plessy decision was made.
Many Blacks were forced to ride in the back of buses and trains, and not allowed to enter certain restaurants and hotels. Also, the accommodations for Blacks were often in a much worse condition than Whites even though they were considered “equal.” Such practices illustrate the perspective American society, especially the South, had of Blacks during this time. Several state governments condoned and supported these unequal practices until the U.S. Supreme Court reversed the *Plessy* decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*. Consequently, DuBois was correct in believing Washington’s suggestion of not insisting on civil rights would be detrimental to the entire race.

Finally, DuBois criticized Washington’s position on the higher education of Negro youth. DuBois believed limiting Blacks to industrial education would force them into the roles of perpetual servitude, leaving very little room for intellectual thought and advancement. DuBois believed Washington’s position contained an inherent contradiction, and responded to Washington by stating:

[Washington] advocates common-school and industrial training, and depreciates institutions of higher learning; but neither the Negro common-schools, nor Tuskegee itself, could remain open a day were it not for teachers trained in Negro colleges, or trained by their graduates (DuBois 41).

DuBois is suggesting that if Blacks focused primarily on labor at the expense of higher learning, then not only would the common-schools be unable to remain open, but Washington’s own Tuskegee University would be at risk of closing as well.
In response to this argument, supporters of Washington may argue that to teach labor in common-schools and at Tuskegee requires experience more than it does deep intellectual thought, and therefore higher learning should not be given precedence over industrial education. DuBois would have likely responded by saying higher learning is very important even with respect to industrial jobs such as farming. For example, if there is a need to increase the production of a crop, a chemist can create a chemical to aid in this affair. However becoming a successful chemist requires a higher degree of education.

As previously mentioned, DuBois grew up in the North, and attended an institution of higher learning where he met several young men and women that shaped his opinion about the value of education. He believed that higher education was definitely the way to advance the race, and that Fisk University provided him, as well as his classmates a way to lead members of the Black race who may not have the capacity to understand how to increase the quality of their lives, which incorporates his concept of the Talented Tenth.

DuBois’s Talented Tenth concept has at least two major problems: one, the process of choosing the people to be a part of the elite group, and two, a small group of elites representing a large mass of people increases the chances of corruption among the group in power. The problem of choosing who will join the elite group of Blacks to lead the rest of the race to some form of social salvation is problematic, because there is no clear way to measure who knows what is right for an entire race of people. The concept of the talented tenth seems to limit its selection pool to
people who are in college. Applying such limitations seems to negate the fact that there are probably some non-collegiate men and women that could serve as great leaders, as well as the fact that there are some collegiate men and women who may not know how to go about in uplifting an entire race. Additionally, they may be motivated by self-interest. Lastly, when a person or small group obtains power that is meant to help others, corruption sometimes develops.

Washington is the perfect example of this scenario. He started out with his view on how he wanted to help advance the race in general. However, when anyone criticized him, he took measures to quiet them as oppose to addressing the critique directly. For example, one person William Monroe Trotter publicly criticized Washington’s position. Washington eventually had him arrested for harassment, and cracked down on other critics that supported Trotter, including DuBois, by trying to bankrupt newspapers that opposed him by funding their rivals. He even forced trustees of Atlanta University to rebuke professor George Towns, who supported Trotter (Wolters 65). Therefore, having a small group of elite Blacks to represent the entire race may not necessarily be the best thing, because although they may have good intentions initially, the temptation for self-preservation may be too great to resist corruption if there is no larger group to monitor their actions. Instead of a small group of people leading African-Americans to social equality, the value of higher education that DuBois has experienced should be engrained in African-American culture. Selling all African-Americans on the idea that they are not only capable of achieving economic success through higher education, but can
also obtain political power via the same method could lead to social equality for all African-Americans.

The fact that both men criticized each other extensively about their respective positions, it did not stop some critics from adding to the debate. Some critics of the Washington/DuBois debate believed that Washington’s position was problematic. One critic, Jacqueline M. Moore, believes that Washington’s “propaganda,” or his accommodating approach, left three dangerous impressions:

First, that southerners were justified in their prejudices and actions because blacks were in such a degraded state; second, that blacks had not made faster progress since slavery because they had pursued the wrong type of education; and third, that it was primarily the responsibility of blacks to improve themselves with minimum help (Moore 72).

Moore goes further to illustrate DuBois’s criticism of these three issues:

First he argued that southern prejudices and actions had led to the degraded state of blacks, not the other way around. Second, educational progress for blacks had been slow not because blacks had chosen the wrong education but because it was impossible to create industrial schools until the universities had trained teachers for them. Third, although it was true that blacks had to make efforts to help themselves, without the support and encouragement of the white community and the elimination of discriminatory barriers, progress was not possible (72).
Moore also states that DuBois believed that Washington’s position had given whites an excuse to step aside and do nothing to help blacks, even though the so-called “Negro Problem” required everyone’s attention. Moore believes DuBois’s argument is persuasive and well formed, but she feels “that whites were moving toward segregation and toward limiting black education to an industrial curriculum” even before Washington’s Atlanta address; and therefore it is difficult “to prove a direct connection between his statements and the rise of discrimination” (73). The problem with Moore’s assessment of DuBois’s statement is that she seems to assume that DuBois is solely blaming Washington for the increased discrimination of Blacks. However, DuBois says that increased discrimination is “not, to be sure, direct results of Mr. Washington’s teachings; but his propaganda has, without a shadow of doubt, helped their speedier accomplishment” (DuBois 41). DuBois would probably agree that racial discrimination was increasing due to the White response to the newfound “freedom” Blacks were given. His position, however is that Washington’s “propaganda” sped up the time such discrimination was inflicted upon Blacks. In other words, DuBois didn’t believe that Washington’s speeches created new forms of racial discrimination; instead DuBois would argue that Washington brought such discrimination to the surface quicker, such as the *Plessy v. Ferguson* verdict (birth of the “separate but equal” doctrine), for example, which was made less than one year after Washington’s speech.

Moore’s analysis of DuBois’s position is not completely clear, because she does not offer any evidence to support her claim that discrimination was on the rise
prior to Washington’s speeches, which would, according to her, make it difficult to prove that Washington contributed to an increase in discrimination. Supplying such evidence would have given a greater understanding of whether she believed DuBois was saying Washington caused an increase in racial discrimination as a whole, or simply caused an increase in the time it took for it to be inflicted upon Blacks. Moore does state, however, that Washington “made it easier for whites to turn their backs on ‘the race problem,’” because they could use his public speeches to show that “blacks themselves did not want political rights or social equality” (Moore 73). She further states:

Washington overestimated the generosity of whites when he made his bargain with them. They would give money to support his schools, but only to train servants and manual laborers. Washington thought he was training blacks to gain the respect of whites through hard work as he had. But most whites never truly believed that blacks deserved respect. Blacks could not expect to improve their situation through hard work alone as long as whites were not willing to admit their part in creating that situation (73).

Here, Moore seems to agree with DuBois’s position about higher education for Blacks. She illustrates how some Whites would only support schools that trained servants and manual laborers via industrial education. She also shows how a lack of higher education would force Blacks to continue being dependent on Whites for support, because Blacks would not be able to improve their situation by engaging in hard work alone.
The DuBois/Washington debate was a major issue, and many Blacks sided with one leader over the other, however there were some Blacks that offered alternatives to the great debate. Some people clearly sided with either DuBois or Washington, and because of that their fates were often reflected in such choices (89). For example, many public supporters of DuBois that spoke against Washington and Tuskegee were often silenced because of Washington's influence and power. Washington directly was responsible for several supporters of DuBois losing their jobs or even political placements. Some Blacks however, decided to take the middle road or hybridize the positions of Washington and DuBois, thus offering an alternative that is essentially better.

Howard University’s Professor Kelly Miller was one African-American that offered an alternative to the debate. Miller’s background and experiences, just as Washington and DuBois, shaped his beliefs as well. He was born the son of tenant farmer in South Carolina where he earned a basic education, and earned a bachelor’s degree from Howard University in Washington D.C. He had both a rural southern childhood and an academic career, which possibly allowed him to understand and support both Washington and DuBois’s positions. Miller believed in the need for industrial training and was an advocate of Tuskegee’s educational work, but thought it was “mischievous and silly” to only offer one type of education for all blacks (90). He believed that it was important to offer higher education as well as industrial education so that Blacks would be able to cover the entire spectrum. He agreed with Washington that a gradual approach to civil rights
should be taken, but also agreed with DuBois that Blacks should make full use of what rights they did have. He believed that internal disputes like that of Washington and DuBois were holding the race back, and made an attempt to change this, but was unsuccessful (90).

Miller assessment of the debate is correct. Both Washington and DuBois had very good points, but combining them in a way that allows for a gradual approach to civil rights, in an effort to reduce the fearful White opposition, as well as exercising the rights Blacks were given seems to be more viable option. Also, finding a way to diversify the talented tenth candidates probably would have made DuBois’s position more appealing to the masses and therefore a better choice, however the alternative of combining both approaches would remain the better option.

Segregation deepened in the twentieth century, especially in the South, and as racial tensions increased many Blacks found that the changing conditions made the debate between DuBois and Washington less relevant. The focus was no longer “how can we improve our situation?” but “how can we stop it from getting worse?” Blacks began to use segregation as a reason to build black-controlled institutions and businesses, “which made them less dependent on whites or the Tuskegee machine and created new opportunities” (Moore 89). According to Moore, “by the time of Booker T. Washington’s death in 1915, the combined efforts of Washington, DuBois, and the rest of the black community had already made parts of the debate obsolete (89). It was around the time of Washington’s death that the shift from improving the situation to preventing a worse situation took place, because more
Blacks were receiving either industrial education or higher education, and some received both.

Ultimately, Washington and DuBois were very influential leaders of the Black community, and their perspectives on issues such as politics and education was heavily dependent upon their backgrounds. Neither man completely disagreed with one another about certain issues. Both men essentially had the same goal of increasing the upward social mobility of Blacks by using education as an anchor. However, their disagreement about the form of education needed to accomplish this goal was the catalyst for more immediate action, and therefore equally important. Washington’s conservative approach provided an accommodating perspective that made many White leaders feel less threatened and less resistant to social change he desired for his people. On the contrary, DuBois’s more radical approach provided not only the belief that African-Americans could do more to change their social position more quickly, but it also inspired many Blacks to obtain a form of higher education and become politically active so they could create political change more quickly. Some blacks, such as Miller, created alternatives and found a middle ground between Washington and DuBois. However, the efforts of both men, as well as other Blacks, eventually led to an increase in both industrial education as well as higher education, and therefore created a shift in focus from how to improve the situation to how to prevent it from becoming worse.

As noted earlier, it is somewhat ironic that some contemporary African-Americans believe that the acquisition of higher education is an act that
relinquishes one’s black identity considering the debate that took place between Washington and DuBois. The idea of obtaining a higher education during their time was an act that was celebrated and even encouraged. On the contrary, the shift in the value placed on both forms of education by contemporary standards could be due to the betrayal by some African-Americans as part of their forfeiture of Black collective identity.

There are many avenues to economic success; however the one that is mostly criticized for causing members of the African-American community to betray this idea of collective identity is that of higher education. According to Ogbu and Fordham, many African-American peers in the black community feel that if one of their own attends college, especially at a predominantly white institution (PWI), they are more likely to be perceived as obtaining the values many in the White community hold. Higher education is then something viewed as a pejorative, but not necessarily because Blacks do not want members of their race to have access to more sophisticated forms of thinking that is supposedly standard with higher education. Instead, the reason higher education has such a negative connotation to some in the Black community is because they believe there is a greater risk of betraying their Black collective identity. The idea of collective identity plays a much larger role in contemporary Black attitudes toward higher education than some may realize and will be explored further in the next section.
AFRICAN-AMERICAN COLLECTIVE IDENTITY AND THE BURDEN OF “ACTING WHITE”

As a young Black male enrolled in an institution of higher education that is predominately White, I have found myself defending my Black identity to my extended family. Many of them believe that it is impossible for a Black person to attend any White institution without losing some or all of his/her “Blackness.” For example, one of them claimed that I “used to talk Black, but now that you have been at that White school so long, you forgot how to talk Black and probably what it even means to be Black.” It is important to note that their idea of “blackness” refers to cultural identity, which is the cultural norms commonly subscribed to by many within a group’s, (African-Americans) race, ethnicity, or nationality. Stuart Hall, a cultural theorist from the University of Birmingham, expands this definition when he writes:

'cultural identity' in terms of one, shared culture, a sort of collective 'one true self', hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed 'selves', which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common. Within the terms of this definition, our cultural identities reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us, as 'one people', with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and
meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history (Hall 223).

Notably, cultural identity is somewhat different from collective identity because it relates more to the unchanging and continuous frames of reference. People typically use these frames of reference in a manner that serve as a symbol of their collective identity. In other words, cultural identities are the symbols and emblems that Ogbu refers to in his definition of collective identity.

Naturally, I found my family's perspective regarding my Black identity offensive, but also intriguing. The critical point of their analysis is that African-Americans must sacrifice their Black identities and adopt White cultural norms to be successful in White institutions, including universities, businesses and firms. Most of my family members have this perspective because they have a low socioeconomic status due to their decision to refrain from obtaining an education beyond high school. Instead, they took up a trade that was not economically fruitful. They believe that African-Americans most likely will not be able to excel economically in the United States through academic means, even if they sacrifice their Black cultural identity to adopt White ideals. They elected not to pursue higher education because they believed no matter how hard Black people try to succeed economically; they will always have a low socioeconomic status unless they “forget where they came from” and reject their Black cultural identities.
On the contrary, my family fails to understand that it is possible for a person to behave in a manner that allows him/her to interact with one group while utilizing aspects of its cultural norms such as speech for example. However, the person can maintain his/her Black identity by employing “code switching,” which allows a speaker to switch between modes of speech depending on cultural requirements. A person who is able to engage in code switching can live in multiple worlds without assimilating to a culture that is not a part of his/her collective identity. This concept mirrors collective pluralism. An article written by Dr. Sharon L. Fries-Britt, an associate professor of education at the University of Maryland, and Dr. Bridget Turner, an associate professor of Social Foundations at the University of Vermont, supports this idea by concluding that African-American students who successfully participate in traditionally White culture “have learned to become bicultural, developing a repertoire of expression and behaviors from both the White and Black community and switching between them as appropriate” (Fries-Britt 320). Ultimately, if more people participated in code switching, it would most likely lead to Locke’s idea of cultural pluralism, because both cultures can co-exist and interact with each other without members of African-American culture assimilating to the ideals of White culture.

The unfortunate reality, however, is that many in the African-American community (especially those with a low socioeconomic status who, like my extended family, believe their position in society cannot be changed due to the limitations created by White culture) do not feel cultural pluralism is a possibility. They
believe too many African-Americans who decided to pursue a degree in higher education eventually rejected their black cultural identities; and anyone else who chooses this path (especially in a predominant White institution) will assimilate into White culture and ideology, which will result in them sacrificing their own culture for economic growth and financial stability. Therefore, some scholars such as Ogbu and Fordham, conclude that the common response within the African-American community is to discourage, (consciously or unconsciously) participation in institutions of higher learning.

One major issue this project intends to address is whether or not the peers of African-Americans (consciously or unconsciously) dissuade their friends from achieving academic success out of fear that their friends could sacrifice some or all of their cultural identity. The other issue is whether or not a person can continue to subscribe to an African-American collective identity if he/she participates in both African-American and White environments without assimilating to the dominant White culture. Both of these issues are addressed in the next section.

**African-American Academic Success and the Burden of “Acting White”**

According to Ogbu and Fordham, African-American students who excel academically are faced with the stigma of “acting White” and as a result, a heavy burden is placed on their shoulders. They even theorized that many gifted African-Americans deal with the burden of “acting White” by sabotaging their academic
success, while other young African-Americans pretend that they are simply “naturally smart” to hide the fact that they actually secretly study. Ogbu and Fordham believe these events occur due to social pressures from the peers of African-Americans. This position caused great controversy in the academic community, which began particularly with a collaborative article written by Ogbu and Fordham.

The late Dr. Ogbu and Dr. Signithia Fordham, currently an associate professor of anthropology at the University of Rochester, published an article entitled “Black Students’ School Success: Coping with the ‘Burden of Acting White.’” Their article holds that students enrolled in a predominantly black high school in Washington D.C., purposefully sabotaged their academic success out of fear of being accused of “acting White.” Fordham and Ogbu identify seventeen behaviors that many of the students within the school defined as “acting white.” Some of these behaviors include:

(1) Speaking standard English; (2) listening to White music and White radio stations; (3) going to the opera or ballet; (4) spending a lot of time in the library studying; (5) working hard to get good grades in school; (6) getting good grades in school, i.e. being known as “brainiac”...(14) listening to classical music; (15) being on time; (16) reading and writing poetry; and (17) putting on “airs” etc (Fordham and Ogbu 603).
They claim that the above list is not exhaustive, but it is “indicative of which behaviors are likely to be negatively sanctioned and therefore avoided by large numbers of students” (602). The most remarkable thing about these factors that Fordham and Ogbu list, which supposedly embodies the idea of “acting white,” is that many of them are exactly the same reasons members of my extended family used in their arguments regarding my Black identity. The fact that this study was carried out in Washington D.C., in 1986 suggests that issue of “acting white” is not limited by location or even time, and therefore has merit even by more contemporary standards.

The crux of Fordham and Ogbu’s work is that there are several reasons that contribute to the low academic success rate for African-Americans, but one of the major reasons is that:

[African-Americans] experience inordinate ambivalence and affective dissonance in regard to academic effort and success. This problem arose partly because White Americans traditionally refused to acknowledge that Black Americans are capable of intellectual achievement, and partly because Black Americans subsequently began to doubt their own intellectual ability, begin to define academic success as White people’s prerogative, and began to discourage their peers, perhaps unconsciously, from emulating White people in academic striving, i.e., from “acting White”...many Black students who are academically able do not put forth the effort and perseverance in their school
work, and consequently do poorly in school. Even Black students who do not fail generally perform well below their potential for the same reasons” (594).

Notably, Ogbu and Fordham blame both White and Black people for the low academic performance of African-Americans in school. However, the most interesting underlying assumption in their argument is that the minds of African-Americans have been, what Marxist philosopher Althusser would describe as interpellated. Dr. John Higgins, an associate professor of English at the University of Cape Town, defined Althusser’s concept of interpellation as “the name of the process which places the individual in his imaginary relationship to society, as a social subject” (Higgins 148). In other words, the perspective of African-Americans (social subjects), regarding their own intellectual capacity with respect to Whites (imaginary relationship) is simply a product of the predominant ideology, and therefore nothing more than a socially constructed concept that has no biological basis. Furthermore, the fact that the peers of African-Americans discourage emulation of “White people in academic striving,” further perpetuates this ideology; which can eventually lead to “naturalization” of this socially constructed concept.

As previously mentioned, Fordham and Ogbu’s position regarding African-Americans and higher education (particularly peer influence), led to a great amount of controversy in the academic community. Several scholars have written articles, and even dissertations, that oppose many of the approaches outlined in Fordham and Ogbu’s work. Dr. Shaun R. Harper, currently an assistant professor of Education at the University of Pennsylvania, claims that Fordham and Ogbu’s idea
that the peers of African-Americans discourage academic success is flawed. He also insists that young African-Americans do not purposefully sabotage their academic success to satisfy peer pressures. He lists several researchers who have found that:

African American students do not value education or school achievement any less than do their White peers from similar socioeconomic or familial backgrounds, and that many high-achievers have positive self-esteem, high goal orientations, and strong Black identities (Harper 5).

Harper conducts his own study regarding peer-effects on academic success in “six large public research universities in the Midwest: the University of Illinois, Indiana University, the University of Michigan, Michigan State University, The Ohio State University, and Purdue University” (7). He claims that the result of his study indicates that the theory postulated by Fordham and Ogbu is flawed, because none of the students in his study suffered from the negative effects of peer pressure with respect to academic success. In fact, their peers actually supported academic achievement.

Harper’s findings of the “32 [African-American] high-achievers regarding their experiences with other African-American college students” illustrates that peer support for academic success exists within the realms of a university-atmosphere in African-American culture. He claims that one of his participants stated that “The Black community is happy to see someone doing something positive, so that’s why they’ve been so supportive” (10). Harper concludes his
analysis by stating that he found no evidence of internalized racism—where an African-American feels that he/she is incapable succeeding in a predominately White society, and therefore does not try. One of the major problems with Harper’s assessment however, is that he does not completely address the issue presented by Fordham and Ogbu, because he focuses on groups of students whose peers also most likely experienced some level of academic success in order to even be enrolled in a college or university. Even students that may have been there on an extracurricular scholarship still had to achieve and maintain some level of academic success to continue attending the institution. Most, if not all, of the students in Harper’s study mostly likely believed that it was possible for them to achieve some form of economic success in a society dominated by White culture, because they all made the decision to attend an institution of higher learning, many of which are predominately White. In fact, it would be both hypocritical and extremely odd if any of the students stated that they were pressured by their peers to refrain from excelling academically.

Another scholar, Ronald Ferguson—currently a lecturer in Public Policy at Harvard University, believes Fordham and Ogbu’s perspective leaves no room for negotiation among African-American students. He argues that racial solidarity allows African-American students the ability to both excel academically and demonstrate a social connection with their peers. Harper notes how Ferguson addresses the issue of “acting White.”
Among its essential features is the drive to maintain a shared sense of African-American identity that is distinct from (that is, in opposition to) the Other...the Other is not White people, especially as individuals. Instead, the Other is the cultural system of White superiority within which negative racial stigma is kept alive and out of which insinuations of Black inferiority and marginality emanate. Black racial solidarity serves as a mechanism of mutual validation and a shield...any apparent attempt by a Black person to escape the stigma of race by joining the Other—by speaking and behaving in ways that appear to seek an exemption from the stigma while leaving it unchallenged—may meet the accusation of acting White (Harper 5).

Notably, Ferguson postulates that the idea of the individual is not the issue when discussing racial identity. Instead, a focus on the collective identity of the Other, which encompasses the cultural system of White superiority that insinuates a socially constructed idea of Black inferiority, should serve as a starting point when approaching this idea of “acting White.”

Other critics have argued that Fordham and Ogbu are attaching racial issues to an event that occurs to most people/students regardless of race. A common argument opposing scholars make against Fordham and Ogbu is that children who label other students as “brainiac” for excelling academically is common ridicule, and children of all races, including Whites, suffer from this traditional form of teasing. They further argue that any peer-discouragement for academic success is not limited to African-Americans, and therefore does not serve as a reason why African-
Americans are not as successful in school as their White counterparts. Instead, some argue that one reason why there is a gap in educational advancement between Whites and Blacks is IQ. Dr. James Q. Wilson, a retired professor at Harvard University, argues that African-Americans have lower IQ’s than Whites on average. Sure “there are black geniuses and white idiots, but on average black school performance is lower than it is for whites” (Wilson 85). Wilson goes further to denounce the arguments regarding culture-bound tests, which hold that African-Americans, and other racial minorities for that matter, generally perform less well on standardized exams due to the culturally-biased nature of the exams. He claims other tests that do not even use words, such as the “Raven Progressive Matrices test,” still indicate low performance of African-Americans on average. Wilson further argues that:

Blacks may react to the fact that their group’s IQ is, on average, lower than that of another by deciding that they will not try to compete with the other group in ways that can be easily affected by IQ. Instead, they will compete in sports, fighting, or music. Black culture may value education in general but not in practice (Wilson 85).

Wilson’s argument seems to indicate that African-Americans generally believe they are incapable of competing with Whites in the realm of academics because of some form of natural or biological impairment. On the contrary the logic of this argument seems to be flawed since many African-Americans apply and are accepted to colleges and universities, including predominately White institutions. If African-
Americans believed their race is naturally inferior to their White counterparts in the realm of academics, why would so many of them even attempt to attend institutions of higher education, especially those institutions that are predominately white? He does mention that he recognizes that there are Black geniuses and White idiots, but surely Dr. Wilson is not assuming that all Blacks who managed to get accepted to colleges and universities are geniuses. Fordham and Ogbu’s position provides more merit than Wilson’s argument, even if their work was challenged by many in the academic community.

On the contrary, Ogbu responds to Harper, Ferguson, Wilson, and others like them, in a later essay entitled “Collective Identity and the Burden of “Acting White” in Black History, Community, and Education.” Ogbu directly addresses the misconception many scholars have about his collaborative work with Fordham in this essay. He mentions that “one of the shortcomings of current scholarship is the failure to distinguish among three different perspectives on collective identity, cultural frame of reference and the schooling of Black adolescents” (Ogbu 2). He also claims that his critics show no evidence that they are:

aware that throughout their history Black Americans have experienced the ‘burden of acting White, because of their oppositional collective identity and cultural frame of reference. Lacking this knowledge, critics ignore the historical and community contexts of Black students’ behavior and focus almost exclusively on the transactions between the students and their school. Basing their analysis on data collected at the level of student-school
transactions, it is not surprising that some critics accuse Fordham and myself of assigning a race label (“acting White”) to a common ridicule, namely, teasing and harassment, endured by academically achieving adolescents or “nerds.” They also believe we have read too much into a “concept that they themselves manufactured” (2).

Clearly, Ogbu’s goal in this essay is to correct the misconceptions that other scholars had about his collaborative work with Fordham. More importantly, however, is his inclusion of historical and community context, which helps broaden the focus from Black student-school relationships to African-American collective identity. Ogbu starts his analysis by describing two of the most important concepts of his argument: collective identity and cultural/language frames of reference.

Ogbu offers a detailed definition of both collective identity and cultural/language forms of reference within the realm of his essay, however he starts his discussion by defining collective identity (partially mentioned earlier) as something that:

refers to people’s sense of who they are, their “we feeling” or “belonging.”

People express their collective identity with emblems or cultural symbols which reflect their attitudes, beliefs, feelings, behaviors, and language or dialect. The persistence of a group’s collective identity depends on the continuity of the external (historical and structural) forces that contributed to its formation...Collective identity usually develops because of people’s
collective experiences. Warfare, conquest, colonization, forced labor, mass emigration, imposition of an outcast status and enslavement are examples of the collective experience that leads to the formation of collective identity (Ogbu 3).

Notably, a symbol or emblem is needed to reinforce the collective identity of particular group. In order to continue reinforcing this identity, the forces that contributed to its formation must continue to stimulate it, otherwise the identity, even with the symbols or emblems (cultural identity), would eventually fade.

Cultural and language frames of reference are similar to collective identity. Ogbu states that cultural frames of references refer to the correct way of behaving and [the] ‘language or dialect frame of reference’ [refers] to the correct way of talking from the point of view of the minorities...where the latter is oppositional, the former is usually oppositional” (5).

The list of behaviors Ogbu and Fordham created based on the input from African-American high school students regarding their concept of “acting white,” serves as an example of cultural and language frames of references. For example, one could reasonably assume that speaking Standard English, listening to classical music, or even getting good grades in school are modes of behavior that is oppositional to the attitudes that reinforce the cultural symbols and/or emblems that perpetuate the group’s collective identity.
Ogbu’s definition of collective identity seems to indicate that it is created and maintained whenever a group of people discover a high degree of commonality. This ultimately leads to a separatist dynamic, which usually results in an oppositional attitude toward the dominant culture. People are categorized and put into groups, which creates the “we feeling” or “belonging” between members of that group. More importantly, however, this form of collective identity creates this idea of the “other.” In the case of African-Americans, White people as a group, or White culture, would be considered the “other,” which is the same concept (mentioned earlier) that is addressed by Ferguson.

It is human nature for people to come together when facing a common threat to their livelihood. When the threat is immediate, differences, animosity, and general discontent between people are usually suspended until the threat is over. The focus on difference and discontent is shifted to the outsider, or a different “other.” For example, it is well known that Black and White people in the United States have a rich history full of discontent and even hatred for each other. However, when tragedy struck the United States on September 11, 2001, many Whites and Blacks immediately suspended their discontent for each other and came together due to a common threat. Discontentment was immediately shifted to a so-called greater common threat or “other”—Middle Eastern cultural system that supposedly in direct conflict of the general culture of the United States. Unfortunately, this shift in discontentment led to the attacks upon many Americans who either were descendents or immigrants from the Middle East. However, based
on Ogbu’s definition, the shift was inevitable since all Americans, especially Black and White, now had the collective experience that was stimulated by being attacked without warning, from a group people whose culture apparently was in direct conflict with their own.

The creation of the “other” is necessary for the survival of collective identity within most cultures, because it stimulates and enhances this “we feeling” and sense of belonging. One reason for this necessity is because people often define themselves by what they are not. For example, many African-Americans may describe themselves as “Black” because their physical skin color (cultural symbol), which consists of many shades of brown, is not the same as members of other races. Additionally, many would say they are Black, because they live in, and relate to, a culture that is not White, Latino, or Asian. Another example is people who say they are Christians because they refrain from engaging in secular behavior. Regardless of the group, the categorizing nature of the “other” ultimately creates an oppositional attitude that actually perpetuates collective identity. As one might expect, the definition of collective identity has deep intrinsic meaning. However, in an effort to fully understand how this concept affects some African-Americans’ perspective regarding higher education, it is equally important to understand its formation within a racial group. One can began evaluating its formation by exploring how collective identity is intensified whenever one group exercises dominion over another, such as the case of colonization.
Formation of Collective Identity

According to Ogbu, collective identity usually forms when a group of people experience some communal connection, which usually results in being collectively subjected to the treatment of another group like a dominating “other,” such as the case with colonization. Whenever there is colonization, there are at least two major groups of people: the dominant group and the minority group. In order to completely colonize a society, many dominant groups had to transform the cultural values that the people in the minority groups possessed into something that was considered inferior. Without this technique, too often would the minority group respond with a level of resistance that could prove tiresome to police. The dominant group had to stigmatize most, if not all, aspects of the minority group’s culture in order to implement its own. Ogbu addresses this issue when he writes:

Dominant group members stigmatized minorities’ food, clothing, music, values, behaviors and language or dialect as bad and inferior to theirs. These [five] mechanisms are used by the dominant group to create and maintain the collective identity of the minorities; i.e., to “carve them out” and maintain them as a separate segment of society with a distinct identity. The existence of the minorities with distinct collective identity remains as long as these mechanisms or mistreatment of the minorities remain (Ogbu, 2000).

The actions of the dominant group were necessary not only to continue their dominance over the minorities, but also transform the ideology of these people into
one that mirrors the dominant culture—an ideology that is motivated and influenced by difference. Members of the minority group were taught to think of themselves and their culture as inferior, because it was different from the dominant culture. If minorities wanted to succeed within dominant society and culture, they were supposed to abandon their own cultural identities and strive to behave in a fashion that was similar (not necessarily equal) to the superior culture, even though they could never truly reach the same level of superiority due to “natural” limitations. If the minority culture was both submissive and believe that their culture was naturally inferior, then dominion over this group would possibly continue for several generations and arguably in perpetuity unless some form of oppositional collective identity formed.

The actions of the dominant culture created a stronger collective identity among members of the minority culture. Minorities were accustomed to the mistreatment imposed on them by the dominant culture, and often looked to other members in their culture, who were experiencing similar treatment, for support, which leads to a stronger, collective identity, which was the case with African-Americans before and shortly after emancipation. To fully understand the contemporary attitudes toward higher education in the African-American community, and why they differ so greatly compared to the time of Washington and DuBois, it is important to not only explore how the African-American collective identity was established, but also how it affected their community before the abolition of slavery, as well as afterwards, including modern African-Americans.
Contributing Factors to African-American Collective Identity

Ogbu explores the phenomenon of how Black collective punishment strengthens Black collective identity when he recalls an event that tells of the resistance of the rebellious slave, Nat Turner:

A slave, Nat Turner, led an “insurrection” in Southampton, Virginia in 1831. Following this incident, the movement of all Black people throughout the United States was restricted. Blacks were forbidden to assemble among themselves. The restriction even applied to children. For example, Black children in Washington, D.C. were no longer allowed to attend Sunday School with White children as they did previously for no other reason than that they were Black (Ogbu 6).

Slaves realized that they could be punished for the acts of other slaves regardless of their physical location within the United States, which help them conceptualize a broader sense of collective identity. This broader sense directly contributed to the reason why an oppositional event like the Underground Railroad worked so effectively. At this point, communal action seemed to be preferred over the individual, due to the nature of collective punishment.

The collective identity of enslaved African-Americans was further perpetuated by modes of discrimination, which included: social and expressive discrimination (7). Further exploration of these modes will serve as the foundation for several upcoming arguments as to why many people in contemporary African-
American communities believe obtaining a higher education, especially at a predominantly white institution, is something people within their community should refrain from doing.

Social Discrimination, the most commonly expressed form of discrimination, depicts the behaviors of both the dominant and minority groups whenever they interact with each other. In the case of African-Americans, this mode of social behavior was not only applicable to slaves and their owners, but also slaves and Whites in general. For example, Ogbu writes:

According to Starker (1971; pp.6), the ritual of social interaction required Blacks and Whites to behave toward each other in certain prescribed forms of address that expressed the ‘ritual.’ Blacks addressed White slave owners as master (massa), mistress (mistis), miss (missy), boss or buckra, with or without given names. Slave owners addressed Blacks as aunt, uncle, mammy, sometimes daddy, boy... The etiquette also required slaves to behave in a certain manner when he or she was spoken to by Whites. For example, the slave had to “stand attentively, respond politely, bow servilely to the extent, at times, of extreme evasion and deceit...” (7).

Notably, members of the Black and White communities had to subscribe to a socially constructed mode of behavior when interacting with one another. None of the rules of engagement put in place by the dominant culture is natural; however they were necessary to perpetuate the ideology of the time. Unsurprisingly many
Blacks, certainly not all, resisted such an unnatural mode of behavior and took action to change not only their individual lives, but the lives of others in their race.

Expressive discrimination is another form of discrimination that perpetuated the collective identity of African-Americans further. It references the belief held by many White Americans that Black slaves were inferior culturally, linguistically, and intellectually, which of course, served as another avenue to illustrate that the entire race was inferior (7). This common belief during slavery prompted the actions of Whites to force their slaves to rid themselves of their “inferior culture,” and to adopt the more “superior” White ideology. Ogbu illustrates this phenomenon when he writes:

[Members of the White race] forced the slaves to give up their African cultures and to adopt superior White culture. White cultural values, behaviors and speech were presented as correct or proper; in contrast, Black cultural values, behaviors and speech were presented as incorrect and improper.

This belief system stigmatized African-American culture and valorized White culture. The actions of the White slave owners’, which forced blacks to adopt White culture, was not motivated by their desire to uplift the minorities and make them more socially acceptable. Instead, stigmatizing the slaves’ culture was an issue of control. If the slaves were to collectively believe they truly were inferior to members of the White race, they would be less likely to organize and revolt against
the extreme hardships they endured, and the dominant culture’s ideological influence could affect the slaves over several generations. Ironically, however, forcing the slaves to adopt White culture strengthened their relationship with each other.

**Slave Double Consciousness and the Burden of “Acting White”**

The creation of a new collective identity united the slaves and helped create a stronger sense of community. However, the establishment of a community also created a situation that is akin to DuBois’s idea of double-consciousness. DuBois describes this idea as something that is:

[a] sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity (DuBois 11).

Notably, this idea is applicable to the slaves. Although slaves may have perceived themselves as being completely different from the perception of Whites, they behaved in a manner that Whites expected, which indicates that slaves were very aware of their own sense of self, as well as how many Whites perceived them and their culture. All members of the slave community became bi-cultural and bi-dialectical due to their involvement in both White and Black worlds according to Ogbu. Both worlds expected Blacks to think, act and react in a particular way,
depending on where they found themselves (Ogbu 9). This social construction creates a new burden the slaves must endure: the burden of acting white.

When slaves were in White environments, they talked and behaved in ways that were deemed appropriate by White society. Behaving in a manner that Whites expected was more for survival purposes for the Blacks during slavery. They knew that if they did not act accordingly, they would be punished (collectively in many cases), or even put to death (9). However, when Blacks were among themselves, they acted in ways that reflected their cultural identity, which was a behavior that Whites rarely observed (10). It should be noted, however, that members of the White culture did not expect, or even want, slaves to behave exactly how Whites behaved. Instead, they wanted the slaves to behave in the manner they expected a slave to behave, regardless of whether it reflected upon the true nature of the slave. For example, Ogbu writes:

White people did not require Black slaves to speak “correct” or “standard English.” Rather, they wanted Blacks to talk according to the White construction of Black speech based on Black “improper English.” Blacks talked the way Whites wanted them to talk when with Whites out of compliance, but talked “Black” among themselves (10).

The White’s expectations regarding slave behavior was simply another socially constructed portion of the dominant ideology. However, the slaves’ compliance to
this code of behavior marks the focal point where they directly deal with the burden of acting White. Ogbu defines this burden best when he writes:

The burden of “acting White” before emancipation was how to comply with the White demand that Blacks should behave and talk like Blacks the way Whites thought that Blacks talked and behaved. It was not that Blacks should choose between behaving and talking the way White people actually behaved and talked and the way they themselves preferred to behave and talk.

In other words, the burden was not choosing between behaving like a White person and the slaves’ preferred behavior. Instead, the burden was how to comply with White expectations of slave behavior while maintaining an internal sense of self.

Although all slaves recognized that a mode of behavior (contrary to their own) was expected of them, their response to White expectations was not uniform. According to Ogbu, slaves created several strategies of coping with the burden of “acting White.” He uses characters portrayed in literary works as evidence for his claim. He mentions that these characters included “[accommodative] slaves, rebellious slaves, clowns, tragic mulattoes, Black mammies and coons” (10). He writes further by defining three of the characters.

The accommodative slave (toms, servile Negro), for e.g., accepted his place as defined by Whites; and behaved and talked according to the White definition. The rebellious slave or “bad Negro” defied the law and the ritual of non-
reciprocal social interaction. Black mammies were the nurturers of White offspring.

According to Ogbu’s definition of how “acting White” was perceived among slaves, the accommodating slave would be accused of behaving in this manner to the slave community, because he/she accepted (believed to be true) the White society’s perception of Blacks, and began to consciously or unconsciously, reject his/her culture. The problem with this particular theory is that many of the slaves engaged in these behavioral rituals out of a survival instinct. They would act in the manner required of them in an effort to not be severely punished or even put to death as mentioned before. However, as long as these people maintained their collective identity by behaving in a “Black” fashion when around their own people, it seems highly doubtful that they would be accused of “acting White.” Only the slaves who not only engaged in the rituals, but used them in the slave community would be shunned. Therefore the burden of “acting White” within the slave community seems to be more applicable to those slaves who believed the White tradition is correct and made attempts to imitate White behavior beyond the realms of the dominant society. This type of behavior would indicate that “acting White” would be more preferential than a survival mechanism.
**Reinforcing Collective Identity After Emancipation**

Having discussed the origin of the burden of “acting White” regarding African-American slaves, it is important to note that these notions should be applied to African-Americans after emancipation as we approach the discussion of contemporary African-American attitudes toward higher education. As previously mentioned, exploring these parts of African-American culture should provide greater insight into the differences in opinion regarding higher education among African-Americans, because it provides the background necessary to fully understand their position.

After the Emancipation Proclamation, some of the rituals that slaves had to endure were no longer applicable. For example, African-Americans did not have to refer to any of the White people by the aforementioned nomenclature. Instead, they could refer them directly by their names, although they still ran the risk of being severely injured without much justice. Eventually, a new generation that never experienced slavery was born. They did not possess as strong of a collective identity based on mistreatment by slave owners. Instead, this new generation had their collective identities reinforced by continued collective punishments and extreme economic exploitation.

African-Americans sense of community was greatly reinforced with continued collective punishments for the offences of one or a few. Ogbu recalls an example regarding an attack on a Black community when he writes:
Whites continued to make Blacks collectively responsible for the offence of a single Black person. For example, in Rosewood, Florida in January, 1923, about 1,500 white men from Rosewood and surrounding communities went to the Black neighborhood of Rosewood and killed 40 black men, women and children in retaliation for an alleged rape of a White woman by a Black man (11).

Similar to the slaves, the new generation, free from slavery, had their collective identities reinforced by the similar form of collective punishment. The actions of the Whites fostered a greater sense of responsibility in the Black community since each individual was potentially liable for threats to the community as a whole.

African-Americans were also denied “free and fair competition with Whites in employment, wages, promotion and entrepreneurship” (Ogbu 11). Also, specific laws added to the new generation’s sense of collective identity. For example, the Plessy v. Ferguson case required that facilities for Blacks and Whites be separated, but “equal.” However, history teaches us that the facilities were everything but equal.

According to Ogbu, the belief of African-Americans’ inferiority was heavily expressed in the White people’s treatment of African-American’s jokes, literature, and movies (11). Ogbu believed that Whites thought that African-Americans were capable of learning, but they were still inferior. He writes:
White people believed that African-Americans were simply not assimilable. Whites did not mean by this that Blacks were not capable of acquiring the education, economic status, and lifestyle of the White middle class. Rather, what they meant was that it was not desirable or acceptable to assimilate Blacks into White society to share their collective identity because they were colored and inferior.

Notably, Ogbu argues that White people did not necessarily think Blacks were incapable of obtaining education and better lifestyles, which proposes the question of how exactly are Blacks inferior if they are not incapable of obtaining the White middle class lifestyle? Ogbu has to be referring to White people’s perception of Black culture. Whites held that Blacks only imitated White culture, such as obtaining the same type of education as a White person and living a similar lifestyle. On the contrary, White people believed that anything that Blacks tried to produce originally would be inferior, whether it was literature, movies, or even businesses. This common belief led to the rejection of the works of many Blacks which showcased stories that accurately represented a true Black aesthetic.

Naturally, many African-Americans responded to this belief by actively taking steps to change it by creating avenues that showcased African-American cultural expression, such as the Harlem Renaissance. The steps taken by African-Americans established their response to their status problems after Emancipation.
Emancipated African-Americans Coping with the Burden of “Acting White”

The new generation of African-Americans was aware that they were being mistreated simply because of their race. Their understanding of their social position motivated them to “forge collective solutions to their collective status problems that reinforced their oppositional identity” (12). African-Americans knew what they needed to do in order to advance within the boundaries of the dominant culture. However, they were also aware of certain measures designed to prevent them from obtaining too much upward social mobility. Job ceilings, which limited how far an African-American could advance in the work force, were implemented to retard, or even stop, their upward social mobility. African-Americans soon came to believe that they had to “meet additional requirements, which included collective struggle at group level and clientship or uncle tomming, as individuals” (12).

According to Ogbu, they eventually implemented instrumental solutions to cope with their status problems. He organizes the instrumental solution into the following categories: accommodation, integration with equality of opportunity, and separatism.

Ogbu defines the accommodation solution by relating it to the ideas of Booker T. Washington. He addresses how Washington “emphasized working within mutually separate collective identities for Blacks and Whites (12). Next, Ogbu defines integration with equality of opportunity by relating it to the ideas of DuBois and NAACP. He addresses how DuBois and the NAACP demanded equality and full acceptance by Whites. He further explains how they increased tensions
between Blacks and Whites, but “more importantly...they increased Black Americans’ sense of oppositional collective identity” (12). Lastly, Ogbu defines the separatist strategy as consisting of people who believed that it was not possible to solve the Black status problem within American society, so it would be better to leave the United States “both physically and spiritually, while heading for places like Africa, Mexico, Latin America, or part of the United States set aside for Blacks...[this] movement promoted Black pride and collective identity” (Ogbu 12). With the exception of the accommodationist approach, the major movements within the Black community during this time created an oppositional collective identity that was reinforced by feelings of Black pride. This new oppositional collective identity led to a shift in the burden of “acting White” after emancipation.

The burden of acting White shifted for two reasons: 1) the growing oppositional collective identity among African-Americans, and 2) the demands White people inflicted upon the social behavior of Blacks. African-Americans’ refusal to be grossly mistreated contributed to the shift in White demands for Black social behavior. According to Ogbu:

Blacks were required to behave and talk the way White people actually behaved and talked: (a) in situations requiring the master of certain White knowledge, behaviors and speech, such as formal education, upward social mobility and speech, in societal institutions controlled by White people, while (b) Blacks were also now required to behave and to talk like White people to gain social acceptance and to be treated as social equals by White people.
Blacks therefore, now had to master... (1) Black ways of behaving and talking among themselves; and (2) White ways of behaving and talking in White-controlled situations... What was not required of Blacks was to assume White people's collective identity (14).

Notice that the demands from Whites are different from slavery because Blacks must now speak like White people, instead of speaking in a manner that Whites believed was appropriate for Blacks. More importantly, Ogbu seems to be indicating that Blacks had to engage in code switching, where they speak using Black dialect in Black communities and White dialects in White communities. Although, Blacks were required to adopt White behavior and speech, it does not mean they were forced to abandon their oppositional culture and dialect to obtain upward social mobility. On the contrary, Blacks' adoption of White behavior and speech did not guarantee complete acceptance or equality.

According to Ogbu, Blacks “accepted the need to behave and talk like White people (to “act White”) for education, upward social mobility, equality and acceptance by White people” (15). He goes further to mention five coping strategies many African-Americans used to deal with the burden of “acting White” after emancipation. These include: cultural and linguistic assimilation, accommodation without assimilation, ambivalence, resistance or opposition, and encapsulation.

Ogbu defined the cultural and linguistic assimilation strategy as something that consisted of:
“[Blacks who] tried very hard to emulate White people in behavior, speech and thought because they believed that their chances of success in education, employment in the corporate economy and in being socially accepted by White people would be better if they abandoned Black frames of reference and emulated White people (15).

African-Americans that chose this approach would incorporate some techniques to mimic White culture more. For example, they would straighten their hair since Black hair was stigmatized as coarse and therefore as something bad and inferior. They would also bleach their skin, pinch their noses to be more pointed like Whites, receive coaching to speak using more traditional White intonations, and even join White churches (15). This group of African-Americans was often criticized the most for “acting White” because they rejected their culture, and exhibited behavior that was stigmatized in the Black community. This group of African-Americans, who rejected their Black cultural identity, was no longer accepted by members of the Black community due to their betrayal of their Black collective identity. This group is also responsible for many of the fears that others in the black community have regarding higher education.

Another coping strategy was accommodation without assimilation. African-Americans that employed this strategy would “more or less live in two worlds at different times.” They would talk and behave like White people required whenever they were in the “White world, like school, work, and among White people.” On the contrary, they exhibited behavior commonly found in Black communities whenever
they were around other Blacks (15). This group of African-Americans was still accepted by members of the Black community. Usually, the members of this group have also mastered the concept of code-switching, which allows them to walk in both worlds without negative consequences. This behavior mirrors the concept of cultural pluralism that will be discussed later.

The third coping strategy, according to Ogbu, was ambivalence. This strategy consisted of African-Americans who knew that using “proper English” was necessary for success in school and professional employment, but believed “no matter how hard a Black person tried to talk like White people, he or she would still sound Black” (15). Therefore for them, attempting to engage in such behavior was pretending to be White.

The fourth coping strategy was resistance or opposition. Blacks who used this strategy were opposed to adopting White culture at all, because they thought doing so would lead to them sacrificing their Black culture (16). They also believed that adopting White culture (“acting White”) would be accepting the White notion that Black culture is inferior and that Blacks should try to uplift themselves by subscribing to White attitudes and behavior.

Lastly, the final coping strategy was encapsulation. This strategy consisted of Blacks who were so submerged in Black culture that they simply could not behave or talk like White people, because they simply did not know how to do so (16).
All of the strategies Blacks used to cope with the burden of “acting White” shortly after emancipation illustrate the differences in Black responses to their changing world. More importantly, these strategies also highlight the fact that an African-American’s rejection of his/her culture is something that is not easily forgiven. It was much harder (impossible in some cases) for the African-American who chose the cultural and linguistic assimilation strategy to return and reconnect with other members of their own race compared to the other strategies. Their increased difficulty in reconnecting is due to both their decreasing understanding of Black culture and reluctance of the community since it sees this person as someone who has relinquished his/her African-American collective identity. Instead of opposing the false notions about their race, the assimilators embraced them and attempted to change themselves accordingly.

The last three coping strategies, ambivalence, resistance or opposition, and encapsulation, represent the strategies employed by members of my extended family and several other African-Americans with low socioeconomic statuses. These coping strategies, as well as the cultural and linguistic assimilation strategy, serve as an explanation of why a cultural shift in the value of industrial and higher education has occurred. During the time of Washington and DuBois obtaining higher education was of great importance, because it was viewed as a means to obtaining intellectual and political power that could lead to equality for all African-Americans. However, the focus on obtaining upward social mobility shifted from the collective/communal perspective to the individualistic perspective. Some
African-Americans decided to subscribe to the first coping strategy, cultural and linguistic assimilation, and focused on their individual success at the expense of their community. Naturally, African-Americans who employed the remaining coping strategies, especially the last three, saw the actions of the assimilators as a rejection and betrayal of their Black collective identity. Therefore, they made an effort, whether consciously or unconsciously, to prevent others from sacrificing their collective identities.

As previously mentioned, the cultural and linguistic coping strategy illustrates why some contemporary African-Americans are reluctant to completely embrace higher education. Higher education was initially viewed as something within White culture. Great success within the dominant White society often required a person to obtain a higher education and participate in its culture. Many African-Americans fear that those who choose this route are risking their Black collective identity when they adopt White cultural values to succeed in these areas of society. Therefore those contemporary African-Americans who do not support higher education are not necessarily against the idea of their fellow Blacks obtaining a higher form of education. Instead, they are fearful that the required adoption of White culture in order to be successful in higher education, and a professional environment, will force African-Americans to sacrifice their own collective identity.

On the contrary, Ogbu’s second coping strategy, accommodation without assimilation, makes it possible to become a part of institutions that require
participation in White dominant culture without losing one’s collective identity. Instead of losing part of their identities, people who employ this coping strategy learn and participate in another culture, which allows them to become bicultural beings. The more effective approach to cultural relations, with respect to both White and Black collective identities, is cultural pluralism.
CULTURAL PLURALISM—THE MOST DESIRABLE OUTCOME

Cultural pluralism, a precursor to multiculturalism, was technically first coined by Horace M. Kallen, but it was Alain “Locke who effectively democratized it” and made it applicable to U.S. culture (Buck 31). Cultural pluralism is essentially the idea that many cultures can co-exist without one culture succumbing to the ideologies of another, which allows members of the cultures to interact with each other while maintaining their differences.

Code switching helps propagate cultural pluralism by providing an opportunity for all cultures to communicate with each other effectively without losing their identities. For example, if an African-American attends a predominantly White school, he/she should be able to interact in the dominant culture by code switching, yet maintain his/her African-American cultural identity. Employing code switching in this manner would help him/her to become bicultural as Fries-Britt and Turner puts it. Constant interaction with the different cultural groups can help everyone develop a repertoire of expression and behaviors of all communities, including White and Black, and allow users of code switching to alternate as appropriate (Fries-Britt 320).

On the contrary, critics may argue that code switching could lead to unstable external cultural relationships, because it creates a pretentious environment due to
members of different cultures simply mimicking each other for the sake of obtaining economic success. However, this form of interaction will actually strengthen external cultural relationships, because it seems necessary that a person first learn something about a culture before obtaining the ability to switch between his/her native cultural behavior and external cultural behavior. The person would not be “mimicking” the alternate culture, but instead illustrating that he/she is bi-cultural. Additionally, the above position assumes that code-switching is directly responsible for establishing a relationship between people of different cultures. Contrarily, code-switching simply provides a medium in which members of two different cultures can communicate. It closely resembles the idea of learning two different dialects for a particular language in an effort to communicate, rather than mimicking another culture for the sole purpose of obtaining a higher socioeconomic status.

Conversely, other critics may argue that the longevity of cultural pluralism is limited, because some cultural groups will eventually lose parts of their identities when they switch codes or modes of behavior in an effort to communicate with other cultures. The problem with this assessment is that it assumes one culture will eventually be consumed by another and eventually fade into oblivion. However, cultural pluralism would be creating a new culture that is ideally a combination of both cultures. This new culture would consist of bicultural beings that are able to communicate and interact with each without losing important aspects of their native culture.
Cultural pluralism will allow an African-American to attend an institution of higher learning, even one that is predominantly White, and obtain upward social mobility as long as the person subscribes to the strategy of accommodation without assimilation (choosing not to reject his/her native culture). If this strategy is employed, there will be an extremely low risk that an African-American will reject his/her cultural identity. Eventually, if more people subscribes to this mode of thinking, the idea of attending a higher educational institution will no longer be considered something that is simply a part of White culture, but it will also be a part of African-American culture, which ultimately results in it being a part of American culture.


