NED E. WILLIAMS:
MEMORY, IDENTITY, AND TRAUMA

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Abstract

In a period of unprecedented school closures across the United States, one East Texas community, Longview, Texas is rebuilding every school in the district. Among these schools is a formal segregated school closed in 1969 –Ned E. Williams. While school administrators saw this 'new' school as the facilitation of population growth, many community members identified the place with a particular legacy, identity and set of memories. The rebirth of Ned E. Williams is involks the nostalgic period of childhood memories and an incredicle education. While the abundance of good memories emerges, this rebirth is the revival of unwarranted memories of segregation and oppression in America.However, this thesis examines how one small community destabilized due the process of cultural trauma as a result of the closure of the school that anchored the town. Moreover, it seeks to explore how school clousures in communities of color may initiate the process of trauma.Through four in depth interviews with alumni, the thesis navigated, the African American identity, collective memory, and cultural trauma laced in one school founded by a former slave named Ned E. Williams.

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First, I would like to Thank God for enduring strength and mercy during this journey.

I dedicate this thesis to the late Hazel M. Moonie, the woman that pushed me to be better than my circumstance and grow wiser every day. It is your voice that first provided me with the history of Ned E. Williams.

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To Major, Max, and Kynndale
This is all for you

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction

On Tuesday, September 21st, 2010, a long-awaited celebration was taking place in the quaint East Texas city of Longview – the re-opening of Ned E. Williams Elementary School. The event, attended by more than 150 men and women of all ages and races, drew attendees from California to the Northeast coast of Maryland, represented the deep connectivity and broad impact of this one school on the lives of hundreds of alumni who both attended and lived in this neighborhood community now known as Lakeport, Texas.

The indelible memories embedded in the minds of attendees from different periods of the school's history constantly evoked stories of "remember when…" all throughout the three-hour event. Everyone had a story to tell, a memory of a special moment or moments that connected him or her to the school forever. These individual narratives coalesced on that September morning as everyone came together witnessing the continuity of his or her story. The faces, some full of tears, others wide smiles, is captured in a colorful photo illustrating the excitement, pride, and historical moment in their lives. The purple and white banner held by attendees in the photo reads: "NED E. Williams Elementary School, September 21st, 2010, MUSTANG P.R.I.D.E." This photo, demarcating a period of resurrection epitomized so much more that cannot be articulated or imaged, only experienced.

There is an old idiom that says, "A picture is worth a thousand words." This ineffable moment captured in this photo, and those "thousand words" that construct it are what I wanted to learn about in the exploration of a school that once anchored an entire community for 85 years until it closed in 1969. September 21st, 2010, became a moment that defined the past, present, and future of Ned E. Williams Elementary School. The story of this day as retold by alumni, decedents,

school administrators, students, and community members all share the same message: "this is a day to remember."

While the historical appreciation of narratives centered on African American schools in the American South are increasingly present in educational literature, there still remains a large gap in the literature regarding the actual schooling practices that made these schools important, and not only to the students, but also the communities they served. As a young man growing up in the rural East Texas community of Longview[1], I vividly recall the nostalgic conversations that family members and elders in my life discussed about the amazing experiences gained as a Ned E. Williams student.

The importance of this institution, passed throughout two generations, formalized a narrative, identity, and marked a moment of a shift for this small community. For forty years, the citizens of Lakeport, Texas did not have a school in their community, but never allowed the memories, lessons, and friends gained to be lost with the closures and demolition of the school.

This thesis seeks to explore the historical and contemporary importance of the rebirth of a formally segregated school – Ned E. Williams – in a rural East Texas community. First, I will discuss the historical context and centrality of schools to communities in America using Longview, Texas as a case. Secondly, I will discuss the construction of community through Ned E. Williams, (the man, the school, and the resulting legacy.) Third, I will discuss the construction of trauma using Jeffrey Alexander's, theory of cultural trauma and the institutionalized methods of preservation that carried the legacy of the institution throughout a forty-year absence. Through ethno-historical analysis of schools in America, it is important to contextualize the history of Black schools against the backdrop of America, in addition to understanding the trauma and "unintended

[1] Longview, Texas is the next city outside of Lakeport, Texas. Essentially, Lakeport is a suburb in a sense.

consequences" that burgeoned from African American schools during segregation and resonate with contemporary school closures today in America.

1.1 Historical Overview

In 2010, I returned home from college to the quaint East Texas city of Longview. It was the first time in three years I would spend a significant period in the city since my departure to Houston, Texas for college. As I entered into the small, vibrant, and rural community, I noticed an emergence of construction signs, trimmed trees, and vacant lots that were once filled with homes and an abundance of children whom dominated the landscape. I remember thinking: 'things are changing.' As I approached my childhood neighborhood, I noticed that my former elementary school was fenced off, boarded up, and closed. Immediately, my mind was flooded with youthful memories as a student at Jodie McClure Elementary School. As the memories began to slip slowly back into the historic depths of my mind, I began to question the schools closure and how this would impact our neighborhood and the local community.

As time passed, I learned not only was my elementary school – Jodie McClure – closed but also two others as a part of one of the largest school bond[2] processes in Longview Independent School District history. The 268-million dollar bond, passed in 2008, called for the rebuilding, replacement, and closures of eleven schools in a three-year period. Concomitantly, the school district overhauled and rezoned a 40-year desegregation order that mandated busing[3] as a measure to integrate the formally segregated schools in 1971. Some Longview, Texas citizens, praised the

[2] A bond issue as it applies to ballots is when a state government, or a local unit of government (city, county, school district), places a question before the voters as a ballot measure, asking them to approve or deny additional proposed spending. School districts and municipalities often make the most use of bond election authority, but state governments utilize bonds as well.

[3] Desegregation busing in the United States (also known as forced busing or simply busing) is the practice of assigning and transporting students to schools in such a manner as to redress prior racial segregation of schools, or to overcome the effects of residential segregation on local school demographics.

rebuilding and rezoning process. The possibility of new schools throughout the entire district was unfathomable in a community with schools dating back to the 1950s. On the contrary, others felt that the loss of schools that embodied decades of history should not be closed or moved to other areas in the city. These divisive opinions solemnly illustrated in a bond election that passed by a small margin of 14 votes.

Longview, Texas, like most American cities, has a peppered past that includes a trite history of segregation that lingers in the form of residential, economic, and educational inequality to date. While the systemic issues in Longview are not as exorbitant as urban metropolises, (e.g. Houston, Chicago, or Philadelphia), they remain significant in such cases like integration that peel back scars on contentious issues that have never truly healed. As citizens expressed concerns over "increased taxes," school closures, school placement/location, and the assumed "re-segregation of schools" another conversation was also taking place within a certain population of the city, which intersected all of these conversation in a nuanced manner – "they're bringing Ned E. Williams back."

This statement rippled throughout the older African American communities within the city with an extraordinary essence of pride. Unlike the present schools that were being rebuilt or closed, Ned E. Williams was a formally segregated school with a profound history that closed in 1969 during the integration process. The closure left one neighborhood-community now known as Lakeport, Texas without a school for forty years. While a number Longview, Texas citizens were affiliated with the school or knew a graduate, the school represented something ineffable that overshadowed every other conversation, and brought smiles to the faces of so many men and women that knew the historical legacy of Ned E. Williams.

As the conversations regarding the preparation for the school grew louder, so did my interest in learning about the significance of this formally segregated institution to a community that championed against slavery, Jim Crow, and the vestiges of inequality that presently exist today. My questions drawn from the mind of a post-integration perspective and native in this community are: how and why are we, the Longview, Texas community, celebrating the symbolic return of a seemingly traumatic and tumultuous period in American history. Moreover, how did this community preserve this legacy in absence never knowing the day of its return?

1.1.1 Ned E. Williams – *The Man*

In 1883, a self-educated former slave named Ned Edward (N.E.) Williams was tasked with the development of a Negro[4] school in the Fredonia community of Gregg County. During this period, the county did not have schools for African Americans, which primarily populated the area. As former slaves and sharecroppers, most African Americans could not read and were often discouraged to do so. Ned determined to "lift his people out of the situation resulting from slavery" purchased 500 acres of land and began his teaching career. Concomitantly, he attended Bishop College[5] and the Tuskegee Institute[6] to obtain a teaching certificate. It was at Tuskegee that he became close with Booker T. Washington, Ph.D., and George Washington Carver, two accomplished and influential pioneers in African American history. After three years of success in the Fredonia community, Mr. Sam Brittain, a local landowner, donated land and asked Ned to assist in establishing a school in his home community – Greenville (Williams J. N., 2010, p. 5).

[4] Negro was the pejorative term used to identify African Americans at this time. I will use African American or Black throughout the remained of this document.
[5] Bishop College was historically black college, founded in Marshall, Texas, USA, in 1881 to serve students in east Texas, where the majority of the black population lived.
[6] Tuskegee University is a private, historically black university located in Tuskegee, Alabama, USA; established by Booker T. Washington. The campus has been designated as the Tuskegee Institute National Historic Site, a National Historic Landmark. Tuskegee University's campus is the only school in the United States to hold this distinction.

Greenville was located in the Elderville School District that included Pleasant Green, Post Oak, Easton, Peatown, and Elderville. Peatown and Elderville were all white schools, but the remaining four were African American. By 1918, Greenville had grown from the one-room schoolhouse to a prominent vocational high school for the entire community. Black students from the district would attend grade 1-8 in their home community and were bused to Greenville for high school. This expansion brought forth the school's first name change from Greenville School (1884-1918) to Gregg County Training School. The funds for the expansion was supported by Julius Rosenwald, a white Chicago philanthropist that provided financial backing to construct better educational facilities for African Americans in the south. In the 1930s, Peatown and Elderville schools were closed and incorporated into the Longview Independent School District eight miles north of these communities, which was still segregated at this time (Pitre, 2013).

For the next fifty-seven years – 1889 – 1945 – Ned E. Williams served as head administrator and principal of the school until his death on November 28, 1945 at the age of 81. In 1946, the school was renamed Ned E. Williams Industrial School in honor of the founder and principal. By 1947, Pleasant Green, Post Oak, and Easton schools were all consolidated with Ned E. Williams. Professor Elzie Roscoe (E.R.) Williams, Ned's son, was selected to lead the school and district becoming the first African American superintendent in Gregg County. In 1952, the school was renamed Ned E. Williams High School, but that would only last for twelve years. In 1963, the school was consolidated with Longview Independent School District as a result of the 1954 Brown v. Board of Education decision that desegregated American schools. In 1964, the high school portion of the school was closed, and the high school students were sent to Mary C. Womack, another all black high school in Longview, Texas. After 44 years of service, E.R. Williams retired with the closure of the high school. From 1964-1971, Ned E. Williams

Elementary School operated in theory; however, the school's elementary closed in 1969 when the entire Elderville School District was dissolved (Williams J. N., 2010, pp. 5-9).

In 1971, Longview Independent School District demolished the abandoned facilities and returned the land to the Brittain family who initially donated the land. The school had grown from a four-room schoolhouse to an entire campus that included an auditorium, agriculture and mechanical shop building, and homemaking building. A modern brick structure constructed in 1958 with eight classrooms including a library, book room, combination science room and laboratory, two administrative offices, and one storage room constructed. After 85 years of operation, the only thing that remains is a concrete foundation of the gymnasium and a platform that once served as the stage (Zarazua, 1996).

1.2 The Centrality of Schools to Communities / Redesigning Urban Schools

The closure of African American schools throughout the 60s and 70s during integration created some voids in African American communities throughout the United States. More importantly, it established a salient moment in American history for educational infrastructure that is not often discussed, as least sociologically. Throughout the last century, educational institutions in the United States have undergone some physical transitions: from one-room schoolhouses relegated to small communities to now multistory facilities that serve entire cities. The redevelopment of educational infrastructure throughout the United States has created an emerging interest regarding school and community interdependencies.

The growth and decline of educational institutions over the course of a century is intuitive, yet misleading. In 1929-30, there were approximately 248,000 public schools in the United States. In 2010-11, that number drastically dropped to around 99,000 (Education, 2013). This loss is primarily attributed to the consolidation of schools and the growth of American cities. However,

in the last two decades, the loss of schools has been attributed to enrollment decline, budget deficits, and poor academic performance (Layton, 2013). No longer is the loss of schools due to growth, but the reverse – decline. Although these trends are achieving the same results, school closures, it is due to two very difference causes.

The three areas above that are currently identified as the leading justification for school closures have begun to destabilize slowly communities throughout the United States (Fitzpatrick, 2012). Two cities, in particular, have been identified as the forerunners in this movement to close schools: Chicago, Illinois and New York City, New York. These two cities have closed, consolidated, and overhauled close to one hundred schools in the last decade; albeit, they are not alone: Washington, D.C.; Newark, New Jersey; Los Angeles, California; Pittsburg and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; New Orleans, Louisiana; Houston, Texas; Kansas City, Missouri, and not surprisingly Detroit, Michigan. More often than not, these schools have been located in low-income and minority communities. Collectively, these cities have closed approximately 500 schools in the last decade alone, which is unprecedented in the history of American schools. (Pennsylvania Clearinghouse for Education Research (PACER), 2013).

These seemingly targeted closures have raised concerns for some citizens, community leaders, elected officials, and education departments at universities across the world. Moreover, the school closures have created adverse impacts on low-income communities in Philadelphia and Chicago exacerbating the pre-existing class and race stratifications within the communities. Additionally, the governing policies that determine a school's closure have created increased gang violence due to school consolidations, which integrated rival gangs into the same school. Although these issues are not as widespread, the absence of cultural competency when creating educational policies creates additional issues on already problem-burdened children and communities. The

social policies implemented has presented communities plagued with poverty and educational inequality with limited access to infrastructure that exists to serve more than the purpose of education (Ravitch, 2013).

In response to these actions, a number of positions have been presented on why these schools should not be closed, the most common arguments are: 1) the dependency on the schools infrastructure in the neighborhood community; 2) student safety; 3) and historical and cultural significance (Sipple, Casto, & Blakely, 2009). Schools, the facility, for many communities in America are multifaceted. Albeit, for communities of color, schools, religious centers, or churches, within communities of color have conventionally served as places of solitude to escape the vestiges of racism and Jim Crow laws that dictated the treatment of colored people for almost a century in the United States. Given these policies, schools, and the land they occupy, have served as green spaces/parks, recreational centers, voting locations, and cultural anchors, which not only preserve history, but also serve as tangible evidence of the communal history and family memories (Pattillo-McCoy, 1998).

There is an ineffable attachment to these physical spaces, especially in places like New Orleans, Louisiana the home of William Frantz Elementary School. Although William Frantz Elementary is no different structurally than most elementary schools throughout the nation, it embodies a heart-wrenching narrative of school integration in the United States. In 1960, Ruby Bridges was one of six black students selected to attend an all-white school in the South. Although she ended up being the only black student to stay, she became known as the first black child to attend an all-white elementary in the segregated South (Hall, 2000).

It is narratives like this that make the closing schools in certain communities' gut-wrenching. When schools are closed, consolidated, or overhauled despite their poor academic

records, budget deficits, or low enrollments, it is seemingly perceived as a destruction of memories, loss of heritage, and devaluing of a cultural history, in this case African-American history (Beaumont & Pianca, 2002).

As the literature on the importance of neighborhood schools to communities continues to materialize, our nation is entering a new phase of rebuilding educational infrastructure. May 17, 2014, marked the 60th anniversary of *Brown v. Board of Education*. This landmark case overturned the *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision of 1896. The 1954 ruling of *Brown* declared, "Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal." As a result, schools began to integrate their children, which led to the closure of many black-only schools and desegregation busing or simply "busing" (Eaton, 2001). Busing, in essence, was the principal tool used to achieve for integration and racial balance. As implied, busing allowed for the transport of students from their assigned neighborhood school to another school often miles away (Jost, 2004). As efforts to ensure forced integration have dwindled, we are entering a period where for the first time in half a century, school districts are rebuilding their schools, altering student assignment/zoning plans, and seeking unitary status. If a school district achieves unitary status then they no longer have federal oversight; ultimately nullifying adherence to the federal desegregation orders because in essence they have "*eliminated the vestiges of prior discrimination to the extent practicable.*"

This new phase of educational construction is primarily due to aging school infrastructure and legislation, such as *Brown,* which has changed the educational landscape. Right now, as school districts begin to reevaluate attendance zones, close schools, and replace aging infrastructure we are witnessing two paradigm shifts: the regionalization of schools – the shift away from neighborhood schools – and a resurgence in de facto school segregation. While school closures,

aging infrastructures, and re-segregation are not unique to the south, school districts within the South are making this transition rapidly, specifically in the state of Texas (Hannah-Jones, 2014).

As the phenomenon of school closures continues to develop, so does the resistant culture of communities against such actions. Unfortunately, the importance of culture, history, and stabilization of these schools to communities remains an absent area of evaluation when determining a closure. Both historically and contemporarily, as schools continue to close, the physical eradication and a declining association with the schools makes the conversation about the importance of schools in and to communities slowly fade away. Once the school disappears some things occur within the community, namely destabilization. Home values shift and the vitality of a community slowly declines which is primarily quantitatively assessed (Lyson, 2002). It is qualitative assessments that are often neglected and not attainable outside of distant conversations.

Chapter 2: Methodology

"Research is formalized curiosity," – Zora Neale Hurston

It is here in Longview, Texas where the qualitative assessment is attainable to me throughout the assistance of ethno-historical analysis, interviews, and archival research. At the onset, I must not dismiss my connection with this community, or my ability to gain access to a particular group of people, lengthy conversations, their homes, and valued memorabilia in a manner that none natives may or may not. Moreover, my growth in this community allowed me to dig a bit deeper than the surface questions one might ask about the historical practices or history within this community, as it is also a part of my personal history in a sense. However, this is why the theoretical framework becomes important in the sense to remain objective. As a researcher, my connections must not be overstated in attempts to reduce the research to a sensational investigation that seeks to cultivate victimization because that is far from what is discovered here.

The use of cross-disciplinary practice – ethnography and historiography – is due to the extensive amount of historical data provided in the thesis. Also, it is important to understand the interview process that necessitates the reconstruction and period in which most of my informants spoke, also to how and why particular things took place. The ethnographic aspect to this approach comes in the attempt to understand the culture and environment that no longer exist but is reconstructed through the historical and ethnographic collaboration. While the environment cannot be wholly recreated, this approach proved best to grasp the voice of the informants.

As mentioned earlier, the access to my informants is primarily attributed to my connection to this community. As the grandson of a well-known minister in the area, I was able to connect with some elders that I did not know because of my family name. In a sense, this served me well given that I had a short period, two weeks, to conduct these interviews. At the same time, while it

may seem like my connections threaten the validity of research or the opportunity learn about subtle notions regarding things I may assume to have answers, it did not. Essentially, my access to their presence in no way guaranteed access to their knowledge, which I faced with one informant that refused to meet with me despite previous agreements. I grew up in a city 8-miles away from this community in an entirely different time period from theirs, which in a sense prompted more questions about how things were and truly research to identify any existing data or research on the town or school. Albeit, I would learn that the most fascinating and informing documents were not archived at the historical society but in the homes of my informants.

Identifying and contacting these informants/interviewees proved to be a challenge. So, with hopes of any source information, I made a Facebook post asking: 'if there was anyone with a connection to Ned E. Williams that would be willing to interview with me.' I was inundated with a number of responses directing me to existing source material but the beneficial source was a former educator in the Longview Independent School District that was related to the grandson James Elton Williams, a 1947 graduate who was now living in Houston, Texas. She provided me with his information, and he agreed to meet with me providing me with an incredible opportunity to learn more about the man, community, and school all in one sitting.

Fortunately, given that my hometown does not have an international airport, I flew into Houston, Texas and met with him at his church where he was a retired administrator, which I also attended during my time in undergrad in Houston creating an immediate connection. After a three-hour interview, I was provided with information regarding the school's alumni association that operated solidifying a point of reference for the next four interviewees/informants. Mentioning that I spoke with Mr. Williams, or that I was directed to meet with them under his advisement granted another level of trust that may not have existed without this initial encounter. Most

importantly, he provided me with an unfinished biographical text that was bound together comprised of important documents, (e.g., slave ownership, obituaries, school diplomas, and biographies), he had collected about his late father and grandfather. The value of this document to my research cannot be overstated. It saved me time that I did not have.

The remaining four informants were equally generous in their time and allowance for me to sit and peruse personal documents that were not available *anywhere* beyond the thresholds of their homes. The in-person conversations, which were digitally recorded, are being archived in a digital database at the Gregg County Historical Association for future information. James Elton, '47, Carmena Jones Anderson, '49, George A. Bates, '51, Shirley Sells, '62, and Troy Simmons, Longview Independent School District trustee all provided information and direction throughout the interview process. The relationships of the interviewees ranged from a student, parent, grandparent, teacher, and school board member of the school. At times, the multiple connections to the school infused a multitude of memories that had to be distinguished at times throughout the interview to ensure that they were not confusing time periods, in addition to the fact that their backgrounds spanned three decades.

Although, there were a few more informants that could have benefited me, I selected these individuals given the constant references to one another or community members that knew that they were connected to the school in one way or another. Most importantly, it was imperative that I spoke to individuals that had excellent ability to remember (meaning that memory had not begun to deteriorate) and that were still involved with the schools association. Albeit, the selection process was simple because many of the alumni are deceased or no longer live within the community. Thus, the four informants and one outside trustee were the only people available for the interview process.

Given the nature of my research, and the dependency on peoples' mind, the questioned asked were open-ended but also rebuffed to learn more than the "good moments" that occurred in the school. Often, I cross-pollinated my question with one of their responses but also a document found in the archives or a previous document provided by another informant. This process of triangulation allows for both the questions and responses to be somewhat grounded preventing or at least lessening romanticization. The few archived documents available at the Gregg County Historical Society were not sufficient enough to provide information on the school given that a lot of African-American school history was not properly archived or discarded due to the integration process.

Primarily dependent upon James Spradley's *Ethnographic Interview*, I was able to identify the emerging or repeating themes from the five interviews. I coded the interviews, also to coding the documents collected to validate many of the themes that may have been discussed in earlier newspapers clippings or memorabilia. The limitations of this method are those commonly associated with qualitative research: times, the degree of connectivity to the informants, and contradictions between dates or stories that cannot be verified without a second round of interviews but these moments were noted. In closing, one remaining limitation is the absence of many school affiliates that are still living in the town or still living but elsewhere. This limited my ability to gain a broader understanding of the stories but also gave me the ability to learn more from those interviewed as they often referenced other living alumni.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

There are three concepts used within this thesis: cultural trauma, collective identity, and collective memory. The use of these concepts is commonly associated with groups and national incidents that fall under the discipline of sociology or anthropology. In this case, I use them to look at a group but an issue – school closures – that is considered educational. By doing this, it places a sociological lens to this issue.

2.1.1 Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity – The Ned E. Williams Identity

As explained in the literature review that follows, Alexander's theory of cultural trauma is particularly strong for my case; however, it cannot be discussed alone given the interdisciplinary development of the theory itself. As coupled in the text, *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, Alexander and Eyerman outline global situations to contextualize how the theory functions. One case particularly discusses slavery in the United States and how that traumatic period assisted in framing the narrative and identity of African Americans today.

Similarly, given the evolution of Ned E. Williams and the African American community that it served, it is important to note the similarities of framing by Eyerman in that case for mine. The discussion of the community, school, and peoples all had an identity and narrative that was interdependent upon one another which I will discuss in chapter four during the construction of community.

The use of collective identity allows the examination of the community to explain the stability and communities that existed or identified from the interviews. Expanding upon the notions of family, race, place, and historical lineage further disaggregate how, in fact, the school "anchored" the community. Moreover, it creates another opportunity to explore how the community may or may not have been strengthened by the schools closures. Albeit, this is not

something that I am seeking to discuss in the paper nor do I think this concept can substantiate such a claim without a quantitative component (STAM, STAMM IV, HUDNALL, & HIGSON-SMITH, 2003).

2.1.2 Collective Memory

The third concept, collective memory, is the foundational concept that guides the narrative. Conceptualized by Maurice Halbwachs, the concept discusses the social construction of collective memories comprised of, "individuals as group members who remember" (Coser, 1950, pp. 22-23). Furthermore, the roles of space in the construction of memory such as social institutions present an interesting interpretation. There are similar discussions that emerge a bit on space, place, and identity that are common in urban planning theories, which support Halbwachs' statements regarding space and memory.

As learned in the interviews, the individual memories of their times at Ned E. Williams and the community allowed the memories to be kept alive during the four decades it was closed. Halbwachs also warns the user of this by explaining social lofting, cross-cueing, and transactive memory. Essentially, it will provide the framing to explain how many of the interviewees remember things or neglected to remember but relied upon particular documents. Moreover, how the formation of the memories were retained through the reinforcement of informal meetings and gathers that cultivated these memories that may have been forgotten or not been experienced at all. While these notions almost necessitate a discussion regarding Marianna Hirsch's, *The Generation of Post Memory* it does not occur enough nor qualify for her conceptualization at this point.

The collective use of these three concepts serves a non-traditional approach to an all too familiar conversation surrounding the importance of cultural institutions and preservation.

Moreover, while this cannot be considered an original theory, I believe that it serves as the best conduit for this conversation. To be clear: I will discuss the construction of the community in the first empirical chapter, constructing and building the community, using Halbwachs concept of collective trauma. In the second empirical chapter, I will use Alexander's theory of cultural trauma to discuss the construction of the school's closure as a trauma.

Chapter 3: Literature Review – Collective Identity and Collective Memory

The concept of collective identity immersed in both social movement and feminist theory and literature that have been used to explain the development and sustainability of contemporary social movements. Albeit, the concept is often found in fields, (e.g. nationalism studies, religion, and psychology) that are comparable to sociology. Particularly, in the field of sociology, the concept is infused with work from Marx, Durkheim, and Weber (Hetherington, 1998). Through their attempt to understand social cohesion when groups face conflict. Although, I am not discussing this case as a social movement, the most applicable definition to this study comes from the social movements' field.

As the contemporary emergence of social movements entered an inexplicable phase (it was often associated with class issues in Europe) that intersected[7] a multitude of sectors that could not be easily aligned. The inability to place the alliance of groups working together on a common issues, (e.g. feminist, environment, and environmental issues). From works by Alberto Melucci, Alain Touraine, and others that were influential in the growth of the theory, the definition, "the shared definition of a group that derives from members' common interest, experiences and solidarity.' (Whitter & Taylor , 1992).

When operationalized, the concept provides a common voice and language on an issue "through a set of rituals, practices, and cultural artifacts". Moreover, Melucci's workplaces a particular importance on the "emotional involvement of activist" (Fominaya, 2010, p. 395). The primary disagree amongst scholars surround the "process or product". The production of the movements based on the process of it and the product of it. Regardless, the most important

[7] See Kimberly Crenshaw's, *Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color.* Commonly used in feminist theory, it outlines a multitude of issues that challenge women of color despite their differing demographics.

arguments as it related to this thesis surrounds is, "Are movements strengthened by the collective identity?" (Adams , 1989, pp. 22-33). While the debate surrounding the answer does not interest me nor the questions surrounding this community, the discussion regarding communities the formation of the groups and the ability to build up momentum within and across the group from difference that is felt outside of the group (Crowley, 2008, pp. 705-24).

Despite the literature being centered on social movements, Ron Eyerman takes a similar approach but suggest that in the case of African American's, collective identity is a cultural process that emerged from the construction of the collective memory of slavery. He states: "The notion of an African American identity, however, was articulated in the latter decades of the nineteenth century by a generation of blacks for whom slavery and its representation through speech and artworks that grounded African American identity and permitted its institutionalization in organization…mediated through recollection and reflection, and, for some black leaders and intellectuals, tinged with a bit of strategic, practical and political, interest" (Eyerman, 2004, pp. 60-1).

Within this chapter, he uses historical and ethnographical materials to ground the development and emergence of the African American identity in Black communities throughout the North and Southern United States. Using major icons within the African American community like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., he articulates how he, King, was able to use his voice, the narrative, and position as a minister to create a movement. This is imperative to this thesis because it reinforces particular occurrences that occurred in Lakeport, Texas and within Ned E. Williams. While Eyerman also discusses the development of generational memory, he does not sufficiently elaborate on the actual passages of memory but how media and time places pressure on groups and society to revisit and sometimes rewrite historical narratives with either gaining or losing a

particular narrative. Moreover, he discusses Benedict Anderson's concept of *imagined communities,* which is important to keep in mind but not focus on for this particular study. In discussing the materialization of Historical Black Colleges and Universities, Black publications, and communities/social institutions that reinforce that Black identity. "The success of the failure of reconstruction was an expanding institution base for sustaining a black community, as segregated schools and newspapers were added to the churches and other counter institutions" (Eyerman, 2004, pp. 80-4). Essentially, movement and identity, in this case, were reinforced due to the rejection.

In the Durkheim tradition, Eyerman grounds his approach to the slavery and African American in Durkheim himself, and Maurice Halbwach collective memory that is also discussed. The importance of collective memory to this thesis cannot be overstated due to the theoretical framing that is derived from this one concept. Maurice Halbwach, a Durkheimian, a foundational scholar in the field of sociology wrote his seminal text, *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire*, in 1925 where he not only discussed his concept of collective memory, but also expanded upon it through this work that was not translated from French to English until 1950 by Lewis Coser to, *On Collective Memory.* The text explores the development and connections between history and collective memory for sociological purposes.

He explains that the construction and reconstruction of memories are primarily for the purpose of informing the present. Through a dialogue of historical continuity and collective memory that illustrates the dependency and need for continuity in history to inform that present from generalizing history in moments and snapshots but a continues narrative that informs the context of those moments. While Halbwachs explores the differences between individual and collective memory he discusses how collective memories are passed throughout groups and

generations through institutions that essentially binds the individual memory with the collective through a few techniques: social loafing, collaborative inhibition, cross-cueing, and transactive memory (Halbwachs, 1992, pp. 37-41).

Within collective memory, as a concept, individuals often depend on the memories of others to sustain their own memories in order to preserve, validate, or better inform their past memories normally to inform a person in a present circumstance or a similar situation. Collaborative inhibition is not only the collaboration of others; it extends to the dependency of another memory for the storing of information; however, this also can be a method of preservation for an individual. At times, this leads to transactive memory, the formation of an individual who is often referred to as the key informant or most informed on a particular issue similar to a historian (Mary, Blair, & Huebsch, 2000, pp. 1570-1).

Chapter 4 – Construction of Community

"Well there were three areas, one area was Easton, Post Oak, and it can on down to Pleasant Green, all of those would come to Greenville School. The bus would bring'em from Easton and Post Oak and then another bus would come from Pleasant Green and bring them all to one school... yes, it was an all-Black community." – Carmenia Jones Anderson, Class of 1949

African Americans primarily occupied the Greenville community[8] like some communities during the 1800s to 1960s. This community structure created an innate structure of services that served to provide the citizens within the community. The community constructed more so as a direct response of the segregation policies in the United States, became a central point amongst the five communities due not only to the centrality of Greenville to the other communities that surrounded it, but also the school as Mrs. Anderson mentioned.

4.1: The Collective Identity

The school became the anchoring draw of the "all-Black community" that provided a "great education" from the "Williams'" (Anderson, 2015). The underline cohesion of this community was steeped in the history of slavery, plantations, and sharecropping, which aligned the identity of the community in the previous struggle and present circumstance. As Ron Eyerman discusses, the construction of the African American identity was reinforced and tied to the institutions that reinforced the sense of parity that existed throughout the country.

In Greenville, that institution was the school that tied the school to the community and the community to people. "He was called to help set up a school in his community (Greenville) on land donated by Mr. Sam Brittain" (Williams J. N., 2010, p. 6). The mobilization of this identity

[8] The Greenville community is now a part of Lakeport, Texas. So, Greenville and Lakeport are used interchangeably dependent upon the time period referenced.

did not emerge on its own; it is strengthened the man, Ned E. Williams. "Everyone respected him." He was a "very strict man that was well educated for a man of his time" (Anderson, 2015; Williams J. E., 2015). The respect that the community had for an educated man presented the opportunity for a sense of glorification for Mr. Williams. The value of education was taken seriously, "you would either become an educator, farmer or a minister" (Bates, 2015). Mr. Williams became the leader of the educational gateway for African Americans within the community due to his development of programs and excellent teaching strategies.

"We had some programs for home economics, science, mechanics, and a lot of other programs that most schools did not have" (Sells, 2015). The growth of opportunities and teaching programs promoting the notoriety of the small Gregg county training school. "The school became well-known for putting out good students" (Bates, 2015). The growth of the schools reputation brought for a "pride in the man, and the legacy of school…there was no other school like this" (Sells, 2015).

The school as a Black institution within the community cultivated a sense of identity that was formed due to the parity in the period. As Eyerman states, these social institutions that solidified the perpetuation and growth of the communities provided a sense of community. Similarly, the definition of collective identity, as discussed within the social movements, the experience of slavery within the community, and the oppressive Jim Crow laws that inhibited access to certain social mobility created a solidarity on the issue education, which was important for mobility.

> "It [the school] meant better opportunities for the people there. We urged the school district to keep the school open. There was a strong resistance here" (Williams J. E., 2015).

The access to better opportunities to gain education was through Ned E. Williams, the man and the school. Thus, he, Ned, did not become a leader of a social movement but a central component to the element of the collective identity that the community was built up. In essence, Ned E. Willaims, education, and mobility became synonymous.

> "Everyone respected the Williams' [Ned E. Williams and E.R. Williams] because they were educated, landowners, and provide opportunities that just weren't available at that time to Black people. If anyone ever misbehaved, he would care [sic] them in the office and give'em something. Then he would call your parents and tell them that he did it. There was a strong appreciation for their family, so no one really disobeyed. And, if they did…" (Sells, 2015, Anderson, 2015).

4.1.2 Glorification and Collective Memory

The self-made development of the Ned E. Williams as a former slave to an educator created an appreciation for the Williams family within the community. More importantly, this led to a glorification of Ned E. Williams. On November 28, 1945, Ned E. Williams died at the age of 81 (Williams J. N., 2010, p. 33). The following year, the school that he founded and served as led for 57 years, was renamed in his honor.

The re-naming of the institution solidified this homage to the legacy and collective identity that Ned E. Williams represented. In Halbwachs text, *On Collective Memory,* he discusses the preservation of memory through "rituals and ceremonials acts of heroic actors…that keep the

memory alive in everyday life. Moreover, he discusses the "symbolic display" to not only maintain but "strengthen the memory through celebration (Halbwachs, 1992, p. 25).

In this re-naming process, this ode to Ned creates a materialized image of his legacy, also to an everyday reinforcement of the memory for the following generations. The institutionalization of memory creates this reinforcement of the importance of education and the man.

> "When my grandfather passed, my father became the principal, and then District Superintendent. If I am not mistaken, he was the first Black Superintendent in the county for sure, but I also believe the state of Texas. My dad worked with my grandfather every day; he was second to my grandfather at the school. Every day, he and my dad would walk to school, about one mile unless it were raining. He also would drive him around because he did not have a license; he only drove a horse and buggy (laughter). For about 25 years, Dad was Superintendent at the school until he passed too. They were very strict and disciplined men. Moreover, Granddad valued education. It was not *if* you were going to school, but *where* we did not have a choice but to get an education after education. He would sit at the dinner table and discuss Socrates, Cicero, and other areas of philosophy because he enjoyed reading those things. And my dad was trained in Latin, so they had an appreciation for these things. I found a lot of it boring (laughter) but I did go on to get my masters after fighting in World War II, there were no excuses" (Williams J. E., 2015).

The familiar lineage that is shared amongst these three men reflects the legacy initiated by that Ned E. Williams, who institutionalized the role of education in the lives of his family and community members. However, the importance in this quote more so centers on the historical continuity that passed down from father to son within the social institution of the school. As the Halbwachs discusses, this also reflects the institutionalization of the memory of the collective.

Moreover, it also creates a direct association of the family name with education. I made this assessment primarily because my initial informant from Facebook was younger relative of Mr. Williams that was also in education, not to mention the Elton, my interviewee, had five children whom all are educators throughout the State of Texas (Williams J. E., 2015).

The reinforcement and development of the African American identity that emerged from the slavery within the United States and the Greenville community cultivate the collective identity that existed within the community. As the community acknowledges the collectivity through a shared narrative and the ability to escape it through education, the identity was seemingly secured. Additionally, as the educational institution became the conduit for the memories of the man that bound the identity in addition to the memories that collectively emerged within and around the institution regarding the commemoration of the man and the legacy of the institution for generations to comes.

Chapter 5: Literature Review – The History of Trauma

The historical development of literature on trauma has shifted throughout the past decade, in addition to being challenged by critics on what trauma is or is not. More importantly, the disciplinary perspectives placed upon 'trauma' have created a multitude of views on a myriad of contemporary issues throughout the world.

The existing literature and emerging sociological of lay and cultural trauma respectively presents a unique opportunity to examine a contemporary event – a school closure in a rural East Texas community – that operationalized the process articulated in Jeffrey Alexander's process of cultural trauma and also pre-existing literature that exist in fields outside of sociology. While the use of literature in a new approach to an issue that is deemed an educational issue, it allows for us to not only answer the questions around cultural attachments to schools in black communities, but also understand and align the process that is examined in this thesis with an issue that would often be excluded in the field of anthropology and sociology due to the educational literature and issue being discussed in silos. In essence, Alexander's work allows sociologist to say, 'let's look at it from this perspective.'

Trauma, as a lay theory, is explained as "naturally occurring events that shatter an individual or collective actor's sense of well-being. The disrupting event creates a response from the impacted, which is the process of "being traumatized". The sharp and immediate loss of basic human needs, (e.g. security, order, love, and connection, creates a traumatic moment (Alexander, Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma, 2004, pp. 2-3).

Arthur Neal's, *National Trauma and Collective Memory* and Cathy Caruth's, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* provide excellent examples to understanding two distinct approaches of lay trauma: "enlightenment" and "psychoanalytic", respectively. Neal's

explains the construction of national traumas through individual and collective responses to said events across the nations. The "extraordinary events…shock the foundation of the social world [creating] disruption [and] radical change" in the lives of the actors involved (Neal, 2005, pp. ix, 9-10).

The enlightenment approach takes a very simplistic view to understanding trauma. It perceives response to such events that disrupt and create major change a natural response that are rational behaviors for humans. The response of those impacted simulates a shared response by others throughout the groups' population "trigging emotional response and public attention" because the dismissal or indifference is not an option. The responses of these normally lead to "progress" and "change" in one way or another (Alexander, Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma, 2004, p. 4).

The collective focus of this approach allows a more group oriented focus as opposed to individual; however, it does not holistic exclude the individuals' role within the group but is better discussed using the psychoanalytic approach that I will discuss below. The individualistic understanding of trauma is understood in an enlightenment sense given that the effects are often visible to the naked eye. Thus, the collective impact of World War I on soldiers created an understanding of the war or combat events on soldiers individually. So while, there is a "natural limitation" to the theory, there is also a benefit of the theory to the overall understanding of the theory and uses.

In Kai Erickson's, *Everything in Its Path,* he discusses the impact of a flood that devastated a small community, Buffalo Creek, in the Appalachian Mountains. The development of a sociological approach created a framework for developments by Ron Eyerman and later

introductory theory by Jeffrey Alexander. Within this text, Erikson distinguishes individual and collective trauma as follows:

> "By individual trauma I mean a blow to the psyche that breaks through one's defenses so suddenly and with such brutal force that one cannot react to it effectively… By collective trauma, on the other hand, I mean a blow to the basic tissues of social life that damages the bonds attaching people together and impairs the prevailing sense of commonality. The collective trauma works its way slowly and even insidiously into the awareness of those who suffer from it, so it does not have the quality of suddenness normally associated with "trauma." However, it is a form of shock all the same, a gradual realization that the community no longer exist as an effective source of support that an important part of the self-has disappeared… "We" no longer exist as a connected pair or as linked cells in a larger communal body." (Erikson, 1976, pp. 153-154)

The articulation between individual and collective is important to his case and contemporary or historical cases examined in trauma literature today.

The individualistic perspective referenced is better understood using psychoanalytic thinking. As mentioned earlier, the external manifestation of internal effects of trauma is best assessed on an individualistic basis. Psychoanalytical thinking allows for the analysis of the internal response to the event. It allows for the complexities and truth of experiences that develop as a result of the event to be properly placed and essentially link particular actions: phobia, stigmas, or the inability to express emotions to the event that occurred[9].

Quite often, the impact certain events are repressed and are acutely displayed or manifested in some unconscious ways. Furthermore, this approach implies that impacted individual must

[9] See Jeffrey Prager's work on suppressed memories in the case of sexual assault victims that create "lost memory syndrome" as a result of a traumatic event. His work extends the scope of literature on trauma used within the thesis but provide an excellent example of the manifestations that can be explored using the psychoanalytic approach.

"[set] things right in the self", which allow "equanimity" to and the ability to "work through" things and regain "agency" of those memories (Alexander, Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma, 2004, pp. 8-9); (Friedlander, History and Memory, 1992); (Friedlander, When Memory Comes, 1979-43).

Cathy Caruth's work has been one of the primary scholars on this approach, namely through her essays on trauma in the text above. Caruth's grounds her use of the psychoanalytical approach by using objectivity and Freudian text to support the cognitive to explain the unconsciousness of trauma. As she explains, "the breach in the mind's experience… Is experienced too soon" for the mind to understand what took place and is now taking place inside. The mobilization of Fraud is through his insatiable desire to understand trauma using psychoanalysis. She further explains how the experience of trauma unfolds in one's dreams and actions that result from the event. She contributes strongly to this literature by not singling out the *event* as a trauma but responsive action(s) of the mind in processing the moment. "Trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way its very unassimilated nature – the way it was precisely not known in the first instance – returns to haunt the survivor later on" (Caruth, 1995, pp. 2-4).

The inability to place a trauma is important but also leads to the use of objectivity Caruth uses. Infused by a thematic identification of certain "symptoms" makes the approach empirical and naturalistic but still allows the approach to extend beyond of the Enlightenment approach. Outside of her literature, the present studies surrounding lay trauma has been mainly focused on "empirical investigations" that discuss "repression, responsibility, and reparations" in South America (Alexander, Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma, 2004, p. 7).

The two approaches present two main facts: first, events are not naturally traumatic; we construct trauma. Secondly, trauma claims cannot be tied to a particular event but the trauma emerges in the suppressed memories or subconscious of the mind revealing a memory or moment not know to us. Moreover, given that the notions of trauma occur internally and ineffable, they are assigned language that articulate, reconstruct, and even imagine events they did not experience but impact them due to the connectivity. Most importantly, the foci of lay trauma seek not to answer the existence but the comprehension of the claim.

As the goal to create mechanism continues to unfold through both the psychological and sociological advancements in the literature, the framework for Lay trauma has properly outlined a nascent theory for trauma through the work of Jeffrey Alexander. In *Trauma – A Social Theory,* Alexander expands upon his previous works[10] but mainly outlines the social process of cultural trauma.

The operationalization of cultural trauma as a theory has primarily developed an opportunity for reflexivity and answer the 'what's happening' as opposed to the 'is this a trauma?' The process outlined within the literature discusses a three-step process in the reconstruction or construction of a cultural trauma: claim making, carrier groups, and an audience, which will be outlined throughout exploration of the case of Ned E. Williams.

The adaptation of carrier groups is not innate to Alexander; it is a term coined by Max Weber in his work on the sociology of religion. As can be seen, Alexander draws upon an

[10] Jeffrey Alexander has previously written articles and book chapters on cultural trauma but seemingly constructed an empirical catalog and theoretical contributions towards this seminal text and foundational theory for the investigation of cultural trauma in the field of sociology. Alexander's first text – *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity – co-authored* with four other scholars sparked controversy and contribution to the conversation regarding appropriate tools to examine contemporary and historical events. In 2009, published another chapter on the *Remembering the Holocaust* followed by another in 2011, which concludes with the current text.

assortment of disciplinary works and genre to ground this theory. In explaining this step, he discusses who within said groups can or do make the claims that initiate this process. Secondly, how they individuals begin to mobilize and seek support of their claim by discussing "what must have been and what should be". The literature on trauma, and the emerging social theory of cultural trauma allows the use of empirical data in a constructivist manner to sustain and link a series of unrelated events in a causal manner (Alexander, Trauma A Social Theory , 2012, pp. 4,6).

Chapter Six: Coping with Trauma

The loss of Ned E. Williams to the Greenville community concomitantly impacted the school community. The re-naming of the school in honor of the legacy and identity established by Ned E. Williams, and affirmed by his son, solidified the historical continuity of the legacy until 1969. Five years after Ned E. Williams died, America overcame a historical moment and progressed in ways that Ned E. Williams may have never imagined.

The progressiveness of the nation came at the cost of Black schools, specifically Ned E. Williams. In 1969, the school closed the doors after 85 years of service to the community, the school was closed but not without resistance from the community.

> "Schools just don't move. When they held the countywide vote for the closure of the school. They didn't vote to move the school to the city. The community voted to keep it. But they overrode our decision…something happened. Had we had our way, the school would have stayed right there" (Bates, 2015).

The dissolution of the entire Elderville School District removed the foundation of the community. The closure of the school and integration process that illustrated progress in the nation was a burgeoning of trauma within the community and alumni students.

> "When the school closed, its students and alumni were filled with mixed emotions and sadness…we had mixed emotions but we adjusted quite well" (Portley, 1992). – Ruby Portley, Class of 1964

> The emotional aspects of the schools were furthered when a former student exclaimed: "When the school was torn down, I felt a sense of loss in identity…part of our heritage was gone" (Foster, 1992). – Helen L. Foster, Class of 1953

Emotional attachment to this school extends beyond the educational provisions but also the core identity of the students within the community. As Foster stated, the facility was a part of African American heritage, and the demolition of the school took something away from that collective through her plural use of the word, "our".

6.1 The Introduction of Trauma

Through comments regarding the closure of Ned E. Williams, we are introduced to the language of trauma unfolding. The statements above were made almost three decades after the school's closure; however, the memories and emotional attachment to the school are still present within their minds when discussing the school. As Alexander explains through his theory of cultural trauma, the loss of the school due to integration was created an invisible pain that is individually experienced. As stated, the "mixed emotions" means that while not everyone experienced it at the same time, this is common within the collective trauma literature. It takes the time to the entire group to experience the trauma (Erikson, 1976, pp. 153-154). Moreover, the "treat to the collective rather than the individual identity defines the suffering at stake", which in this case is the closure (Alexander, Trauma A Social Theory , 2012, pp. 2-3).

Although the cultural trauma process is being expressed in the form of a yearning and nostalgia, there is a process for this theory that is enacted in three phases but requires the appropriate audience and event to occur. In this case, both are available.

> "It was a real community center, next to the church; it was not unfamiliar to have a funeral or Sunday school there." The loss of Ned E. Williams to the community was "the end of a great legacy" that connected to the stability of the neighborhood community and the families that lived there. "When the school closed the community changed a lot" (Williams J. E., 2015).

6.1.1 The Claims Process

Claims made regarding the importance of the school to the community, in addition to the memories that make claims that there was something special here that no longer exist; a special element in the community that no longer exist and remains "unattainable due to the irreversibility of time (Keightley & Pickering, 2006). Consequently, the emergence of claims that acknowledge that absence and desire a recognition mobilizes the claims process, which is the first step of the three-step process.

As the loss of Ned E. Williams is being mobilized as a claim it must be articulated by certain individuals that are willing to construct the argument and message that this, in fact, was something special that we no longer have in our presence. "The cultural construction of trauma begins with such a claim (Thompson, 1998), (Alexander, Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma, 2004, p. 10).

Max Weber described the process of making claims are to be made by "carrier groups" they are collective agents of the trauma process. "Carrier groups have both ideal and material interest, they are situated in particular places in the social structure, and they have particular discursive talents for articulating their claims – for what might be called "meaning making" – in the public sphere. Carrier groups may be elites, but they may also be denigrated and marginalized classes. They may be prestigious religious leaders or groups whom the majority has designated as spiritual pariahs." They can be "older or younger generations", groups, or "national" that make claims (Weber, 1968) (Alexander, Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma, 2004, p. 11).

Essentially, the carrier group speaks for a group, towards the public 'the group they are claiming to be harm that they too are apart' about the event that "historical, cultural, and institutional environment within which the speech act occurs." They explain the situation, using

symbolic examples and how the event has impacted them. If successful, the group believes the claims and moves forward with the narratives of disruption.

6.1.2 The Class Reunion

As the Ned E. Williams Alumni, the group articulated the claim and thus became the carrier group.

> "Back in the 80s, we selected a committed that became known as the Ned E. Williams Alumni Association. We wanted to keep our school in the light. The group handled the organization of the bi-annual Alumni Reunion. I was selected as the chair. I did it because they [Ned E. Williams] were so wonderful to me [as a student and former faculty member.] I did not intend on teaching, I wanted to be a dentist. However, I returned back to the city and E.R. Williams gave me a job, they were just so good to me. They [the fellow alumni] decided to hold it [the reunion] at the site of the old school site. Most of the teachers lived out in that area [in Greenville]. They knew about our school and our reunion because most people would come home… so that's one of the main reasons…" (Bates, 2015).

In 1969, when the school closed, there were not many opportunities to create a sense of importance for the school without an infrastructure or present alumni to cultivate this legacy. So throughout, "informal meetings here and there." The former alumni, comprised mainly of elders, given that the schools closed in 1969, most of the alumni are 55 or older, started the association in order to "meet more frequently with former classmates and talk about old times…I don't know why but we were tight knit." (Anderson, 2015). For 17 years, almost two decades, the classmates hung out together within the city of Longview, Texas or Lakeport.

In 1986, they formalized this process by:

> "[Holding] their first reunion. The reunion every other year." "Well each year before the reunion, we meeting at the old credit union on young and discuss what we are going to do and how we're going to do it. It was Eddy Lee's idea; she said we should get all…. the former students together. So we sent letters *all* over the country, California, New York, Maryland, Chicago, and I mean from…you know. People from all over would come back for our school reunion so that we would be able to see our high school classmates. Here's my high school boyfriend (pointing to a memorabilia book). We wanted everyone to try and come so we would have on the week of the 4th of July for three days. People would normally have their vacations at that time, so it allowed more people to come. We would have such a good time; we would just discuss good times, like the time I fell going to the well. I still have the scar on my knee. Some of my classmates would remind me about that time when 'mina was running to the well and feel and bust her knee on that rock….""she was running" (As she imitated the voices of others classmates) (Anderson, 2015).

This event is one of the staple summer events within the Lakeport, Texas community. The development allowed the group to validate their claim of the uniqueness. While class reunions are not unique, the process of articulating the memories of the "lil country school" across the Sabine River differentiated them, in addition to the legacy and successful amount of graduate that came from the school that "were in many high positions in the city." In 1992, at the third class reunion, Lucy Dixon, class of 1953, began rallying classmates together to keep the legacy of Ned

E. Williams alive. "I am gathering documents now to send to Austin, Texas, for a historical marker. I'm doing the research necessary for the declaration of the school" (Dixon, 1992).

The state approval and recognition of historical place is a significant process that is often rejected. The process necessary requires sufficient documentation that the vacant land that the school once sat on is a tough task in the state of Texas. However, this carrier group, comprised of the Ned E. William Reunion Planning Board/Historical Committee, and Melvin Snoddy, class of 1966, and current owner of the land were determined to demarcate this vacant space of land as a sacred; articulating that something special happened here. After a four-year process, they successfully unveiled that marker during their 6th annual reunion July 7th, 1996. The event, attended by "alumni and former faculty of the school…" was heralded within the local newspapers as a success. Marvin Calloway said it was, "an expression of love present in this school." (Zarazua, 1996).

The significant of this moment is a conformation of the "harmful abruptness" and adoration of the school's alumni and community so quickly, less than two decades, allowed the process of gathering memories to begin immediately. Typically, this is a slower process, especially since this group was not centralized in one area anymore. "The collective trauma works its way slowly and event insidiously into the awareness of those who suffer from it, so it does not have the quality of suddenness normally associated with "trauma" (Erikson, 1976, pp. 153-154). The abrupt disruption of this community's historical lineage is evanescent in a sense being that they recognized that the school was important and collectively made a claim (Alexander, Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma, 2004, pp. 9-10).

The final part of this three-part process of cultural trauma is the audience. As can be surmised, in the case of Ned E. Williams, the audience group is the alumni member, the Lakeport,

Texas community and the greater African American community within Longview, Texas that all identify with the school's legacy in one way or another. The completion of this process provides the articulated the completion of the cultural trauma theory.

The creation of this school's closure as an event that removed that interrupted the social tissues of a community as stated by Erikson's text successfully recreated the narrative from an "imagined" event to an actually recognized event, narrative, and material representation to maintain the story that something special was once stood here but was destroyed. Additionally, the now narrative is adopted by the group and carried forth (Alexander, Trauma A Social Theory , 2012, p. 17).

6.2 Forty-Year Absence

From 1996 until 2008, there was a sound narrative within the community that recognized the tragic loss of Ned E. Williams to the Lakeport, Texas community. Throughout the absence, the annual reunion took place; however, "the population growth was now increasing in South Longview, and Lakeport, Texas. The growing residential homes and construction compelled the Longview Independent School District to reconsider and ultimately agree that a school needs to be placed in the Lakeport, Texas community (Troy W. Simmons, 2015).

As the Longview Independent School District began their school rebuilding process, they also rebuilt a school in the Lakeport, Texas community that came to be known as Ned E. Williams. The naming and placement of this school is conflicting given the interviews process. Mrs. Anderson, one of the reunion committee members provided this recollection:

> "We actually came together and as a board and agreed upon a name. We then asked the school district board if they would agree on the name, and they did…. We wanted to name it Ned E. Williams. George Bates, Ruby Portley, Eddy Lee, and a group of

> us got together and decided. We decided Ned E. Williams be appropriate because it was once in that area. It's where we all grew up, and most of us graduated from there. Although the class of '68 finished at Womack, they still considered themselves alumni of Ned E. Williams" (Anderson, 2015).

However, Mr. Bates, whose chaired the reunion/alumni committee since inception said, it was naturally going to be called Ned E. Williams and just adopted the school, we're not connected (Bates, 2015). Despite the minor discrepancies on the naming or placement of the school back within the community, it made a major impact on the alumni group.

On September 21st, 2010, over 200 people gathered at the opening of Ned E. Williams Elementary that was replacing Jodie McClure Elementary School that once served the South Longview students. The event attended by some alumni, parents, community members, school officials, and a new generation of Ned E. Williams students marked a new moment within the school's history; Ned E. Williams was back. However, the nuances throughout the interview reveal a minor difference being made by the original Ned E. Williams group.

6.2.1 The *new* N.E.W.

Five years have passed since the re-opening of the '*new* N.E.W.' as some of the young kids called it. "That school from the time it opened until now has been successful. And recognized by the state of Texas for its exemplary academic performance…it's such a community school." The current principal is doing an excellent job. "She's carry on the legacy as if she was there [a student back in the day]. I guess the only noticeable difference, besides the new facility, is the mix of all races. It's quite a conglomeration of people" (Williams J. E., 2015).

"Dr. Wise, the principal is an awesome principal. She's dynamic. I think she's doing a great jobs ensure that the name of the school carries a bit of pride you know" (Anderson, 2015).

While conversation surrounding the similarities regarding the leadership styles of the school, there were similar comments made regarding the generational shift in disciplinary practices within schools in general: "I think the culture is different though, we cared for each other a lot more than this generation. We would never pull a gun on one another; we would fight but not like the things you see today" (Sells, 2015).

"The student attitudes have changed over the years. And one disturbing aspect is the lack of respect and discipline children have for today's children" (Portley, 1992). The scales of differentiation ranged from the school's leadership, students', location, and physical facility, but nothing stood out more than the major distinction between the new and the original Ned E. Williams. "We're not really connected to them…. They just adopted the name but we're separate… I told my grandkids that they go to the school named after mine, but it *not* the same school (Sells, 2015). While both, Mr. Bates and Mrs. Cells mentioned their grandchildren attending their alma mater per say, they distinguished the two school in the earlier quotes, separating the narrative of trauma from the future legacy that is being constructed presently (Bates, 2015).

The construction of the cultural trauma process as successful executed by the alumni association and reunion committee, the embrace of the new Ned E. Williams after 40 Years of absence, and the differentiation process the separate the historical bridging of the two schools provides for an interesting analysis of the school's history and future legacy. While the school is being celebrated for is significance in a sense, the name of the new school was the ultimate materialization and ode to the man, Ned E. Williams and his legacy of education in the community.

While I cannot agree that the schools are or are not the same, I believe the interview data shows that the names of the school was a secondary tier to the symbolic process of the narrative

making process from the community. Similar to a monument the new Ned E. Williams stands in homage of the historical legacy forged before prior to the closures of the school in 1969.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

The historical development of Ned E. Williams, the man, the school, and the legacy provided a noteworthy conversation regarding the importance of schools to communities, and the ineffable attachment of the communities to the schools. The fact remains that the multiplying impact of a school closure in a community of color can initiate the process of cultural trauma as discussed using Jeffrey Alexander's developing theory.

While, school closures as a trauma is not a commonly discussed case due to the minuscule occurrences and the small communities like Lakeport, Texas making it particularly challenging for a sociological lens used in this thesis, it is something that educational policymakers or school administrators will consider in the future.

As Halbwachs' concept of collective memory laid the framework to discuss Eyerman work on collective identity in African American communities, it is important to note that that underline history resonates across communities, especially schools in traditionally African-American communities. The formation of this identity and historical memory allowed for the development of the symbolism and commemorative practices that cultural groups introduce in order to ensure passage of memory throughout generations. The construction of communities whether imagined or real bound communities and people from multiple demographics together for a common goal. In this case, the group was African American but the age factor played a significant role in how multiple generations came together for this goal of making this commemoration happen.

7.1 Closing thoughts

The reconstruction of Ned E. Williams is a seminal moment in history. Moreover, it remains an outlier in the phenomena of urban school closures. The likelihood of a school reopening is completely rare. However, it is important to note that while a new school named Ned E. Williams exists, the community that initially constructed the solidarity within the man, Ned E. Williams is forever a memory. The attempt to tie the glorification of a symbol of a tumultuous past, this is not a symbol of the past but a commemoration for the future. Ned E. Williams, as a place, only exists within the minds of those they attended the schools or living in the community at that time. Today, Ned E. Williams exists as a narrated event surround the closures of a prestigious school in a small community. It reinforces by the legacy of the man and his appreciation and devotion to education former slaves in his home community. However, the illusion and claim that Ned E. Williams is back remains to be proven true outside of the memories of the alumni.

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