## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my daughter, Caylee Naomi Ann Dawson, a blessing beyond any words. To students of all ages, races and walks of life: I look in the mirror and see you, we are reflections of one another.

To know something is to know nothing, but to strive to learn anything is the most passionate act of them all.

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CCD

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|---|---|
| PWI | Predominantly white institution |
| HBCU | Historically black college and university |
| CRT | Critical race theory |
| GPA | Grade point average |
| MCSUI | Multi-city Study of Urban Inequality |

**SUMMARY**

This dissertation is a narrative inquiry research project that focuses on the collegiate experiences of African American students at both historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) and predominantly white institutions (PWIs). I look at how African American college students who engage in race or culturally specific activities, the degree to which such engagement are forms of self-affirmation, and the relationship between self-affirmation, self-determination and their definitions of success. Approaching this study qualitatively, this study focuses on student voice with narrative inquiry highlighting life experiences and grounded theory allowing for commonalities to arrive from the data. Critical race theory is then combined with narrative inquiry and grounded theory to demonstrate the role of race in the participants' collegiate experiences.

Analyzing the data with grounded theory and critical race theory, the participants' interviews are reconstructed to demonstrate the role of the researcher in re-presenting these collegiate experiences. After creating a new theoretical framework which to approach the collegiate experiences of African American students, grounded critical race theory, the study produced six findings: 1) impact of family on self-affirmation, 2) regulation of blackness, 3) down-playing of blackness, 4) educating/managing conflict around race, 5) self-affirming in a multicultural society and self-affirmation and 6) self-determination as giving back: hero/shero.
Keywords: *collegiate experience, self-affirmation, self-determination, success, narrative inquiry, African American, poetry, historically black college and university (HBCU), predominantly white institution (PWI) and counternarrative*