ABSTRACT

ROBINSON, JO-ANN. An Interpretive Biography of Benjamin S. Ruffin, the first African American Chair of the UNC Board of Governors: How Life Experience Informs Practice. (Under the direction of Dr. Robert Serow and Dr. Paul Bitting).

This qualitative study examined the life experience of Mr. Benjamin S. Ruffin through an interpretative biography and portraiture. The interpretative biography is a non-traditional approach to biography that creates the subject in context (Denzin, 1989) and portraiture extends the narrative from a story of life experience to a “dynamic interaction of values, personality, structure, and history” (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997, p. 11).

The American university is one of society’s key institutions, perhaps the leading organization available to respond to changing social imperatives (Benjamin, 2003). Examining the life experiences of Ben Ruffin as a social activist and education leader in North Carolina enhanced our understanding of governance in higher education.

The data drawn from interviews, observations, document review, photo elicitation and archival research concluded that Ruffin’s black consciousness, cultural cohesion, and leadership development informed his practice in university governance.

Ben Ruffin’s life experience provided him with a black consciousness that helped him analyze and empathize with the difficulty of growing up poor and black in America. This phase of his development shaped how he would come to view the world. Through cultural cohesion, he achieved success against difficult odds and recognized the role of poverty and racism in the marginalization of first a community and then a people. The Civil Rights era resulted in the development of Ruffin as an activist. Ruffin’s formal and informal roles
within organizations propelled him to assume leadership positions as he engaged in activities that ensured social justice and access to opportunities for blacks in the Jim Crow South. This phase would define Ruffin’s leadership style, one that would require him to create a bridge between his world in black Durham and that of white Durham.

   The development of key leadership skills strengthened his resolve to enhance life for blacks and also to reach beyond the boundaries of race and class to affect change across North Carolina. The Ruffin model demonstrates an individual’s ability to transcend circumstance and move beyond circles of race and class to affect change on significant levels for the broader community.
An Interpretive Biography of Benjamin S. Ruffin, the first African American Chair of the UNC Board of Governors: How Life Experience Informs Practice

by
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DEDICATION

To Ben, thank you for trusting me to tell your story. You are missed but your legacy lives on through the many people whose lives you touched. I wish to express my deepest appreciation to my family whose love, patience, and understanding supported me as I pursued my dream. Thank you for your faith in me and all you have sacrificed so I could follow my dream. To my God, whose love and guidance has directed my path, I am glad to be your child. A special thanks to my committee Dr. Paul Bitting, Dr. Thomas Conway, Dr. Bonnie Fusarelli, and Dr. Robert Serow for their guidance and support throughout this process. A special thank you to the Ruffin family for your support and assistance. To Fred, Carolyn, and Celestine, I appreciate your support. To Avon, April and Benita, thank you for sharing Ben with the world. My gratitude also goes out to the colleagues and friends of Ben Ruffin who took the time to meet with me to tell their Ben story. Truly, our collective voice tells his story.
BIOGRAPHY

Jo-Ann Robinson is the Assistant Vice Provost for Student Diversity at North Carolina State University. She is pursuing a Ph.D. in Educational Research and Policy Analysis. She is originally from Schenectady, New York, and currently resides in Raleigh, North Carolina. She received a Bachelor’s degree in Psychology and Elementary Education Certification from the State University of New York, College at Brockport. She has a Master’s degree in Social Science with an emphasis in Counseling from Binghamton University.

Over a span of twenty-seven years, she has worked in elementary/secondary education, business, social service, and higher education administration. She began her career in education, teaching in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; Kansas City, Missouri; and Schenectady, New York. As an administrator in higher education, she has worked in the Office of Programs for Students with Disabilities at Binghamton University, Placement Director and Instructor at Florida College of Business and Director of Minority Student Services at Florida Atlantic University. She has also served as a Student Affairs Administrator and Instructor at the University of Texas at Austin. She has spent the last twelve years at North Carolina State University and currently serves as Assistant Vice Provost for Student Diversity. She began her work at NCSU with Academic Support Program for Student Athletes: she later became Associate Director of the University Honors Program and Director of Undergraduate Fellowship Advising prior to moving to the College of Education, where she served as Director of Teaching Fellows until pursuing full time graduate study.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In honor of my mother Clara Moore Stamper,

in memory of Benjamin S. Ruffin, Hayes H. Stamper, James & Minnie Stamper and

in tribute


to

Kelvin, Kelvin II and Taylor Robinson.

Thank you for all you have given to make my life wonderful.

Celeste, Harvey, Cousin Syl, Aunt Syl, Aunt Mary,

Aunt Josephine, Helen, Rudolph, Marie, James, Phil, Jose, my beautiful nieces, and

many special relatives and friends, thank you for the foundation of family

and the bond of friendship.

My life is enriched because of you.
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CHAPTER I
AN INTERPRETIVE BIOGRAPHY OF BEN RUFFIN

Introduction

A central purpose of higher education is to prepare talented young people to assume productive roles in their society: to foster the creation of human capital (Bowen, Kurzweil, & Tobin, 2005). Higher education in the United States has shifted from an early philosophy of elitism and limited access to equal opportunity and access for all. Shifting perspectives on the role and responsibility of higher education have contributed to significant changes in the academy.

Modern American universities have become the essential gateway to most major professions. Universities have become the major agents of social mobility and significant providers of social services as well as primary agents of research in the United States (Rhodes, 2001).

The United States strives to educate its citizens to compete in a diverse, technologically advanced global economy. The United States maintains a position of international prominence in higher education. However, growing demand for access, limited resources, rapidly advancing technology, and changing demographics challenge our ability to be competitive and educate the masses. These and many other issues confront higher education and influence the function and scope of university governance. Strong academic leadership is needed in the twenty-first century. How we harness educational leadership is important to the continued growth and development of the higher education system.
Governance

The United States does not have a national education system legally sanctioned by the Constitution. Governance of the public education system is treated as residual powers reserved to state government by the Tenth Amendment. The state government has become inextricably involved in the governance of higher education (Gaither, 1999). As access to higher education exploded in the late 1940s, federal and state support peaked, and governmental influence and involvement escalated.

The Morrill Act, G.I. Bill, and the Higher Education Act of 1965 were three federal initiatives that spearheaded open access in higher education. Substantial state and federal monies were directed to higher education as new college campuses emerged and college populations increased. The states’ share of higher education funding peaked at 57 percent in 1974 and fell to 40 percent in 1995 (Gaither, 1999). As resource allocations began to soar, state level demands for accountability and influence by government officials ensued. When state resource allocations plummeted, government participation and influence remained stable. The state government remains deeply involved in governance in higher education.

The Importance of External Governance

Institutional governance occurs both internally and externally to the university. Internal governance is reflected in the day-to-day management of the organization. External governance is reflected in the presence of a coordinating board, board of governors, board of trustees, or board of regents that assumes responsibility for institutional oversight and coordination. These bodies operate externally to individual campus management structures.
The significance of external governance is attributed to several factors. Scott (2001) identified the following factors: (1) the increasing size and complexity of the university mission, (2) governmental desire to expand participation and limit exclusion, (3) the growing demand to harness knowledge, (4) the increased demand to expand wealth creation in a highly competitive global market, (5) the growing demands of external stakeholders, (6) the erosion of trust within universities that have traditionally enjoyed considerable autonomy, and (7) fiscal relationships that have led to the re-configuration of budgets. These factors specify the increased importance of external governance and the challenges facing those who govern.

Recent trends in external university governance indicate a shift toward the organization of higher education into multicampus statewide university systems. Multicampus systems are defined as “groups of public institutions with a unique mission, academic programs and policies, an academic leader, and an internal governing structure” (Lee & Bowen, 1971, p. 8-9).

Each institution in the multicampus system is governed externally and is also subject to a statewide governing board and state level chief academic officer. The fundamental rationale for multicampus systems is to “promote specialization, diversity, and cooperation: a division of labor and alternative approaches to education in a coordinated intercampus context” (Lee & Bowen, 1971, p. 8-9).

Multicampus statewide systems have become the dominant models of public higher education in the United States. It is estimated that 80 percent of all students in higher
education in the United States attend an institution that is part of a statewide system (Gaither, 1999). Literature has begun to emerge, yet there is a need for more information about this governing structure.

**Research Focus**

The ability to understand the structures of governance and the individuals who govern within those structures requires an in-depth analysis of both the individual and the process of governance. The capacity to examine an individual in the context of an environment requires a methodology that supports inquiry in a natural setting. A methodology that values the desire to understand and explain behavior can be found in a qualitative approach. The qualitative study beckons the researcher to answer questions of “how” or “what” when describing a phenomenon (Creswell, 1998).

Qualitative research is multi-method in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials-case study, personal experience, introspection, life story, interview, observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts-that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individual lives (Creswell, 1998). The primary goal that interpretive traditions share is to understand meaning in context (Moss, 1996).

A biographical study is the study of an individual and his or her experiences told to the researcher or found in documents and archival material. The studied use and collection of life documents that describe turning-point moments in an individual’s life can also contribute to deeper understanding of experiences and phenomena. Narrative inquiry is a form of
storytelling. “Stories are the way we make sense of our lives: by telling them we tell ourselves who we are, why we’re here, how we come to be what we are, what we value most, and how we see the world” (Caruthers, 2006, p. 8).

An interpretive biographical study of an education leader will enhance the understanding of the scope, mission, and functions of the multicampus university system. As the researcher, I began the study focused on the interpretative bibliography as the primary methodology and added portraiture. Portraiture is another form of qualitative inquiry. Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997) framed this methodology as a means for the “portraitist to record and interpret the perspectives and experiences of the people they study documenting their voices and their visions” (p. xv). The portrait is situated within the social and cultural context. The narrative biography of Benjamin Ruffin is a unique blending of the following two methodologies: the interpretative biography as defined by Norman Denzin (1989) and portraiture as defined by Sarah Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997).

**Statement of the Problem**

Universities are social institutions, embedded within a wider society and subject to society’s constraining forces and turbulent times (Altbach, Berdahl & Gumport, 1998). The American university is one of society’s key institutions, perhaps the leading organization available to respond to changing social imperatives (Benjamin, 2003). Benjamin (2003) argues it is essential to match the functions of the university with the social imperatives presented by a changing environment.
Higher education has often taken responsibility to improve the social condition and advance the ideals of creating human capital. The history of higher education in America, and North Carolina in particular, portrays a legacy of access and opportunity for many American citizens. The development of human capital has been at the forefront for decades. However, this legacy of access and opportunity and the development of human capital are fraught with racial tension, legislative intervention, and legal challenges. How does a state cope with monumental change and maintain a thriving academic enterprise? Citizens look for visionary leadership in the development, management, and growth of public institutions and university systems. The governing bodies within higher education systems are the ultimate arbitrators, charged with understanding and meeting the needs of their constituents. These governing bodies establish policies and procedures to develop human capital in an academic environment and address issues of access and equity. The public university systems are state agencies committed to educating their constituents.

The multicampus system dominates all of public higher education and more information is needed about this structure. There is a dearth of research on the subject of governance within the multicampus structure. The systems and their leadership are subjected to intense accountability with high expectations for performance (Gaither, 1999). What information do we have to: (1) understand these systems, and (2) identify and train potential leadership for these systems? An in-depth analysis of the process of governance can inform this practice.
Purpose of the Study

The University of North Carolina System was developed in 1971 to facilitate collaboration and equitable distribution of limited resources within a splintered system. The move to restructure higher education in North Carolina was led by Governor Robert Scott and members of the State Board of Higher Education (Solow, 1999). The UNC system reorganization and consolidation efforts were viewed by many as a way to match the functions of the university with the social imperatives presented by a changing environment. The decision to bring all public institutions under the leadership of one governing entity was met with both support and strong opposition. Supporters viewed the creation of the University of North Carolina system as a response to a social need. The need to foster the development of a well-planned and coordinated system of higher education, to improve the quality of education, extends its benefits and encourage economical use of the state’s resources was the goal (Scott, Robert, Chapter 116, General Statues of North Carolina, 1971). Strong opposition came from individuals satisfied with sixteen autonomous institutions and fear that restructuring might limit the success of the University of North Carolina (Solow, 1999, p. 1). Governor Robert Scott won a bitter battle to reorganize the system, a battle that polarized the General Assembly. Felix Joyner, University Vice President summarized the conflict, “It was an irrational fight that led to a rational system” (Solow, 1999, p. 1). The legislative process saw the academic leaders playing politics and lawmakers taking on the role of educators, according to Solow (1999).
The UNC Board of Governors was established by legislative action to manage the statewide university system effective July 1, 1972. After a tumultuous beginning, the current system of governance in North Carolina has received national acclaim and continues to be a model of excellence for other states.

Few witnesses to the birth of the university system have also played an integral role in the growth and development of the system. Mr. Benjamin S. Ruffin, a native of North Carolina, not only witnessed the development of the university system; he played an active role in its expansion. He served as a member of the UNC Board of Governors from 1991 to 2006. He was the first and only African-American vice chair and chair of the UNC Board of Governors.

A review of the history can help citizens, policy makers, and educators understand its past, present and future (Solow, 1999). How will North Carolina’s system of governance adjust to changes in education brought on by increasing diversity, competition for scarce resources, political influence, and changing technology? Barbara Solow states, “Perhaps the basic lesson to be learned from exploring the recent history of North Carolina’s public universities is that UNC is the product of both its traditions and its turning points” (Solow, 1999, p. 1). This study examined Benjamin S. Ruffin’s life, his leadership and how his leadership influenced the UNC system. His life story reveals both the traditions and the turning points of the UNC system.

Mr. Benjamin S. Ruffin died suddenly of a massive heart attack on December 7, 2006. At his untimely death, he was President of The Ruffin Group in Winston-Salem, North
Carolina. He was a native of Durham, North Carolina, and a graduate of Hillside High School. He received a Bachelor’s degree from North Carolina Central University in Durham, and a Master’s degree from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He was a recipient of nine Honorary Degrees from North Carolina Central University, North Carolina Agricultural & Technical State University, Elizabeth City State University, Winston-Salem State University, Fayetteville State University, Edward Waters College, Livingston College, and St. Augustine’s College. He received an honorary degree posthumously from Western Carolina University.

Ben Ruffin served in several corporate and grassroot positions, including vice president of R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company, vice president and special assistant to the president of North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance Company. For seven years he was special assistant to former North Carolina Governor James B. Hunt, Jr. It is believed that his earlier training as a community organizer equipped him with many of the skills to enhance his effectiveness and career as an agent of change.

Ben Ruffin often stated, “to whom much is given, much is required” (B. Ruffin, personal communication, October 25, 2005). His public service included the Winston-Salem 1991 Capital Campaign, Winston Lake Family YMCA, Board Member of the Congressional Black Caucus, Foundation Chair of the Corporate Roundtable for the National Black Caucus of State Legislators, Trustee of Old Salem, Polemarch of the Winston-Salem Alumni Chapter of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, A Prince Hall Mason, A. S. Hunter Lodge No. 825, the Holder of a Life and Golden Heritage Membership of the NAACP, Immediate Past Chair of
the University of North Carolina Board of Governors, and an active member of Emmanuel Baptist Church. He served on corporate boards of North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance Board, and the Executive Board of the Research Triangle Foundation of North Carolina Board of Directors. He had been recognized by the following groups: Distinguished Alumni Award, the University of North Carolina School of Social Work; the 1991 NAACP Kelly Miller Alexander Humanitarian Award; the Donald H. McGannon Citation by the National Urban League; the Dollar & Sense Magazine’s Blackbook Award for Professional Achievement; North Carolina Kappa Man of The Year (twice) from Middle Eastern Province; and the North Carolina Association of Black County Officials Frederick Douglass Leadership Award. Ben Ruffin was an accomplished civil servant, and educators can gain valuable insight by examining his life.

The purpose of the interpretive biographical study is to understand the life experiences of Mr. Benjamin S. Ruffin. As the researcher, I posit an interpretive biography is the best means to examine the process of governance within complex university structures. The focus on life experience provides an understanding of leadership development and how leadership is manifested in governance.

The topic of governance was explored through an examination and interpretation of Ben Ruffin’s role as the first black chair of the UNC Board of Governors, as well as his role in the Civil Rights movement in North Carolina and how that experience influenced his leadership. The overarching question for this study was: How does life experience inform practice in university governance?
**Definition of Terms**

For purposes of this study, multicampus systems, governance, power, and influence have been defined.

**Multicampus systems**

Public multicampus systems are defined as groups of public institutions, each with its own mission, academic and other programs, internal governing policies and procedures, and chief executive officer (president or chancellor) but governed by a single board with a president (Gaither, 1998).

**Governance**

The “trend in higher education has been toward consolidation and control” (Gaither, 1999, p. 1). States have developed governing bodies to manage these systems. The basic definition of governance implies an act, process, or the power of governing; government; the state of being governed; and the persons (or committees or departments etc.) that make up a body for administering something. Governance in higher education represents the established body of individuals who are empowered to govern the activities of the institution.

**Power**

“Power is the capacity or potential for influence” (Northouse, 2004 p. 6). Sociologist Max Weber defines power as “the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rest”(as cited in Pels, 1998, p. 19). Weber’s theory of power also links power to influence. According to Weber, power, in the sociological sense, subsumes both physical
power and political power and need not include coercion. More generally, he concludes one could define power as the more or less unilateral ability (real or perceived) or potential to bring about significant change through the actions of oneself or of others. Dennis Wrong concurs, “Power is basically the capacity to produce an effect of some sort on the external world” (as cited in Pels, 1998, p. 18).

Influence

Influence is defined as: (a) the act or power of producing an effect without any apparent exertion of force or direct exercise of command; (b) corrupt interference with authority for personal gain; (c) the power or capacity of causing an effect in indirect or intangible ways; and (d) one that exerts influence. Northouse (2004) contends that all leadership involves influence. Northouse believes that leadership cannot exist without influence.

Significance of Study

Ben Ruffin’s life experience growing up in Durham, North Carolina, during the Civil Rights movement shaped his perspective on educational access and opportunity. He grew up in a family with modest means. Poverty instilled in him an appreciation for what educational attainment could mean to social and economic mobility. His passion for education and desire to serve his community and the state led to lengthy involvement in the educational, political, and business arenas. Ben Ruffin’s life experience explores the challenges of growing up in the segregated south during the Jim Crow era and the fight for civil rights in North Carolina.
His life story is one of struggle, courage, commitment, and passion for education. The interpretative biography shares that story.

The interpretative biography is set within the context of the West End neighborhood of Durham, North Carolina; the Greensboro sit-ins; the Civil Rights movement; the emerging demand for equal education at the elementary, secondary, and postsecondary level in North Carolina; the development of the University of North Carolina System; and institutional governance. As previously noted, the UNC Board of Governors was established to manage the North Carolina system of education.

To understand life in Durham, North Carolina, it is important to understand the historical context of race and class in the early and mid twentieth century. To understand the influence of the Civil Rights movement and the Greensboro sit-ins, it is important to examine how these activities transpired and influenced life in North Carolina. To understand the UNC system, it is critical to examine the creation of the system and the challenges of managing a multicampus system. To appreciate the role of governance in higher education, it is necessary to examine the structure and inherent nuances of governing. The literature review examined these areas in hopes of providing a foundation upon which to understand the impact of these circumstances on Ben Ruffin.

The research is biographical. The interpretive biography is a life story. The significance of telling the life story is to contribute to understanding and the advancement of knowledge. The study of Mr. Benjamin Ruffin brings insight to how life experiences inform practice. Examining the life experiences of Ben Ruffin as a social activist and education
leader in North Carolina enhances our understanding of governance in higher education from his perspective. How early experiences influence the development of belief systems and how these belief systems influence decision-making and problem solving are key questions for educators and policy makers. Understanding these inner dynamics are vital to understanding governance and how decisions are made. Generalized knowledge of these inner dynamics and their relation to outside forces will help form the basis for review and planned change. In the “review of large organizations (systems) and their individual units (campuses), as in the cases of cultures and individual personalities, in-depth investigation of a single case remains the best means for investigating and revealing the wholeness of the system and the various processes in action” (Gaither, 1998, p. 143). This philosophy postulates the potential for deep understanding of a system by examining the role of participants.

**Theoretical Framework**

“Qualitative research is a process of understanding based on distinct traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem or condition”(Creswell, 1998, p. 15). The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, by analyzing words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducting the studies in natural settings (Creswell, 1998).

This study is a biography of Mr. Benjamin S. Ruffin, an education leader and social activist in North Carolina. His life experiences were examined in the context of growing up in the South during the Civil Rights movement in America. Life documents that describe turning-point moments in his life were used to examine his life experiences. Postmodernist contend that knowledge claims are set within the conditions of the world today, and in
multiple perspectives of class, race, gender, and other group affiliations. Donnor states, “an individual’s social reality is based on lived experiences, and his or her racial groups’ collective historical experience in the United States” (Donnor, 2005, p. 51). C. Wright Mills argues that “the sociological imagination enables us to grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within society” (Denzin, 1989, p. 9).

The theory “metaphysics of presence” proposed by Derrida alleges, “Real concrete subjects live lives with meaning and these meanings have a concrete presence in the lives of these people” (Denzin, 1989, p. 13). As the researcher, I propose that knowledge and meaning are set within the context of race, class, gender and other affiliated groups. Particular to this study, Ben Ruffin’s life story sheds light on how race and class have impacted his life and experience and thus influenced his role in governance in higher education.

**Philosophical Framework**

Creswell (1998) asserts that ontological, epistemological, axiological, rhetorical, and methodical assumptions mark all qualitative studies. The interpretive biography in the form of a life story lends itself to the examination of several assumptions. The ontological stance examines what is the nature of reality. Reality is subjective and multiple, as seen by participants in the study. The epistemological stance evaluates what is the relationship between the researcher and subject. The researcher is cognizant of the distance between researcher and subject and through prolonged engagement attempts to become an insider. The underlying question is whether storytelling is influenced from prolonged engagement.
The axiological stance looks at the role of value. The researcher acknowledges that research is value laden and that bias exists. The researcher addresses bias through external audits. The rhetorical question examines the language of research. The researcher writes in a literary, informal style using the personal voice of the subject. The methodical stance explores the process of research. As the researcher, I explored these basic assumptions within the study. I used an emerging design. The research developed over the course of the study and questions emerged as information was gathered.

**Overview of Approach**

In an interpretive biography, the researcher begins with an objective set of experiences in the subject’s life, noting life course stages and experiences. The researcher gathers concrete contextual biographical materials using interviews (e.g., individuals close to the subject recount a set of life experiences in the form of a story or narrative) with a focus on stories. Stories are organized around themes that indicate pivotal events (epiphanies) in an individual’s life. The researcher explores the stories, relying on individuals to provide explanation, and searching for multiple meanings. The researcher looks for larger structures to explain the meanings such as social interaction, cultural issues, ideologies, and historical context to provide an interpretation for the life experiences of the individual.

The approach involves collecting extensive data. The emphasis is on developing a clear understanding of historical, contextual material to position the subject within the larger trends in society. The identification of stories and themes related to major topics develops and the researcher brings self into the narrative as an interpreter without bias (Creswell,
Portraiture is added to forge a relationship between science and art. The narrative moves from a life story to a vivid portrait.

**Organization of Study**

Central to the view of narrative as a research methodology is a belief that societies, cultures, and the expression of human experience can be read as social text (Denzin, 1989). The organization of the study for an interpretive biography begins with an expectation by the researcher that an objective set of experiences exist in the subject’s life and are connected in life course stages and experiences (Denzin, 1989). The researcher begins by collecting contextual biographical materials through interviews and document collection. Data collection includes observations, several in-depth interviews, document review, photo elicitation, and a review of audio-visual materials. In this study, data analysis and representation looked to identify themes that emerged from significant life experiences associated with Ben Ruffin’s participation in the Civil Rights movement, his work in the business and political arena, and his experience as the first black chair of the UNC Board of Governors. Narrative categories and clusters were identified and isolated, as patterns emerged. Interpretation of life experience was positioned within the context of class and race. The narrative was constructed initially as a database to facilitate the emergence of themes and epiphanies that guided the interpretation of life experience. The narrative report reflected writing from the subject’s perspective. Rhetorical structures examine the language of research (Creswell, 1998). The rhetorical structures in the narrative included the identification of themes to guide the story and the use of transitions to tell the story.
Standards of quality and verification included engagement and observation that was consistent and prolonged to ensure adequate retrieval of information. Triangulation was utilized to provide corroborating evidence using multiple and different sources, methods, and theories. A peer review provided an external check of research and the research process. To clarify researcher bias, member checking was employed, and the researcher solicited feedback to ensure the credibility of the findings and interpretations. Thick, rich descriptions allowed the researcher to make decisions, and the external audits allowed the audit of both the process and the findings.

The subsequent chapters provide a review of the literature, methodology, data collection, data analysis and representation, the narrative, and the narrative report. Standards of quality and the verification process are also discussed.
CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

Higher Education: A Historical Perspective

To understand how the educational system has evolved, it is important to examine its origin. The philosophy of higher education and its foundation for much of its practice can be traced back to Europe. According to Duryea (1987), the current system of higher education has its roots in medieval antecedents. The twelfth century medieval centers of higher learning evolved into formal institutions in the thirteenth century (Duryea, 1987).

The Middle Ages recognized the concept of the university as a separate and autonomous entity in society. Religious doctrine and the power of the Roman Catholic Church dictated early educational practice. The decline of the Roman Church led to leadership by kings and emperors, and education emphasized Christianity and the Greek and Roman classics (Altbach & Berdahl, 1987). The emergence of contemporary thought and secular influence began to challenge traditional beliefs. The initial clash between religious beliefs and emerging contemporary thought challenged existing philosophy by attempting to apply reason to religious doctrine. Peter Abelard challenged these early philosophies and was tried by the church for promoting his ability to comprehend God, void of the merit of Christian faith (Altbach & Berdahl, 1987). Moving from a medieval to more modern perspective saw the emergence of science and an ideology of progress. Scholars began to seek knowledge that looked to the future instead of the past.
The Emerging Years

The colonists brought to the New World traditional beliefs about education, which were manifested in the first colleges of this country. College leaders called “overseers” held comparable positions of leadership in government and in church (Bowen, Kurzweil & Tobin, 2005). Humanistic studies in the form of classical education existed against a strict orthodox view of religion and education. The search for pure knowledge, in contrast to the acquisition of knowledge and skills for specific social need, illustrated a deeply entrenched conflict in the philosophy of higher education that permeated its practice for centuries.

Nineteenth century college presidents identified preparation for lives of usefulness and responsible citizenship as a part of the educational mission. Blumin quotes Thomas Jefferson as saying, “Every citizen should receive an education proportioned to the condition and pursuits of his life” (as cited in Bowen, Kurzweil & Tobin, 2005, p. 15).

The Yale Report of 1828 argued in support of a classical education stating, “the college’s primary goal is the development of mental discipline, not practical specialized vocational training” (Hall, as cited in Bowen, Kurzweil & Tobin, 2005, p. 19).

The Tradition of Education in America

Noted scholar Clark Kerr has identified four critical periods in the history of higher education in America: the first period, the founding of Harvard and William and Mary; the second period, 1870-1910; the third period, 1960-1980; and the fourth period, 1980-present. These four periods reflect changing attitudes regarding the role of higher education.
Harvard University and the College of William and Mary were both founded with religious affiliation. Harvard was founded with Puritan affiliations, and William and Mary was founded with Anglican affiliations. This practice established a pattern where most private colleges and universities had religious affiliations (Bowen, Kurzweil, & Tobin, 2005).

Historically, “American colleges enrolled white Protestant males” (Orfield, & Miller, 1998, p. 4). These individuals were prepared for careers in teaching, theology, medicine, and law. Colleges and universities, with many located primarily on the east coast, educated just over 1,000 students at the turn of the century. The enrollment of students based on social standing and income varied at different colleges, and was based on location, governance and the financial status of the institution (Bowen, Kurzweil & Tobin, 2005).

**Class, Race and Gender in Nineteenth Century Higher Education**

Historians noted that the “entrance requirements of most institutions were minimal” (Bowen, Kurzweil, & Tobin, 2005, p. 17). However, the entrance requirements to attend “socially prestigious colleges in the east were controlled by selective admissions requirements, high tuition and a rigid class system” (Bowen, Kurzweil, & Tobin, 2005, p. 17). According to Orfield, “Selective colleges historically tended to reflect the bias of the larger society, including anti-Antisemitism and racism” (Orfield & Miller, 1998, p. 5).

Columbia and Harvard were known “to attract students from more affluent families in Boston, Philadelphia, and New York in contrast to other institutions in New England that attracted young men from more rural small towns” (Bowen, Kurzweil & Tobin, 2005, p. 13).
Columbia only admitted full paying students. Harvard was noted for having one of the most extensive scholarship programs in the nation at this time with 15% of students receiving some financial assistance. Ronald Story notes that, given the extensive scholarship program, “Harvard’s student body was still predominately middle and upper class” (as cited in Bowen, Kurzweil & Tobin, 2005, p. 17). Williams and Dartmouth can be counted among the institutions that admitted students and discounted tuition to provide access. It should also be noted that “it was not uncommon for students to take time out from college to teach and save money to pay for college expenses” (Bowen, Kurzweil, & Tobin, 2005, p. 13).

On a national level, college attendance was not widespread nor deemed critical to one’s ability for economic security. However, the profile of the typical college student began to change. “Oberlin College was the first college to admit students regardless of race in 1835 and to admit women in 1937” (Bowen, Kurzweil & Tobin, 2005, p. 20).

By 1870, close to one third of total undergraduate enrollment were women. The same rationale behind the creation of women’s colleges was also behind the development of higher education opportunities for blacks. Although the foundation for access to higher education for blacks and women shared similar origins, the opportunities for free blacks were more limited than those for women. With a national black population exceeding four million after the Civil War, historians revealed “twenty-six baccalaureates were awarded to blacks around this period” (Bowen, Kurzweil, & Tobin, 2005, p. 21).
Seminal Acts that changed American Higher Education

The Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862 changed conventional thinking about the role of higher education. “The Morrill Act authorized the states to use the sale of public lands to establish state colleges of agriculture and mechanical arts” (Bowen, Kurzweil & Tobin, 2005, p. 22). The act affirmed a national commitment to support education and increased state assistance to higher education. College attendance became an accepted part of the American middle class tradition (Duryea, 1987)

The initial act created colleges that prepared young men for scientific, agricultural, mechanical, educational, and industrial careers. The second act in 1890 gave states additional resources to fulfill the goals of the Morrill Act designed to “elevate the status of the working class, promote long-term benefits of scientifically based agriculture and harness the application of academic knowledge in the public interest” (Bowen, Kurzweil, and Tobin, 2005, p. 22).

While the process of expanding higher education can be viewed as “a process of democratization” (Karen and Dougherty, 2005, p. 40), the Morrill Act was initially enacted at a period in time when “separate but equal” state supported education prevailed and constrained access for black Americans, particularly in the South. The Morrill Act strengthened the extension of segregationist practices and funded black colleges and universities at lower levels as compared to white institutions. Black normal schools already in existence and new land grant institutions focused on teacher training, animal husbandry, and industrial education received support (Bowen, Kurzweil, & Tobin, 2005, p. 23).
The Servicemen’s Readjustment Act, also known as the GI Bill, was another federal initiative that dramatically changed higher education. The GI Bill of 1944 was designed to assist returning veterans with employment, job training, mortgages, and educational benefits. Massive demobilization and a fear of record unemployment led to the creation of the GI Bill by Franklin D. Roosevelt. The GI Bill “supported nearly eight million honorably discharged veterans and contributed to the expansion of higher education” (Kahlenberg, 1998, p. vi). Approximately “2,232,000 veterans used the education benefit to attend college” (Bowen, Kurzweil, & Tobin, 2005, p. 31), with one million veterans enrolling in American colleges in 1947-48.

The original GI Bill demonstrated that higher education could serve a broader segment of society (Kahlenberg, 1998). The general philosophy of who attends college had begun to shift after World War II, and the GI Bill was another federal initiative that dramatically altered access to higher education. Minority and low-income veterans obtained vocational training and access to higher education, with blacks representing about 2.5% of the population. Northern universities admitted both white and black veterans. Southern universities barred the admission of blacks, and black veterans flooded to historically black colleges in the southern states (Bowen & Bok, 1998). The GI Bill made higher education affordable but issues of race and geographical location presented significant challenges for black veterans. Many historically black colleges did not have the staff or resources to accommodate the influx of students, and many students were turned away. Economist Sarah Turner and John Bound indicated that “the GI Bill exacerbated rather than narrowed the
economic and educational differences between blacks and whites” (Bowen, Kurzweil & Tobin, 2005, p. 32).

The Supreme Court ruled in 1954 that segregated schools were unconstitutional and subsequently transformed the educational system in America. The “separate but equal” dogma that limited opportunities for minorities with the GI Bill and Morrill Land Grant Act was no longer the law of the land. The landmark case, Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, was a class action suit representing plaintiffs from Kansas, South Carolina, Virginia, and Delaware. The plaintiffs, black elementary and high school students, alleged segregation in public schools violated their Fourteenth Amendment rights. They sought admission to the public schools of their choice in their respective state of residence. The court ruled in favor of the plaintiffs, outlawing segregation in public schools. Chief Justice Earl Warren rendered the opinion. The opinion stated, “Today, education is perhaps the most important function of state and local government” (Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, 347 U.S. 483, 1954).

The enforcement of Brown v. Board of Education would prove to be the greatest challenge America has faced in addressing equal opportunity in education.

The Higher Education Act of 1965 was another federal policy that shaped higher education in America. President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Higher Education Act into law, solidifying federal commitment and strategy to increasing access to college for low income and minority students. The legislation created need based financial aid in the form of Educational Opportunity grants for needy students and guaranteed student loans for middle-income students to make college affordable. The primary goal of the Higher Education Act
and subsequent reauthorization was to provide access to postsecondary education for our nation’s neediest students (Higher Education Act, 1965).

The Johnson administration was proactive in administering policies and procedures to provide equity and access to higher education. The Higher Education Act and Executive Order 11375 underscored a sentiment that discrimination was not to be tolerated. These significant gains were met with legal challenges and ballot referendums in attempts to strike down affirmative action in higher education. Claims of reverse discrimination reached the halls of the Supreme Court.

Regents of the University of California v. Bakke went to the Supreme Court in 1977. Bakke, an aspiring medical student was denied admission to the Medical School at the University of California at Davis. UC Davis had two admission committees. Bakke alleged the special admissions committee operated to exclude him in violation of the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. Chief Justice Earl Warren rendered the opinion part of which said, “While the goal of achieving a diverse student body is sufficiently compelling to justify consideration of race in admissions decisions under some circumstances, petitioners special admissions program, which forecloses consideration to persons like respondent, is unnecessary to the achievement of the compelling goal and therefore invalid under the Equal Protection Clause” (Regents of the University of California v. Bakke, 438 US 265, 1978).

The Court’s decision allowed universities to continue to consider race in the university admissions process. However, subsequent legal challenges at the University of
Texas at Austin, the University of Michigan, and other institutions of higher education have challenged and changed the landscape of higher education.

21st Century Landscape of Higher Education

Changing political, economic, and social climates, shifting demographics, rapidly changing technology and a global economy have also influenced many aspects of the academy. The twenty-first century institutions of higher learning are dramatically different from the early colleges established at the turn of the century. The early college president often comprised the entire administrative staff. The institution’s identity became a reflection of the president’s character and leadership (Levine, 1993).

The history of higher education in America documents a significant shift in the governance of institutions of higher learning coupled with dramatic changes in mission, selectivity, resources, resource allocation, and external influence. The American model of governance has changed. The authority of governing the institution often rests with a lay governing board and the president whom the board selects. Shifting perspectives on the role and purpose of higher education have also contributed to the transformation of the system of governance in higher education. The broader landscape of institutional governance can provide an impetus for change on a state level. The state of North Carolina, the birthplace of Ben Ruffin, underwent significant change in the governance of its system of higher education in 1971.
The University of North Carolina System

The University of North Carolina’s multicampus system seeks to preserve its historic mission to serve the state of North Carolina while adapting to extraordinary global economic change and constrained resources (Solow, 1999). The consolidation of the system of higher education in North Carolina brought considerable change in 1971. When Molly Broad was inaugurated as the fifteenth president of the UNC system on April 29, 1998, she made a critical observation and posed an important question. “We must redesign ourselves in a way that is faithful to our principles,” and asked, “How do we translate the strength and foresight embodied in our University to meet the challenges of our future?” (Broad as cited in Solow, 1999, p. 1).

The University of North Carolina system addressed this very question in 1971 when the University of North Carolina was reorganized into its current system, and they asked this question again in January, 2006, when Erskine Bowles became the sixteenth president of the University of North Carolina system.

The Importance of Governance

The importance of external governance becomes even more apparent when a system is confronted with the challenge of managing large systems. How do we learn from our history as we continue to move forward? The study explored the key questions about governance through the experiences of Mr. Benjamin Ruffin.

Scott (2001) outlines the challenges of governance, noting the size and complexity of the university mission, the role, demands of stakeholders, increased governmental influence,
the growing demand for high quality education to expand wealth creation in a global market, limited institutional autonomy, and fiscal constraints. These factors clearly express a need for strong and consistent governance.

Barnett (2001) addresses the importance of external governance in his treatise on chaos theory in higher education. He contends that managing a university system in a complex age creates conceptual uncertainty. Barnett’s work examines numerous complexities that challenge institutional governance. They include: mission complexity, priority complexity, position complexity, strategy complexity, human resource complexity, communication complexity, operational complexity, epistemological complexity, ontological complexity, political complexity, economic complexity, and ethical complexity. Barnett evaluates these factors and synthesizes them into three categories: conceptual, environmental, and relational complexities. The ability to address these complexities requires governance to move from a basic regulatory and coordinating function to a visible policy-making entity, according to Barnett (2001). Although much is written about these complexities, there is much to learn about confronting these complexities as university systems continue to grow and expand.

Organizational Structure

Academic researchers have been reluctant to study the organizational characteristics of universities and the decision-making process these characteristics imply. According to Carter and Uveges (1993), the university possesses all the characteristics of a bureaucracy, and decisions about university programs and priorities reflect the utility-maximizing
preferences of various forms of internal and external power interests. Although information is limited on the university organizational structure and the relationship between structure and the decision making process, we can glean some insight by looking at power and influence.

Power and influence permeate university governance. The governing board must use a combination of power, influence, collaboration, and compromise to guide the university in changing times. Fisher (1984) believed power is often misconceived as a negative term. He also notes power refers to the human capacity to act effectively, to influence, and lead other humans to realize a worthwhile action and its driving purpose. Power in its purest sense is as ethical a concept as action. Managerial competence and talent for educational leadership are also critical characteristics for success as an educational leader (Dodds, 1962).

Perceptions of Governance

What do we know about governance within multicampus systems? Leslie’s (2003) work on governance examines ways of governing. He contends that power can shape the central way academic institutions are governed. The research considered the perceptions of governance.

Leslie (2003) identifies perspectives of power to analyze its existence in institutional governance. He uses political theory, leadership studies, and analysis of how informal and formal organizations interact in the management of conflict. He also analyzes the tension between bureaucratic and professional authority. Leslie argues that the process of governing provides more useful information than the structure of governance. Leslie (2003, p. 24)
identifies “the overriding goal of governance to engage the interest of all constituencies and mobilize their interest.” Inherent in this goal is the recognition that mobilized constituencies will generate conflict. Leslie believes the success or failure of governing depends on how you manage the conflict. The “health” of the system will depend on how well you deal with conflict. A good and stable system is reflected in the equitable distribution of rights and resources (Leslie, 2003).

Leslie’s (2003) model of governance is structure neutral and differs from many conventional approaches that examine governance. Leslie states that structure is a means to an end, rather than an end in itself. He also states that the fluidity of power and influence is as important as formal delegated authority. He does acknowledge that the charters and state laws define the nature of colleges and universities, and outline control, authority, accountability, and fiduciary responsibilities.

The study of governance by scholars has led to many different conclusions. Baldridge (1971) points out that power and conflict are central to university governance, and the interaction shapes how the flow of decisions can be interpreted. Baldridge (1971) believes that conflict is universal and unavoidable. The universality of conflict requires the acceptance of the constant need to resolve conflict in order to move forward. Economic, social, and political pressure requires constant attention. Maintaining a stable environment requires the ability to systematically balance differing needs, objectives, and perspectives, all of which could lead to conflict and disarray if not addressed. Conflict underlies academic governance and purpose; values, financial resources, and faculty are all sources of conflict (Leslie, 2003).
Dahl (1961) looks at legitimacy and effectiveness within the context of a stable government. Dahl and Leslie (2003) agree that universities and colleges are loosely coupled organizations, and often entities have competing interests and demands. Governing involves addressing each concern and issue while attempting to strike a balance. Effectiveness is contingent upon the system’s ability to meet the needs of the people (Leslie, 2003). Universities, as complex organizations, also mix hierarchical (formal) and negotiated (functional) authority. Leslie (2003) states that governing involves the accommodation of formal structures to the realities of the functional structures. In essence, universities may need to mix formal and functional practice in governing the institution. The most important element is finding the right balance.

Scholarship on governance examines formal and informal systems as well as leadership traits of power, influence, legitimacy, and effectiveness. Many of these characteristics, some would say, are developed over a lifetime.

The perception of governance extends beyond research by scholars in the field to established organizations in higher education. The American Association of University Professors perceives a limited role for the governing board and more power for the faculty; the American Council of Trustees and Alumni prefers a more activist board: and the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges argues for a stronger system presidency (Leslie, 2003). The Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (AGB) is one of the primary organizations providing university and college presidents, board chairs, and individual trustees of both public and private institutions with
the resources they need to enhance their effectiveness. For more than 80 years, the AGB has
maintained a commitment to advance the practice of citizen trusteeship and help ensure the
quality and success of our nation’s colleges and universities. To accomplish its mission,
AGB has developed programs and services that strengthen the partnership between president
and governing board; define the responsibilities of governing board members; provide
guidance to regents and trustees, inspiring a level of professionalism for a voluntary function;
identify issues that affect tomorrow’s decision making; and foster cooperation among all
stakeholders in higher education. The AGB serves 34,500 trustees, regents, presidents,
chancellors, rectors, executive directors, board secretaries, and senior administrators and is
affiliated with 1,800 college and university campuses of all types: independent and public,
four-year and two-year, general and specialized. The AGB also works with foundation
boards affiliated with public colleges and universities (Association of Governing Boards of
Universities and Colleges).

Many scholars have examined the importance of governance, the perception of
governance and the organizations designed to support governance in higher education.
However, this information alone does little to tell us about the people who make the
decisions and the structures within which they serve.

The Role of Governance in Higher Education: Shaping a System in North Carolina

The University of North Carolina was the first public university in the United States
to enroll students and the only one to graduate students in the eighteenth century. Chartered
by the North Carolina General Assembly in 1789, the University of North Carolina at Chapel
Hill admitted its first class in 1795 and remained the only campus for 136 years.

The University of North Carolina expanded from a single institution in Chapel Hill to several institutions across the state between 1931 and 1969. The Consolidated University of North Carolina was initially composed of UNC–Chapel Hill, North Carolina State University, UNC–Greensboro, UNC–Wilmington, and UNC–Asheville. A one hundred member Board of Trustees elected by the legislature and chaired by the governor governed the institutions. Ten state supported institutions operated outside of the Consolidated University system. The institutions included Appalachian State University, East Carolina University, Elizabeth City State University, Fayetteville State University, North Carolina Agriculture and Technical University, North Carolina Central University, North Carolina School of the Arts, Pembroke State University, Western Carolina University and Winston Salem State University. A board of trustees governed each of these institutions. Five of these universities were historically black institutions, and one served Native Americans.

For decades, North Carolina’s public colleges and universities served diverse regions, populations, and needs. They operated as separate and competing organizations (Solow, 1999). The North Carolina Board of Higher Education provided oversight with limited authority, and many campuses competed for state support and resources. Governor Robert Scott led a bitter battle to reorganize the system of higher education in North Carolina (Solow, 1999). The goal was to foster the development of a well-planned and coordinated system of higher education, improve the quality of education, extend its benefits, and encourage an economical use of the State’s resources.
In 1971, the General Assembly of North Carolina “adopted the most extensive changes in the structure and governance of public higher education that this State has experienced since the adoption of the Constitution in 1868” (Sanders, 1971, p.1). The University of North Carolina was reorganized into a sixteen-institution multicampus system (Committee Substitute for Senate Bill 893, House Bill 1456, 1971), and a thirty-two member Board of Governors was established to manage the new system of higher education in North Carolina, effective July, 1972. The UNC Board of Governors became the policy making body legally charged with the “general administration, control, supervision, management, and governance of all affairs of the constituent institutions” (Committee Substitute for Senate Bill 893, House Bill 1456, 1971). The challenges facing educators and political leaders three decades ago continue to challenge our public education institutions today. While there are few witnesses to the dramatic and difficult birth of the North Carolina multicampus system, reviewing its development can help educators, policy makers, and citizens understand its present and its future.

The development of the Board of Governors and the emerging system of governance in North Carolina is explored through the life history of Mr. Benjamin Ruffin. Ben Ruffin witnessed the development of the UNC Board of Governors and later served as the first African American vice chair and chair of the Board of Governors.

The development of the University of North Carolina system transformed higher education in the state of North Carolina. A qualitative study in the form of an interpretive biography with portraiture was used as the methodology.
The Civil Rights Movement and North Carolina

While the UNC system was developing, the social context was changing in America and in North Carolina because of the civil rights movement. The history of Civil Rights is a "story of negotiation and struggle" according to Bradley and Fishkin (1998, p. xxi.) They contend the Fourteenth Amendment clauses on due process and equal protection are the far-reaching statements that ensure civil liberties. The desire by blacks to vote in a democratic process, to attend schools, to eat in restaurants, to ride trains and buses and to be treated as equal citizens under the law moved passive participants to action. A struggle was waged to change formal laws requiring segregation in many southern states (Bradley and Fishkin, 1998).

A Civil Rights Act in 1866 “would have granted civil rights but it was never passed” (Bradley and Fishkin, 1998, p. 12). Formal laws prohibiting equality were then enacted between 1873 and 1898 when the Supreme Court issued a series of rulings to limit rights guaranteed by the constitution. Plessy v. Ferguson in 1896 empowered states to have separate facilities for whites and blacks with the assumption that they would be equal (Plessy v. Ferguson 163 U.S. 537 1896). This ruling, “gave states a constitutional justification for segregation” (Bradley and Fishkin, 1998, p. 135). The most common form of discrimination was social segregation, removing access to dining, lodging, and forms of transportation. Blacks were not served, and black travelers could not find a place to stay. As late as 1951, only seven of the twenty-six parks in the nation’s capital admitted blacks (Bradley and Fishkin, 1998, p. 14).
While Plessy vs. Ferguson reinforced separate but equal doctrine, Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka would uphold Fourteenth Amendment rights and eliminate separate but equal educational policies on paper. The terms for school desegregation were unclear and “all deliberate speed” allowed many states to delay desegregation efforts for decades. The Civil Rights movement in America would stimulate a conversation about equal opportunity for all citizens and motivate blacks to protest segregated and unequal conditions in transportation, housing, education, and employment.

On a national level, the Civil Rights movement of the sixties began with Rosa Parks’ refusal to give up her seat on a bus. This act started the bus boycott that gave way to a national movement of peaceful protest. Martin Luther King, Jr. surfaced as a voice of discontent with a plan for peaceful resistance. His efforts to mobilize peaceful protest in cities and counties across the south brought national attention to the realities of racism and discrimination. He led the March on Washington in 1963, and thousands turned out to protest inequality. The Black Panthers and Malcolm X preached a different form of social change and rallied individuals to take action by any means necessary. Kennedy and Johnson wrote legislation to effect change. The US Congress passed the Civil Rights Act in 1964, which outlawed racial discrimination in public accommodations.

On a local level, the Greensboro sit-ins led to massive sit-ins, protests and student unrest. The Civil Rights movement began to slowly change the hearts, minds, and practices of some Americans. Unfortunately, the Civil Rights movement brought fear and hatred for others to the surface. The nation was changed as a result.
Civil disturbances on a national level often overshadowed protest and civil unrest in local communities (Franklin, 2005). North Carolina, like many southern states, had its share of racial conflicts in many small towns and communities across the state. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 did not change practices in many parts of North Carolina (Tyson, 2004). Desegregation was slow to come to the state.

The Greensboro sit-ins in North Carolina marked a critical period in the Civil Rights movement for this state. A pivotal moment arrived when four college students from North Carolina Agricultural & Technical University requested service at a F.W. Woolworth Company lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina. The Woolworth’s lunch counter became the focus of national attention when, having been refused service, these four black students staged a peaceful protest that led to hundreds of students protesting segregation in the state (Davidson, 1996).

The Greensboro sit-ins began as a student protest and escalated to massive boycotts of public transportation, public accommodations, and businesses by blacks both young and old. Months of peaceful protest, civil disobedience, and negotiations finally led to desegregation of the Woolworth’s lunch counter. Neighboring counties and the nation watched this unfold. Oxford, North Carolina, in relatively close proximity to both Greensboro and Durham, went literally untouched by the civil rights movement until a tragedy engulfed the community (Tyson, 2004). The brutal murder of Henry Marrow, a black Vietnam War veteran on May 11, 1970, in Oxford, North Carolina sent young blacks to the streets in protest. The small town erupted into violence as other black Vietnam War veterans
burned tobacco warehouses. Klan rallies, intimidations, and protest overwhelmed the city. When the white assailants were acquitted of murder, the city of Oxford was left to face the reality of racism and an ugly history of racial injustice. The struggle for civil rights in North Carolina underscores the influence of race, and class on life experience. The Civil Rights movement and the desegregation of North Carolina public schools in the aftermath of Brown v. Board of Education situates the issue of race and class in the context of one’s life experience.

The interpretative biography of Ben Ruffin draws upon the historical events surrounding the Civil Rights movement that influenced the lives of African Americans in North Carolina and across the country.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative Research

The development of the University of North Carolina system in 1971 changed the structure of university governance in the state of North Carolina. The challenges facing the state in 1971 required education systems to respond with innovative leadership to rapid change and limited resources. North Carolina is facing these same challenges in the new millennium. How do we learn from previous experience as we prepare for the future?

The ability to understand the structures of governance and the individuals who govern within those structures requires a comprehensive examination of both the individual and the process of governance. The capacity to analyze an individual in the context of a particular setting requires a methodology that supports inquiry in a natural setting as well as in-depth analysis of an experience, event, or trend. A methodology that values the desire to understand and explain behavior can be found in a qualitative approach. The qualitative study beckons the researcher to answer questions of “how” or “what” when describing a phenomenon (Creswell, 1998).

The qualitative approach was selected because this method allows the researcher to analyze experience and tell a story. Central to the view of narrative as a research methodology is a belief that societies, cultures, and the expression of human experience can be read as social text (Denzin, 1989).
This study is a biography of Mr. Benjamin S. Ruffin, an education leader and social activist in North Carolina. The overarching question for this study is: How does life experience inform practice in university governance?

Joseph Featherstone (1989) captured the complexity of narrative storytelling in his early work. He concluded, “The telling of stories can be a profound form of scholarship moving serious study close to the frontiers of art in the capacity to express complex truth and moral context in intelligent ways” (Featherstone, 1989, p. 377).

Portraiture was added to extend the narrative biography from a life story to a portrait of Benjamin Ruffin. According to Lawrence-Lightfoot, portraiture is constructed through dialogue between the portraitist and the subject (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997, p. 3). The portrait extends the narrative from a traditional story of life experience to a “dynamic interaction of values, personality, structure, and history” (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997, p. 11). The fundamental philosophy of social science portraiture is on identifying the successes. Sarah Lawrence-Lightfoot contends that most social science research is focused on the pathology (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997, p. 9). Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997) contends,

The relentless scrutiny of failure has many unfortunate and disturbing results. First, we begin to get a view of our social world that magnifies what is wrong and neglects evidence of promise and potential. Second, this focus on failure can often lead to a kind of cynicism and inaction. Third, the documentation of pathology often leads to blaming the victim rather than a complex analysis of the
coexistence of strengthens and vulnerabilities. Fourth, the focus on pathology seems to focus on facile inquiry (p. 9).

The blending of science and art to tell a story that both informs and shares the reality of the human experience is complex by nature. The methodology of narrative biography and portraiture allowed the researcher to tell a compelling life story that draws the reader into the life of Ben Ruffin using a qualitative research design. The sharing of intricate details of the human experience is particular to the portraitist and enables the reader to understand the context as well as appreciate the authenticity of the writing.

Qualitative research is defined as multi-method in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter (Creswell, 1998). Qualitative researchers study subjects in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. This approach involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical material that includes case study, personal experience, introspective, life story, interviews, observational, historical, interaction, and visual texts which describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individual lives (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

Qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem or condition. The researcher builds a complex holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting (Creswell, 1998). A biographical study is the study of an individual and his or her experiences told to the researcher or found in documents and
archival material. There are two types of biographies. The classical biography uses statements about theory, concerns with validity and criticisms of documents and materials, and forms of a distinct hypotheses, all drawn from the perspective of the researcher (Denzin, 1989). The interpretative biography is a non-traditional approach to biography. The interpretive biography creates the subject in context (Denzin, 1989).

The interpretive biography was selected to construct the history of a life through qualitative methods. As a researcher and key instrument of data collection, I had an opportunity to immerse myself in the field and develop an “insider” perspective that has allowed me to interpret data from the perspective of my subject. I collected data through conversations with Ben Ruffin, observations of Ben Ruffin in an educational, political and social context, interviews about Ben Ruffin with select informants, archival research, document review, audiovisual review, and photo elicitation. All interviews, observations, and document reviews were conducted in North Carolina.

Portraiture was added to go beyond a basic life story. The life story becomes a portrait of Ben Ruffin. Portraitists deem that “context is critical to the documentation of human experience and organizational culture” (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997, p. 41). To establish the context, “they use physical, geographical, historical, cultural, and aesthetics settings as a framework to locate people and places in time” (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997, p. 41). Portraitists view “human experience as being framed and shaped by the setting” (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997, p. 41).
Ben Ruffin played a significant role in the UNC Board of Governors. There is very little written on the development of the UNC system and the role of the Board of Governors in managing the system; however, the history of the university system of governance is an important part of the history of the university system.

The qualitative study provides thick descriptions of how the system evolved and how Ben Ruffin influenced education policies and procedures in North Carolina. The literary narrative style of writing provides rich information on the intricate details of life experiences. The biographical nature of the study allowed the researcher to approach the study knowing that questions would emerge as the study progressed. Portraiture allowed the researcher to document and detail the complexity of experiences with an understanding that some individuals may see themselves reflected in the experience (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997).

Statement of the Problem

The multicampus statewide system has become the dominant model of governance in US public higher education. There is a dearth of research on the subject of governance within the multicampus structure (Solow, 1999). The systems and their leadership are subject to intense accountability with high expectations for performance (Gaither, 1999). An in-depth analysis of the process of governance can inform the practice and provide useful information in future planning. The research helps educators, policy makers, and citizens understand these systems and provide the tools necessary to help identify and train potential leadership for these systems.
Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the interpretive biographical study is to understand how life experience informs practice. Mr. Benjamin Ruffin was the first, and only, black vice chair and chair of the UNC Board of Governors in North Carolina. His experience is the focus of the study. This factor serves as the central point for examination and interpretation. Ben Ruffin’s role in the Civil Rights movement in North Carolina and how that experience influenced his leadership is explored within the narrative biography.

The ability to understand large systems by examining smaller components or participants is articulated in the research by Gaither (1999). Generalized knowledge of these inner dynamics and their relations to outside forces will help form the basis for review and planned change. In the review of large organizations and their individual units as in the cases of cultures and individual personalities, “that in-depth investigation of a single case remains the best means for investigating and revealing the wholeness of the system and the various processes in action” (Gaither, 1998, p.143).

Research Question

The overarching question of this study is how does life experience inform practice in university governance?

Theoretical and Philosophical Framework

The interpretive biographical study of Mr. Benjamin Ruffin, an education leader and social activist from North Carolina is examined in the context of his maturation in the South during the Civil Rights movement and student unrest in the sixties. The studied use and
collection of life documents that describe turning-point moments in Ben Ruffin’s life were used to examine his life experiences.

As previously noted, Creswell (1998) indicated that ontological, epistemological, axiological, rhetorical, and methodical assumptions mark all qualitative studies. This interpretive biography in the form of a life story lends itself to the examination of the stated assumptions. Within this context, I explored the basic assumptions. The ontological stance examined the nature of reality. Reality is subjective and multiple, as seen by participants in the study. As the researcher, I paid particular attention to how Ben Ruffin’s perception of reality influenced his relationships with others. The epistemological stance examines the relationship between the researcher and subject. As the researcher, I was cognizant of the distance between self and the subject; through prolonged engagement, I developed a relationship with Ben Ruffin and later with his selected family members, friends, and colleagues. As the researcher, I observed whether storytelling is influenced by prolonged engagement with informants. The axiological stance examines the role of values in qualitative research. I acknowledge that research is value-laden and that bias exists. I addressed bias as a researcher through member checking and external audits. As the researcher, I used triangulation to analyze interview data with documents and observation. As the researcher, I reviewed information with select informants as a form of member checking. An external auditor analyzed the collection and interpretation of data. The rhetorical stance examines the language of research. As the researcher, I wrote in a literary, informal style sometimes using the personal voice of Ben Ruffin. The interpretive biography used an
emerging design. As expected, the research developed over the course of the study, and questions emerged as information was gathered.

Site Selection & Sample

Few witnesses to the birth of the university system have also played an integral role in the growth and development of the system. Mr. Benjamin Ruffin, a native of North Carolina, contributed to the development of the university system. He served as a member of the UNC Board of Governors from 1991-2006. He was the first and only black vice chair and chair of the UNC Board of Governors.

Ben Ruffin’s life experience growing up in Durham, North Carolina, during the Civil Rights movement and student unrest period of the 1960s shaped his perspective on educational access and opportunity. Ben Ruffin’s life experience tells a story of growing up black and poor in the segregated South. The interpretative biography shares that story.

The interpretative biography is set within the context of race and class issues surrounding the United States and the state of North Carolina. The issues include the Greensboro sit-ins, the Civil Rights movement, the emerging demand for equal education in the public school system in North Carolina, the development of the University of North Carolina system, and subsequently institutional governance, as well as other pertinent issues that contributed to the development of the educational system in North Carolina. As the researcher, I draw upon many of these areas in the investigation.

The study is framed with a synopsis of black life in America preceding Ben Ruffin’s birth to provide a context for the challenges of race and class during this period in American
history. To understand growing up in Durham, North Carolina, it is critical to understand the city and its development regarding factors of race and socioeconomic status; to understand the influence of the Civil Rights movement and the Greensboro sit-ins, it is important to examine how these activities transpired and influenced life in North Carolina. To understand the UNC system, it is critical to examine the creation of the system and the challenges of unification and managing a multicampus system. To appreciate the role of governance in higher education, it is necessary to examine the structure and inherent nuances of governing. The research examines these areas in hopes of providing a foundation upon which to understand the impact of these circumstances on Ben Ruffin.

Overview of Approach

In biography, the researcher begins with an objective set of experiences in the subject’s life, noting life course stages and experiences. The researcher gathers concrete contextual biographical materials using interviews (e.g., informants recount a set of life experiences in the form of a story or narrative) with a focus on stories. Stories are organized around themes that indicate pivotal events (epiphanies) in an individual’s life. The researcher explores the stories relying on the informants to provide explanation while searching for multiple meanings. The researcher looks for larger structures to explain the meanings such as social interaction, cultural issues, ideologies, and historical context to provide an interpretation for the life experiences of the individual.

The approach involves collecting extensive data from interviews, observations, photo elicitation, and document review. The emphasis is on developing a clear understanding of
historical, contextual material to position the subject within larger societal trends. The identification of stories and themes related to major topics is developed and the researcher brings herself into the narrative as interpreter without bias (Creswell, 1998). The interpretative biography tells a life story.

Data Collection

Biographies are conventionalized, narrative expressions of life experience. This distinct “approach assumes: (1) the existence of others, (2) the influence and importance of gender and class, (3) family beginnings, (4) starting points, (5) know and knowing authors and observers, (6) objective life markers, (7) real persons with real lives, (8) turning point experiences, and (9) truthful statements distinguished from fiction” (Denzin, 1989, p. 17).

According to Denzin, these conventions define the study of human experience and shape how lives are told. Data collection included several in-depth interviews with informants, several active interviews with select individuals, observations, and document review. The discussion of the research timeline begins with an outline of the approach and rational for each methodology.

To capture through immersion the depth and breadth of the participant’s life experience is one reason to select a longitudinal study (Saldana, 2003). There is no minimum length of time for a qualitative study to be considered longitudinal, according to Saldana. The interpretative biography of Ben Ruffin was a longitudinal qualitative study, and collection of data extended over a significant period of time.


Interviews

“The interview is not a simple tool with which to mine information. It is a place where views may clash, deceive, seduce, and enchant. It is the inter-view. It is as much about seeing a world as about hearing accounts, opinions, arguments, reasons, and declarations, words with views into different worlds” (Schostak, 2006, p. 1).

The interview can be portrayed as a method for individuals to direct their attention toward each other as a way to share experience, insight, values, knowledge, and beliefs about a phenomenon. Interviews may be long or active. The long interview may last two to three hours and is characterized as a highly efficient, productive, streamlined instrument of inquiry (McCracken, 1988). The long interview traditionally helps the researcher avoid the intimate, repeated, and prolonged involvement in the field. However, in this study, as the researcher, I participated in intimate, repeated, and prolonged involvement. The long interview four-step method of inquiry proposed by McCracken provided the foundation for engagement with informants about Ben Ruffin. The four-step method includes: review of analytical categories and interview design, review of cultural categories and interview design, interview procedures and the discovery of cultural categories and interview analysis, and discovery of analytical categories.

The first step of the long qualitative interview begins with the review of literature. The review of literature on governance in higher education and the Civil Rights movement in North Carolina facilitated interpretation of data and aided in the construction of the interview
questions. The questionnaire was open-ended and established the scope of the interview. The questionnaire helped organize data into categories and relationships for later analysis.

The second step in the method was a review of cultural categories. The researcher as an instrument of inquiry must be cognizant of his or her role in interpretive biography. This step requires the researcher to “examine his or her own experience and explore the associations, incidents, and assumptions that surround the topic in his or her mind” (McCracken, 1988, p. 32). McCracken states that this step is a process of familiarization and defamiliarization. He explains this by articulating that the researcher must be somewhat familiar with the context to enhance data collection as well as recognize personal bias and cultural assumptions. As the researcher, I reviewed cultural categories.

The third step was the construction of the questionnaire. The qualitative interview allows the respondent to tell the story on his or her own terms. The development of questions cannot be directive. The goal is to let topics emerge, but as the literature review indicates, when a critical issue does not emerge, a “floating prompt” may be appropriate. A prompt may direct the respondent to address the topic. The forth step in the method is the discovery of analytic categories, which is addressed in data analysis.

The active interview treats the interview conversation as a pipeline for transmitting knowledge (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). The active interview can be stated as a form of interpretive practice between the researcher and the respondent. The exchange allows the researcher to explore aspects of experience that address relevant issues and make meaning out of these experiences. Holstein and Gubrium (1995) indicate the process of selecting a
sample for active interviewing is different from random sampling for standard research. The use of theoretical sampling helped me identify the best individuals to answer the research questions.

As the researcher, I conducted a personal interview with Ben Ruffin on October 25, 2005. This interview was the impetus for the selection of the dissertation topic and subsequent research and interviews on the life experience of Ben Ruffin.

The original research design included four long interviews with Ben Ruffin, followed by eight interviews with selected individuals who worked with Ruffin in an educational, political, or business arena or knew him as a community organizer/activist. Ben Ruffin identified the eight individuals for the original design.

The research design was modified upon his death. As the researcher, I identified 60 individuals for consideration. Snowballing was used to identify participants. Selected family, friends, and colleagues of Ben Ruffin were identified and agreed to participate. Thirty-one individuals were interviewed. Data from all thirty-one interviews was incorporated into the analysis. However, a total of fourteen interview sessions were specifically referenced in the findings. I developed an Interview Grid to illustrate interviewee classifications and interview session codes. (Figure 1. Interview Grid) When multiple perspectives were shared to a point of saturation, As the researcher, I collapsed information into categories and referenced the overarching idea in the findings. Interview codes are referenced within the narrative.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INTERVIEWEE CATEGORY</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. BOARD OF GOVERNORS</td>
<td>INTERVIEW C</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. MAYOR – ELECTED OFFICIAL</td>
<td>INTERVIEW Q</td>
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<td>3. BOARD OF GOVERNORS</td>
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<td>6. BOARD OF GOVERNORS</td>
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<td>7. CIVIL RIGHTS ACTIVIST</td>
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<td>8. BOARD OF GOVERNORS</td>
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<td>9. BOARD OF GOVERNORS</td>
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<td>10. CIVIL RIGHTS ACTIVIST</td>
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<td>11. ELECTED OFFICIAL</td>
<td>INTERVIEW G</td>
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<td>12. ELECTED OFFICIAL</td>
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<td>13. UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATOR</td>
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<td>15. EDUCATION LEADER</td>
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<td>16. BOARD OF GOVERNORS/EDUCATION LEADER</td>
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<td>18. BOARD OF GOVERNORS</td>
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<td>27. FRIEND</td>
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<tr>
<td>28. FAMILY FRIEND</td>
<td>INTERVIEW P</td>
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<td>29. BOARD OF GOVERNORS</td>
<td>INTERVIEW M</td>
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<tr>
<td>30. COMMUNITY MEMBER</td>
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<tr>
<td>31. COLLEAGUE / FORMER UNC GENERAL ADMINISTRATION</td>
<td>INTERVIEW R</td>
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Figure 1. Interview Grid
Of the initial proposed eight interviewees identified by Ruffin prior to his passing, five were interviewed, two of the individuals were referenced and quoted from written documents, and one preceded Ben Ruffin in death. Their respective voices have been included in the study.

The project participants included Ben Ruffin and Ruffin’s family, friends, and colleagues; elected officials; members of the academic community; and participants in the Civil Rights movement who marched side by side with Ben Ruffin. Each participant’s lens helped to capture the intricacy, delicacy, and dynamics of the human experience (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997). Each interview with informants began with an overview of the research project and background information on the researcher. Participants were given the opportunity to ask questions about the interview process. All interviews were loosely structured around several questions. Participants were encouraged to speak freely and were only interrupted for clarification or to ask follow-up questions. While most of the interviews were individual, group interviews took place with Ben Ruffin’s siblings and immediate family. All interview questions were structured around the context of the professional or personal relationships participants had with Ben Ruffin.

All interviews with informants were recorded on audio cassette and with handwritten notes. The interviews lasted an average of two hours. The data was transcribed and coded around topics explored in the literature review in Chapter 2, which included leadership and governance.
As the researcher, I interviewed Ben Ruffin on October 25, 2005. I had numerous conversations with Ben Ruffin on issues related to higher education, governance, access, and equity over a period of seven years. As the researcher, I conducted several long interviews about Ben Ruffin. The interviews were conducted with a focus on the collection of biographical data, a review of Ben Ruffin’s early years, and his experience growing up and working in North Carolina.

The nature of this work required conversations with informants about protocol, ethics, the scope of the research study, and Ben Ruffin’s support of the project prior to his death. The long interview covers the early, middle, and the later years as previously identified by Ben Ruffin. Follow up interviews provided an opportunity to review information for verification and member checking.

Ben Ruffin and I identified the following categories upon which to identify active interview participants. The areas included historical information, the political arena in North Carolina, the North Carolina university system, and personal relationships. Prior to Ben Ruffin’s death, he suggested individuals for active interviews. The individuals reflect a group of people who have worked with or known Ben Ruffin over the course of his life or work with the Civil Rights movement and the UNC Board of Governors. However, the sample selection for active interviews was an ongoing process centered on meaning making. As the researcher, I added individuals as questions arose. The active interviews were semi-structured and open-ended. In addition to field notes, all interviews sessions were tape-recorded and transcribed.
Participant Observation

Participant observations are categorized as qualitative research where the researcher is immersed in the life of the informant (Creswell, 1998). As the researcher, I observed Ben Ruffin in University of North Carolina System Board of Governors meetings from 2000 to 2006 as well as functions of a public, political, and social nature. I reflected upon these activities. This methodology gave me first-hand experience observing the leadership style of Ben Ruffin in a multitude of settings. The interview process articulated a perception of leadership, and the observations correlated the perceptions with the reality for interpretative purposes.

Document Review

Denzin (1989) defines biography as the studied use and collection of life documents that describe turning point moments. Document review included an examination of select tributes, reports, and newspaper clippings related to Ruffin’s work with the UNC Board of Governors and his social activism in North Carolina. Data collection also consisted of a review of public records related to the Civil Rights movement in North Carolina and the UNC Board of Governors. The review of documents identified patterns of participation and categories of involvement in the Civil Rights struggle in North Carolina. The UNC Board of Governors document review provided a chronology of actions and positions taken by Ruffin as a member of the UNC Board of Governors.
As the researcher, I also reviewed articles regarding Ben Ruffin’s civic and community engagement. The death of Benjamin Ruffin produced an avalanche of documents that commemorated his life and work in North Carolina.

Archival Research

Researchers who enter archives enter a new world of information (Hill, 1993). A historical perspective supplemented by archival data is alive and well in socio-historical research, according to Hill. He asserts that a historical perspective is important for all individual biography. C. Wright Mills (1959) states, “We have come to see that the biographies of men and women, the kinds of individuals they variously become, cannot be understood without reference to the historical structures in which their daily lives are organized” (Wright as cited in Hill, 1993, p. 3). The study of Ben Ruffin’s life experience is set within the history of the Civil Rights movement in North Carolina and the reorganization of the UNC system, both of which date back a quarter of a century to the mid-sixties and early seventies. The historical significance of these events and how they changed the lives of people cannot go unexamined.

The ability to develop a clear understanding of historical, contextual material to position the subject within larger societal trends was accomplished by examining historical records surrounding the Civil Rights movement in North Carolina and the development of the UNC Board of Governors. As the researcher, I selected archival research to explore historical records that shed light on the development of the Board of Governors and the controversy that surrounded the reorganization of the university system. As the study
progressed, I became aware of Ben Ruffin’s extensive work in grassroots community development. Archival research on the development and success of community development organization was conducted. Archival research is characterized as a form of excavating, because you do not know what you will find. Archival materials are typically unique, irreplaceable, one-of-a-kind items that cannot be obtained anywhere else (Hill, 1993).

As the researcher, I began a review of historical records at the North Carolina State Archives in Raleigh, North Carolina. The personal correspondence and papers of Governor Robert Scott were identified as documents that detail the development of the UNC Board of Governors. The documents paint a picture of the structure of governance in higher education prior to the reorganization. The documents and personal memos also highlight the role of the Governor and the General Assembly in higher education. The documents highlight the inequity in resources, political influence of some campuses, and record the power struggle to create the university system. Subject matter from the archived documents on the UNC Board of Governors was discussed with Ben Ruffin prior to his death.

A historical review of documents was also conducted at the Southern Historical Collection, Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Documents related to the North Carolina Fund, the United Organization for Community Improvement, and Operation Breakthrough were examined.

Subject matter from archival documents was incorporated into some interview questions about Ben Ruffin. I solicited secondary opinions regarding Ben Ruffin’s perception of some of the events surrounding the creation of the UNC Board of Governors.
Photo Elicitation

Photo elicitation is a procedure where the informant is asked to discuss the content of a picture (Creswell, 1998). Ben Ruffin had an extensive collection of photographs of himself with dignitaries and receiving awards in recognition of service to the community. Ben Ruffin displayed many of these photographs in his office in Winston-Salem. The collection covered a span of about 30 years. On October 25, 2005, I interviewed Ben Ruffin in his Winston-Salem office and was able to view these photos.

Ben Ruffin previously identified photos from this personal collection as a starting point for photo elicitation in the original research design. Prior to his passing, Ben Ruffin identified a photo of himself and Governor Hunt. As a result, Ben Ruffin talked about working for Governor Hunt as his Special Assistant for seven years. He also referenced a picture of himself with Mr. Wheeler and a piece of artwork called “Neck Bones of Poverty.” As the researcher, I was unable to locate the picture of Ruffin and Mr. Wheeler or identify the artwork “Neck Bones of Poverty” after his death.

As the researcher, I was able to obtain a collection of photos of Ben Ruffin from North Carolina Central University. Ruffin’s family had provided the photos to North Carolina Central University. Fred Ruffin, Ben Ruffin’s brother granted permission to use the photographs. I also collected numerous photos of Ben Ruffin from newspaper articles and Internet sources. Ben Ruffin had previously provided me with a videotape recording of an interview he had with William Friday. I viewed an audiovisual tape at the Southern
Historical Society in Chapel Hill and a videotape tribute of the life of Ben Ruffin developed by UNC General Administration.

A review of photos and audio-visual materials was included in the process of collecting data. Photo elicitation was used to identify turning point moments or epiphanies in Ben Ruffin’s life.

Data Analysis

Miles and Huberman (1994) state that qualitative data is a source of rich descriptions and explanations of processes, and unlike quantitative data, words are organized into incidents and stories. Their view of qualitative analysis is grounded in a belief that “social phenomena exist in the world and exert influence over individuals because of the way people construct them” (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p. 4).

Data analysis allows the researcher to interpret the data in ways that inform. Data analysis and representation identified themes that emerged from significant life experiences from Ben Ruffin’s participation in the Civil Rights movement and his experience as the first African American chair of the UNC Board of Governors. Interpretation of life experience is set within the context of the Civil Rights movement.

Data from the long interviews was organized with questionnaires. Data from observation field notes was organized using a contact summary sheet. Data from document review was organized using a spreadsheet. Data analysis began with coding. The interview transcripts, field notes, and document review matrix were individually coded into categories based on the research questions. As the researcher, I used pattern coding to begin to group
these categories as themes emerged. The use of “memoing” allowed me to unite portions of data together to draw relationships and begin to extrapolate and interpret meaning. The constant comparative method of analysis was used, and I continued to collect data as I analyzed information until a level of saturation was reached.

The narrative was constructed from this database of information to facilitate the emergence of themes and epiphanies that guide the interpretation of life experience. The narrative reflects my writing from the informants’ perspectives. The use of embedded rhetorical structures includes the subject’s voice, the informant’s voices, identification of themes to guide the story, and the use of transitions. As in narrative, “the portraitist is expected to bring interpretative insight, analytic scrutiny, and aesthetic order to the collection of data” according to Lawrence-Lightfoot (1989, p. 185). The narrative tells the life story of Ben Ruffin, paints a portrait of who he was and answers the key question: How does life experience inform practice in university governance?

Reliability and Validity

Standards of quality and verification included engagement and observation that is consistent and prolonged to ensure adequate retrieval of information. As the researcher, I used triangulation to provide corroborating evidence using multiple and different sources, methods, and theories. I used interviews, observations, and document review. A peer review provided an external check of the research process. To address researcher bias, member checking was employed and I solicited Ruffin family views of the credibility of the findings and interpretations. As the researcher, I sat down with members of the Ruffin family and
reviewed the data that would be incorporated into the study. I used thick, rich descriptions to allow the readers to see the transferability of the information and thus make the information more meaningful. An external audit allowed the audit of both the process and the findings. Dr. Thomas Conway served as an external auditor prior to his appointment on the dissertation committee. Dr. Conway reviewed chapters one through three prior to formal submission and the proposal defense. Dr. Sylvia Carey also served as an external auditor. Dr. Carey reviewed the research process and findings in three stages. The initial review was conducted upon completion of chapter one through three and prior to the proposal defense. The second review was conducted upon completion of the first draft of chapter four. The third review was completed upon the completion of chapter five. According to Creswell (1998), an external consultant with no connection to the study can assess accuracy of the process and provide a sense of inter-rater reliability.

Subjectivity Statement

My name is Jo-Ann Robinson and I am the Assistant Vice Provost for Student Diversity at North Carolina State University. I am pursuing a Ph. D. in Educational Research and Policy Analysis. I am originally from Schenectady, New York, and currently reside in Raleigh, North Carolina. I received a Bachelor’s degree in Psychology and Elementary Education Certification from the State University of New York, College at Brockport. I have a Master’s degree in Social Science with an emphasis in Counseling from Binghamton University.
Over a span of twenty-seven years, I have worked in elementary/secondary education, business, social service, and higher education administration. I began my career in education, teaching in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; Kansas City, Missouri; and Schenectady, New York. I have also worked with International Business Machines (IBM) and was President/Owner of Positive Images, Your Source for Ethnic Art, Inc. I have written grants for the Urban League and Boys Club of America as well as institutions of higher education. As an administrator in higher education, I have worked in the Office of Programs for Students with Disabilities at Binghamton University, Placement Director and Instructor at Florida College of Business, and Director of Minority Student Services at Florida Atlantic University. I have also served as a Student Affairs Administrator and Instructor at the University of Texas at Austin. I have spent the last twelve years at North Carolina State University and currently serve as Assistant Vice Provost for Student Diversity. I began my work at NCSU with the Academic Support Program for Student Athletes; and later became Associate Director of the University Honors Program and Director of Undergraduate Fellowship Advising prior to moving to the College of Education, where I served as Director of Teaching Fellows until pursuing full time graduate study. I have served on numerous university and community based committees. I recently served on the Board of Directors for Planned Parenthood Health Systems. I have presented numerous workshops and seminars on a local, state, and national level.

As a 51-year-old black female, I have spent much of my career creating and supporting educational access and equity in higher education. I come from a family where educational achievement and excellence are expected. I am the third generation of my family
to attend college. My paternal grandparents attended college in the early 1900s. My paternal grandfather graduated from Tuskegee, and my paternal grandmother graduated from Spellman. My father attended Howard University, and my mother graduated from Nursing School in New York.

A legacy of educational excellence and achievement exists in the family. Dr. Cletus Stamper, an uncle, completed a Ph. D in Economics and chaired the Economics Department at Lincoln University in Jefferson City, Missouri. Mrs. Vivian Stamper Warnick, an aunt, completed a Master’s degree at Columbia University. Mr. James Stamper, another uncle was the first black supervisor at General Electric Company. While several other family members provided role models of community service and personal achievement, the family tree is full of educators, nurses, doctors, and businesspersons who overcame obstacles and achieved success.

At the core of the family tradition of academic excellence is service to others. The old adage “reach as you climb” is a family motto. Each individual is expected to help others achieve. This philosophy has fed my passion for educational access and equity.

My initial passion to ensure others are treated fairly led to a commitment to education and a curiosity to understand the intricacies of the educational system. I believed if I understood the educational system from a broad perspective and understood how decisions were made, who makes the decisions, and how these decisions influenced students, I could be a better advocate for students. My initial desire to understand the educational system quickly led to a desire to participate in the governance and decision-making process and a
desire to have a voice in the process. The higher education administrative positions I have held in Florida, Texas, and North Carolina have given me an opportunity to have a voice and participate in governance. I have gained valuable insight into how systems work and how they differ within regions. I have expanded my interest from institutional governance to leadership and governance of statewide systems. My dissertation, an interpretive biography, examines the life experience of Mr. Benjamin Ruffin. I explored the topic “governance” and examined how Ben Ruffin’s life experience influenced his leadership in this area. My educational and experiential background has given me insight into the field of higher education. I draw upon personal experience, research on race relations and the role of civil rights in providing access and equity to all students to tell the story. This insight has guided the narrative in sharing Ben Ruffin’s story.

As the researcher, I am aware of my own bias. As a black American, I understand the inherent realities of being black in America. My research bias due to race includes a perception that I may have a greater insight into Ben Ruffin’s challenges and circumstance due to a shared ethnicity. Ben Ruffin also served as a role model and mentor to me. My bias due to the mentoring relationship challenged me to ensure the interpretative nature of the analysis was objective. I confronted my bias regarding race by exploring alternative explanations to situations and remained open to the idea that race may not influence all situations. I do not abandon my perspective on race but explore issues surrounding race to tell Ben Ruffin’s life story from a historical perspective as it relates to the Civil Rights movement.
I met Ben Ruffin on September 9, 1999, at a fundraiser for North Carolina Central University. As the researcher, I began observing Ben Ruffin as chair of the Board of Governors in January 2000. I discussed issues regarding access and equity in the UNC system with Ben Ruffin on numerous occasions commencing in early 2000. I was invited to attend a reception in support of the University and Community College Bonds at the Executive Mansion on October 25, 2000. Ben Ruffin extended the invitation to the reception hosted by Governor James Hunt. Ben Ruffin soon became my adviser on higher education issues in North Carolina. I later invited Ben Ruffin to serve as a keynote speaker at the NC State University Honors Banquet in the spring of 2001. These early interactions led to Ben Ruffin becoming a mentor of higher education, providing insight into issues confronting higher education in North Carolina. The insight gained from numerous conversations and observations of Ben Ruffin in a leadership capacity have been invaluable in telling the story.

As the researcher, I confronted my bias based on this mentoring relationship with a conscious attempt to limit personal experience and knowledge of topics from the narrative and analysis. The mentoring relationship between Ben Ruffin and I provided a unique challenge with data analysis. I acknowledge some familiarity with information shared with some informants, having had conversations with Ben Ruffin. As the researcher, I recognize a level of personal bias due to the mentoring relationship.

I shaped much of the narrative life story from informants, document review, photo elicitation, and archival research. An external evaluation of the narrative and analysis by an external auditor and members of my dissertation committee also addressed researcher bias.
Ethical Issues/ Human Rights Approval -IRB

The study was submitted to the North Carolina State University for the Protection of Human Subjects Office for Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval. Confidentiality is honored for all participants who sought it and or requested information be kept off the record during interviews.

The nature of the interpretive biography allowed me to share information about Ben Ruffin’s involvement and life story in accordance with his agreement. As the researcher, I wrote a narrative analysis using his voice and the perceptions of others. Member checking facilitated reliability and validity to ensure accurate representation when appropriate.

Limitations

The limitations inherent in this qualitative study are centered on the use of the interpretive biography, which cannot be generalized because it focuses on the life of one individual. This approach does not lend itself to the perception of other points of view.

The narrative text is often criticized for “freezing” events and lived experiences into a sequence (Denzin, 1989). This may influence how the story is interpreted. The narrative life story is also limited in how the researcher creates meaning by how he or she tells the story. The ability to use language and voice is critical to the success of telling the story. Some scholars who believe that storytelling is not a factual account of the life experience also criticize the storytelling methodology.

The study is limited to a specific field in higher education. The study is also limited because the informants focus on a black male, and the study reflects the life experience in a
Southern state. These limitations are not viewed as weak points but starting points for future research.

**Summary of Chapter**

The interpretive biography is the telling of a life story. The shape and creation of biographical text beckons to answer how do men and women live, and give meaning to their lives (Denzin, 1989).

Benjamin Ruffin grew up in North Carolina and participated in university governance as a member of the UNC Board of Governors. He was the first and only black to serve as vice chair and chair. His life story shared how race and class influenced his leadership involvement in university governance in North Carolina.

The methodology outlined in chapter three provided an overview of the use of the long interview, active interview, document review, archival research, and photo elicitation that was employed in data collection. The systematic collection of data and data analysis used coding, patterns, and memoing to tell the story. The manuscript gives voice to Ben Ruffin’s life experience. “Voice enables us to use our constructed meaning for active engagement in the community” (Caruthers, 2006, p. 10).

The following chapter will share the many findings in the life experience of Mr. Benjamin S. Ruffin.
CHAPTER IV
NARRATIVE RESULTS

This chapter presents the life experiences of Benjamin (Ben) Ruffin and discusses the topics of leadership and governance explored through an examination and interpretation of Ben Ruffin’s role as a civil rights activist, political insider, business leader, and as a member and the first black chair of the University of North Carolina Board of Governors.

The interpretive narrative utilizes the voice of interview participants to tell the life story of Ben Ruffin. All interviews were summarized around the primary themes that emerged. Lawrence-Lightfoot (1994) discusses the historical context of narratives in the black community. She asserts that a more ancient source of storytelling flows from the African continent where stories are often embedded in tribal ritual filled with entertainment, adventure, moral lessons, and cultural wisdom. The participants in this story used the same medium, storytelling, to help tell the story of Ben Ruffin.

To create the biography, Carey (2002) suggests that the use of direct quotes help preserve the voice of each person interviewed. Lengthy passages were used to convey important information as well as to capture the essence of the participant's voice.

The Ben Ruffin Story

According to Sarbin (1986), our lives are storied. The inner world of thoughts and experiences and the outer world of events and experiences establish how a life can be described or told. The union and recording of these two result in a very personal story (Denzin, 1989). To frame the concept of storytelling, “it is critical to understand the
difference between living a life and telling a life” (Bruner, 1984, p. 7). Bruner (1984) distinguished between the concept of living and experiencing. Denzin (1984) summarized “a life lived is what actually happens, a life experienced consists of the images, feelings, sentiments, desires, thoughts, and meanings known to the person whose life it is” (p. 30).

In other words, Mair (1988) asserts “stories are habitations. We live in and through stories. They conjure worlds. We do not know the world other than the story world. Stories inform lives. They hold us together and keep us apart. We inhabit the great stories of our culture. We live through stories of our race and place. It is this enveloping and constructing function of stories that is especially important to serve more fully” (p. 129).

Lived experiences and epiphanies shape the individual within the group and social relations that surround him or her (Denzin, 1989). This biography connects the lived experiences of Ben Ruffin and the epiphanies of the groups and social relationships that surrounded and shaped his experience in the world.

The Ben Ruffin story is organized into topical and chronological categories. The narrative is divided by life stages into four distinct periods that include: The Formative Years (Birth-15), High School and College (16-22), Civil Rights Activist (22-36) and Hunt Administration/UNC Board of Governors (36-65). The narrative is preceded by an explanation of the status of black Americans in the United States at the time of his birth, an introduction to Ben Ruffin as well as an explanation of the social context of his birthplace, Durham, North Carolina.
Introduction

Life in America for blacks was bleak around the time of Ben Ruffin’s birth. In 1940, most black men and women lived in rural communities in the South, and approximately 90% lived in poverty. The annual earning for blacks was less than half for whites (Bowen and Bok, 1998, p. 1). An inferior educational system produced few graduates, with 12% of black’s 25-29 years of age completing high school in 1940 and 2% obtaining a college degree (Bowen and Bok, 1998, p. 1). Professional opportunities for blacks were limited. Blacks represented 2.8% of physicians, 0.5 % of attorneys, 0.5% of engineers, and 1.3% of all male managers and proprietors. There were no black senators, governors, or mayors. There was only one black judge on the federal bench and only thirty-three elected officials serving in the United States, in 1940 (Bowen & Bok, 1998, p. 1).

Between 1940 and 1960, the circumstances of some blacks improved in the United States. World War II brought unprecedented economic growth, and black poverty rates declined from 93% to 55% nationally. Millions of blacks moved from the rural South to the North, and their education quality improved slightly. The median years of education for blacks grew from 7 years in 1940 to 10.5 years in 1960. The percentage of blacks obtaining college degrees grew from 1.6% in 1940 to 5.4% in 1960 (Bowen & Bok, 1998, p. 2).

There was an increase in the number of black attorneys at this time as well as managers and proprietors. The number of black attorneys rose from 0.5% to 1.2% while the percentage of engineers and physicians remained the same between 1940 and 1960. The number of black elected officials saw the greatest increase with 33 elected officials in 1941.
increasing to 285 by 1965. There were an increasing number of blacks involved in local
government. There were three mayors, 68 blacks on the School Board around the country,
City Council membership jumped from four to 74 and State legislative representatives
increased from 26 to 102 (Bowen & Bok, 1998, p. 2). Blacks made progress between 1940
and 1960. The Johnson administration’s support of the Higher Education Act and Civil
Rights Act would prove a pivotal opportunity for increasing educational opportunities for
blacks. On June 4, 1965, President Lyndon Baines Johnson stood before the graduating class
at Howard University in Washington, D.C. He said,

You do not take a person who, for years, has been hobbled by chains and liberate
him, bring him up to the starting line of a race and then say, you are free to compete
with all the others, and still justly believe that you have been completely fair. Thus, it
is not enough just to open the gates of opportunity. All our citizens must have the
ability to walk through those gates. This is the next and more profound stage of the
battle for civil rights. We seek not just freedom but opportunity. We seek not just
legal equity but human ability, not just equality as a right and a theory but equality as
a fact and equality as a result.” (Public Papers of the President, 1966, p. 635-640).

President Lyndon B. Johnson spoke of access and opportunity. As President of the
United States, he enjoyed a national platform and often expressed the importance of
education, access, and equal opportunity. While President Johnson articulated the importance
of these ideals, many other individuals worked in their communities with a similar
commitment to access, opportunity, and social justice.
Ben Ruffin was one of those individuals. The life story of Ben Ruffin begins in the backdrop of Durham, North Carolina. Ben Ruffin was born December 11, 1941 to Benjamin and Catherine Ruffin in Durham. He attended public school and completed his secondary education in the Durham City Schools. He graduated from Hillside High School in 1960. He continued his education at North Carolina College, completing a Bachelor of Science degree in 1964. He later earned a Master of Social Work degree from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

During the civil rights protests of the 1960s, Ben Ruffin worked to remove vestiges of racism, Jim Crowism, segregation, and discrimination. He moved from civil rights activist to having major leadership responsibilities as Chairman of the Durham Housing Authority. He also served as Chair of the Durham Committee on the Affairs of Black People.

In 1977, Governor James Hunt appointed Ruffin as Special Assistant for Minority Affairs. During his seven-year tenure (1977-1984) on the governor’s staff, Ruffin was instrumental in increasing the number of black judges in the state of North Carolina and expanding the number of blacks employed in state government. After serving as Special Assistant, Ruffin moved into the corporate business world. He was appointed Vice President and Special Assistant to the President of North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance Company. In 1986, he was appointed Director of Corporate Affairs for R.J. Nabisco, and in 1989, he became Vice President for Corporate Affairs at R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company. In this position, he led the company’s local, state and nation partnerships with key minority businesses, civic, and professional organizations.
These experiences positioned him to be appointed to the University of North Carolina Board of Governors in 1991. He ascended to Chairman in 1998 having previously served as Secretary and Vice Chair. Ruffin was appointed Chair of the UNC Board of Governors on July 11, 1998. He was the first black to serve as Chairman. In 2000, he was unanimously re-elected Chair for a second term. He served on the UNC Board of Governors as Member Emeritus until his death in December, 2006.

Ruffin received numerous awards and honors during his life, including nine honorary degrees from colleges and universities (one was awarded posthumously), Distinguished Alumni Awards from the University of North Carolina School of Social Work, and the National Urban League’s Donald H. McGannan Citation (Excerpts, Benjamin S. Ruffin Obituary, December 12, 2006).

The Social Context: Durham, North Carolina

Durham, North Carolina, was established in 1823. Durham was officially named and established as a railroad depot in 1854 (Greene, 2005). By 1864, the population had grown to close to one hundred residents. Davidson (1996, p.15) characterized Durham as “a scruffy cluster of shacks, surrounded by improvised farms and linked by dirt lanes.” It was hard to imagine that Durham would rise from relative obscurity to become the “Jewel of the South” (Davidson, 1996, p. 15).

A noted historical site after the Civil War, Durham received notoriety for being the site of the Confederacy’s final retreat. On April 26, 1886, General Joseph Eggleston Johnston surrendered the southern troops to Union General William Tecumseh Sherman at a
farmhouse just outside of town (Davidson, 1996). The farmstead “Bennett Place” is claimed as the true location of the end of the Civil War and is now a recognized historical site (Davidson, 1996, p. 16).

The troops’ final surrender and subsequent departure is believed to have spurred the growth of the tobacco industry in North Carolina. John Ruffin Green owned a tobacco farm near Bennett Place. As soldiers departed Bennett Place, they helped themselves to the tobacco. Upon returning to their homes, former soldiers’ requests for tobacco began pouring in from around the country. A significant and widespread appeal for this southern product was born. “In 1883, Green had sold over 5 million pounds of tobacco” (Davidson, 1996, p. 18).

Durham flourished into the “tobacco center of the world” (Greene, 2005, p. 1). The explosive tobacco industry paved the way for other new industries, and “scores of black and white women, often outnumbering men, flooded to Durham factories and mills” (Greene, 2005, p.1).

Durham soon emerged as an economic power, and the Duke family empire was born. The American Tobacco Company (ATC) was developed, which gave the Duke family control of four-fifths of the country’s tobacco industry. When the monopoly was dissolved by a US Supreme court decision, the Duke Empire had already diversified and controlled “all major textile mills” in Durham (Davidson, 1996, p. 22). Trinity College was transformed into Duke University.
While “tobacco money fueled the establishment of the white professional class in Durham” (Greene, 2005, p. 1), the North Carolina Mutual Insurance Company fueled the establishment of the black professional class in Durham (Greene, 2005). The prosperity of the black professional class in Durham was linked to the life of the insurance company. The North Carolina Mutual Insurance Company served as the “nucleus for virtually all Black enterprises in Durham, North Carolina” (Davidson, 2005, p. 25). The achievement of the “Mutual” symbolized black progress, and individuals looked at the “Mutual,” saying, “This is what we did, this is what we can do” (Davidson, 2005, p. 25). John Merrick, A.A. Moore, and C.C. Spaulding were among the noted black leaders in Durham at this time (Davidson, 1996).

Southern blacks often marveled at the success of blacks in Durham. Black newspapers echoed a sentiment of success and prosperity. The Durham Negro Observer applauded the “energy and business savvy” of blacks in Durham. The Atlanta Independent said, “There is more grace, grit, and greenbacks among the Negroes in Durham and more harmony among the races than any city in America” (as cited in Davidson, 1996, p. 23-24).

W.E.B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington visited Durham in the early 1900s, and both agreed Durham was a model city. Du Bois (1912) chronicled his visit in his article “Uplifting of Black Durham: the success of the Negroes and their value to a tolerant and helpful southern city.” He wrote “there is in this small city a group of 5000 or more colored people whose social and economic development is perhaps more striking than that of any similar group in the nation” (Du Bois, 1912, p. 334). He noted “at first glance a visitor sees
little distinction between Durham and other southern towns with a black labor force of janitors, washer women, laborers, and service workers. A second look identifies a circle of black leadership he characterized as group economy indicating the rise of the Negro American” (Du Bois, 1912, p. 334). He concluded in his writings:

Today there is a singular group in Durham where a black man may get up in the morning, from a mattress made by a black man and a house which a black man built, out of lumber which a black man cut and plain, he may put on a suit which he brought at a colored haberdashery, and socks knit at a colored mill, he may cook vittles from a colored grocery store, on a stove which black men fashioned, he may earn his living working for colored men, be sick in a colored hospital, and buried from a colored church, and the Negro insurance society will pay his widow enough to keep his children in a colored school (Du Bois, 1912, p. 338).

Booker T. Washington (1911) made a regular pilgrimage to the Southern states to examine first hand the living and working conditions of blacks in the South. Reflected in his 1911 manuscript “Durham, North Carolina, a city of Negro enterprise” are his impressions of Durham. When Washington (1911) traveled to Durham, he witnessed the prosperity of blacks in rural and urban areas. Upon his arrival in Durham, he marveled at the prosperous “doctors, lawyers, preachers, and men of other professions” (Washington, 1911, p. 642). However, he became suspicious of the near picture perfect presentation of black life in North Carolina. He noted that his skepticism evaporated as he witnessed firsthand the “largest Negro insurance company in the world with sizable assets, a building, and a Negro staff of clerks and agents”
He also observed and acknowledged a number of business ventures and left convinced Durham was a city of Negro enterprise.

Du Bois and Washington examined economic success in Durham and praised the city. They examined race relations and both agreed that race relations were unique in Durham. Du Bois (1912) perceived the relationship between what he classified as the noble few, as sympathetic and helpful, and average citizens; he also stated the majority of whites are not hostile (p. 338). Washington (1911) indicated he found the doors of opportunity open to people of color at all levels. He cited the contribution of Lincoln Hospital to the black community by the Duke family as a prime example of good race relations. He summarized his evaluation noting, “In Durham, a good opinion of the colored man is growing more and more general” (Washington, 1911, p. 649). However, not all communities enjoyed the prosperity witnessed by Washington and Du Bois.

Washington’s writings acknowledged the success of professional black citizens whose work established them as leaders. Yet he questioned, “What of the poor man, the unlettered man, the man who because of circumstance or age, the door of training had been tightly closed?” (Washington, 1911, p. 646).

Durham’s Contradiction

Booker T. Washington and W.E.B Du Bois revealed the black experience in the prosperous section of Durham in the early 1900s. Their accounts of the lifestyle in this southern city made national headlines, and many across the country marveled at the new “Jewel of the South.” However, there were distinct class and race differences in Durham and
surrounding communities. The race and class differences were evident in the way poor working class citizens were treated in the textile mills and tobacco factories. The 1934 textile strike and 1947 strike at R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company painted a clear picture of work and the living conditions of the working class poor in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. Markowitz and Rosner (1987) captured the despair. They wrote,

The 1934 textile strike failed to bring the transformation in work conditions and social relations that the strikers had hoped to win and was widely considered a devastating defeat for Labor. An important window into the persistence of poor conditions in the mills is the letters that the mill workers (both male and female) wrote to Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt and other government officials describing their plight. These letters provided compelling evidence of the discontent that lingered after the 1934 strike. The following excerpt from a mill worker tells of the poor working conditions in Burlington, North Carolina.

March 4, 1937

Dear Mr. & Mrs. Roosevelt:

I am a poor widow woman with 4 children and uneducated and don’t know how to word a letter but in my simple way am going to try and explain what I am about to write we poor working people love you and Mr. Roosevelt our President and we done everything we could do to make him our President again now what I am about to say is this the firm we all work for works us all just as long as they want to and pay us just as little as they please. (Markowitz and Rosner, 1987, p. 76-80)
Class differences existed and violence did erupt. The worker's strike at the R.J. Reynolds factory in Winston Salem, North Carolina, brought the class divisions in this region to the surface. Factories were segregated, and the racial divide was evident in both wages and working conditions. “Blacks toiled in preparation steaming, cleaning, and conditioning tobacco, under appalling conditions for low pay” (Davidson, 1996, p.54), while white workers operated machinery at higher wages (Davidson, 1996).

Collective bargaining was introduced, and for a short time, circumstances were better. The black working class poor joined the union, and working conditions improved. The trade unions eventually collapsed. However, the union had given hope and courage to many in this segment of the population. A desire for change had begun to sweep across the neglected areas in Durham and surrounding cities (Davidson, 1996).

Booker T. Washington spoke of these poor men and women, the unlettered men and women, the men and women for whom circumstances or age, the door of training had been tightly closed. These men and women lived a very different existence in Durham.

According to Davidson (1996), “all but a few blacks living in Durham were consigned to slum life” (p. 38). Substandard housing, disease, and high infant mortality rates plagued many black communities. Davidson (1996) captured the anxiety of one Durham resident Pauli Murray, when she said, “it was as if the town had swallowed more than it could hold and regurgitated it, for the Bottoms (neighborhood) was an odorous conglomeration of trash piles, garbage dumps, cow stills, and crowded humanity” (p. 37-38).
The plight of the poor as articulated by Davidson (1996) was in sharp contrast to what was nationally recognized for this city at the turn of the century. Poverty plagued many communities in Durham in the early to mid 1900s, and Ben Ruffin experienced that poverty growing up in the West End section of Durham.

**Poverty and Inequality**

Against the backdrop of abject poverty, residents of the West End of Durham watched as society relegated them to second-class citizenry. Jim Crow laws of “separate but equal” established rules of engagement in the city. Employment opportunities were scarce for blacks, and many workers labored for low wages. The majority of workers were considered unskilled, and factory work and domestic work were common for those individuals without formal education.

The daily struggle for survival for those with limited means permeated the community, leaving many with little hope for change. However, the shadow of inequality did not remove all hope for a better tomorrow. Positioned within the West End of Durham, facing economic hardship and enduring life in the segregated South, was the Ruffin family.

**PHASE I Ben Ruffin, the Formative Years (Birth-15)**

**Benjamin Ruffin’s Beginnings**

The Ruffin siblings shared childhood memories about their family and the experience growing up in the West End section of Durham during a five-hour conversation. What follows is a description from his siblings of his early life. The stories surrounding Ruffin’s
formative years allows one to see how close he was to his family and how he came to cherish the relationships he had with his brother and sisters.

Ruffin’s father, Benjamin Ruffin, Sr., was born in Hillsborough, North Carolina. His mother Catherine Wallace was born in Charlotte, North Carolina. Benjamin, Sr., and Catherine met in Durham. Catherine and her family had moved from Charlotte to Durham in search of better circumstances. The Ruffin siblings called Catherine’s mother, their grandmother, “Mama.” One commented that “Mama came because the factories were a good place of employment at the time.” Another sibling said that “When Mama heard they were hiring at the tobacco factory, she moved her family to Durham.”

Historically, domestic work in homes and hotels was the primary source of employment for black women in Charlotte in the 1930s. The factories in Durham promised better opportunities. Catherine’s family moved to Durham, and she later met and married Benjamin Ruffin, Sr. The marriage of Benjamin and Catherine produced five offspring: Fred, Celestine, Carolyn, Benjamin, Jr., and Cheryl.

The Ruffin family lived in a section of Durham called the West End. The Ruffin siblings all agreed that the West End was a “tight knit community” and one of several black communities in the city. According to Ruffin’s siblings, the residents of the West End shared a family-like bond. They described it as “a community of very close-knit families” and noted that, “the community was like one group.”

The siblings commented that families looked out for one another; if a young person misbehaved, an elder would intervene if a parent was absent at the time. “The neighbors had
an influence on you; if your parents were at work, and the [neighbors] saw you do something, they would not hesitate to discipline you” (Interview A).

The family established deep ties with residents of the West End, and those ties continue to this day. Ruffin and his siblings regularly attended the reunions that are held every two years. The siblings agreed that “growing up in the West End was a great place.”

A Prophecy on a Life

Ben Ruffin’s life began with sickness and a prophecy of greatness. Ruffin’s sister recounted, “Ben became sick a few months after he was born; he had a strangulated hernia, which was very dangerous, especially in those years.” Another sibling recalled, “I remember as a child that Ben’s neck was swollen and the doctors at that time did not have anything for a baby that small with a hernia. His doctor knitted a little truss to put on him.”

A neighbor from the West End community, Ms. Arluna Dunn, spoke of Ruffin’s future leadership while he was just an infant. It was around this time that Ms. Arluna, as she was called, made her prophesy about Ruffin’s life. A sibling recounted: “Ms. Arluna told my mother not to worry about Ben being sickly, because he was going to come out of it, because the Lord had shown her that Ben was going to be a leader. She told my mother to speak that into Ben's life every day and tell him and who he was. And every day Ms. Arluna would come and see how Ben was doing.”

Ruffin’s siblings also recalled the story that in a small church in Durham prayers were being offered for his recovery. It is their belief that through faith, Ruffin was healed and a special calling was placed upon his life. Ruffin’s sibling recalled the following story:
A prophet visited Ms. Arluna’s church. The prophet spoke of healing and he said to Ms. Arluna, you may not need healing but you might know somebody who needs healing. He instructed her to take her hand and lay it at the point where that person was sick. Ms. Arluna, who affectionately called Ben “Bamnose,” laid her hand down on Ben and said, “I claim this for Bamnose.” Later, when mother carried Ben back to the clinic, they could not find any sign of the hernia and he never had any more problems with it. His neck went down and Ben never had any problems as far as I knew for the rest of his life. Ms. Arluna went on to tell mother that Ben was here for a purpose, she said he was here like a Black Moses, here to save our people (Interview A).

Ruffin survived his early illness and began to thrive. According to Ruffin’s siblings, he soon developed a very close relationship with Ms. Arluna and he spent a lot of time with her. As their relationship grew, Ms. Arluna became very instrumental in his life as far as spirituality was concerned. Ms. Arluna would always sing hymns and quote scripture to Ruffin (Interview A).

As Ruffin matured, he continued to visit Ms. Arluna on a regular basis. A sister recalled, “Ben used to go down there all the time. When we went to school, we would bring our lunches and many times Ben would go down to Ms. Arluna’s house, and they would give him a quarter. He called it quintencence, because he couldn’t pronounce quarter.” Ruffin maintained a close relationship with Ms. Arluna his entire life. Into his later years, he would continue to visit Ms. Arluna, bringing gifts and updates on his life.
From infancy, Ruffin was told he was special and there was a calling on his life. His spirituality and love of the Lord was instilled by family and reinforced by those in his local community and church family. Ruffin’s brother recalled, “Ben was spoiled, and remained the baby of the family until his sister Cheryl was born. When Cheryl was born, he put his finger in his mouth and went to Ms. Arluna’s house. She told him that another baby had come, but he was a big boy.”

In addition to the story about Ms. Arluna, Ruffin’s siblings also shared that Ruffin had a few nicknames while growing up and many stuck with him throughout his life. The siblings said, “Ms. Arluna and Mr. John called him Bamnose, but we called him Fancy. Growing up we called him Fancy for fancy pants. He was given the name in the hospital after mother delivered him; he wore fancy diapers, so the nurses called him fancy pants.” His siblings continued to call him Fancy even after he was grown. In fact, during the interview his siblings referred to him as Fancy.

Ruffin’s family believes that his childhood was full of hope and promise from people who believed Ruffin to be a future leader.

The War at Home and Abroad

The outbreak of World War II in 1941 forever changed the world, and the Ruffin family. “From 1941 to 1945, over one million blacks served in the United States armed services” (Verney, 2000, p. 35). This experience contributed to the “process of grown grassroots consciousness” (Verney, 2000, p. 35). Servicemen from the Southern states who were stationed in European counties experienced open and liberal race relations in deep
contrast to race relations in the South. “Black soldiers returning to the US after the war, had heightened expectations and were often unwilling to accept the imposition of old oppression” (Verney, 2000, p. 35).

Benjamin Ruffin, Sr. served in the army. He went to war and returned to Durham fluent in French and troubled by the death and destruction he witnessed. His time in France taught him a new language, and the anguish of war. The battle of war haunted Benjamin, Sr. and his children claim it was reflected in how he interacted with his family upon his return to the United States (Interview A).

While stationed overseas, Benjamin, Sr., wrote letters to his wife, Catherine, and described his experiences. Ruffin’s siblings recalled that upon returning to the United States, Benjamin, Sr., was a changed man. One sibling stated,

Daddy was kind of in and out of our lives after he came back from World War II, and when he came back he was a changed man. He was not the daddy that we knew at all because he had seen so many people die. Mother showed me some of the letters he sent, and words were often blacked out; we believed he was saying too much. He came back to us as a new daddy. As the years progressed, he began to drink wine and it was about this time he and my mother separated. He was still always around us, and I’m sure you heard this story many times, the reason he resorted to the wine was because there was a group of them that went over there, they came back as friends, when they returned they couldn't find decent jobs, they couldn't get housing for their families, and it made them distraught (Interview A).
Post-World War II proved difficult for Durham, North Carolina. As veterans returned home from the war, they found little change in the standard of living for the black working class in Durham. The democracy they fought hard to uphold was often not evident in their own communities. Upon their return, veterans witnessed injustice with little recourse to address the racism and discrimination they faced.

One incident that demonstrated such injustice occurred on July 8, 1944 in Durham. Private Booker T. Spivey, a black soldier stationed at Camp Butner on the outskirts of Durham refused to give up his seat on a city bus (Davidson, 1996). He was fatally wounded by a gunshot to the heart for refusing to move to the back of the bus. Private Spivey, dressed in his military uniform, challenged the bus driver’s order to move to the back of the bus. An altercation occurred and when Spivey exited the bus, the driver, Herman Lee Council fired two shots. “During Council’s trial, one of the lawyers pointed out that the driver was merely upholding North Carolina’s segregation law” (Davidson, 1996, p. 76). The jury found the bus driver not guilty in less than 30 minutes (Davidson, 1996). After the verdict was announced, a suspicious fire raged in the tobacco warehouses in downtown Durham. “It took 3,000 servicemen from nearby Camp Butner to extinguish the flames, leaving a vast spread of utter destruction” with damages estimated at close to half a million dollars (Greene, 2005, p. 19). Although no one was ever arrested, many people speculated that blacks were sending a strong message of discontent.

Many black veterans felt they had stood in harm’s way to protect their country and watched while friends laid down their lives, only to return to the United States and not be
treated as equal citizens. This experience changed Benjamin Ruffin, Sr. One of Ruffin’s siblings recounted how her father and his army buddies would gather together and speak French. She said they would get upset when they thought about how they were treated in America as opposed to France.

Benjamin Ruffin, Sr. maintained regular contact with his family but ceased to live in the same household. A sibling recalled, “Daddy had a beautiful talent for carpentry and could landscape your yard, and he did that all over Hope Valley. A lot of people knew him out that way, because he worked out there with my mom. Although they were separated, they worked together and he never missed a day that he did not come by the house” (Interview A).

**Spirituality**

The Ruffin family attended church regularly, and each child was expected to be baptized at twelve years of age. The family attended Second Baptist Church in Durham then moved to Morehead Avenue Church. A sister recalled their early church involvement. She said,

All of us were childhood members, we were all in the youth choir; we would go to Sunday school and church, three o'clock service, BTU in the evening, and night service. You couldn't do anything else unless you were sick, and when you became 12 years old you had to get baptized, and we were all baptized at twelve years of age (Interview A). Another sibling recounted,

One thing Ben did every Saturday, he would be outside playing, and Reverend Yelverton would come on the air [radio], he would stop what he was doing outside
and come in the house at 3:30 every Saturday. We had the radio, we didn’t have TV, and he would come inside and he would listen that whole hour (Interview A).

His siblings remembered an incident when Ruffin got hurt and spontaneously broke into song. A sister stated, “Ben was outside playing in the yard, a little boy threw a ball and hit Ben. Ben came in the house bleeding, as we washed him up he began singing, The Lord Will Make a Way Somehow.” Although Ruffin was not known for musical talent, that did not stop him from trying, according to his family.

The church pastor and his wife were very prominent in the lives of the Ruffin children. Ruffin’s siblings explained the significance of their presence and influence on their lives. They stated, “At our end of town we had few people at that time that had gone to college and had higher education.” When the family separated from Second Baptist Church, according to the siblings, Mrs. MacLester took over at Morehead Avenue Church as an important figure in their lives. They remembered her as leading the choir and the missionaries; vocationally she was a guidance counselor and schoolteacher.

In conducting the interviews for this biographical study, many people interviewed felt that Ruffin missed his calling to preach. When he spoke to large crowds, people often said he sounded like a preacher in both tone and manner. His brother concurred, “I think some of the things that he did when he spoke, came from listening to the way black preachers, preached back then, they preached from the heart and life experience.”


Young Entrepreneur

For the Ruffin family, Sundays were devoted to church services, and Saturdays were devoted to household chores. According to Ruffin’s siblings, cleaning the house had to be complete before any other activity could occur and everybody participated in completing household chores (Interview A).

Ruffin’s brother described the Saturday ritual, “One thing we all had to do on Saturday mornings was to clean the house and wax the linoleum floor. We all cleaned up the house; however, when Ben got older he’d pay you 15-20 cents if you would do his job” (Interview A). The siblings noted that Ruffin was an ambitious child, always engaged in some business transaction. They described him as a young entrepreneur and careful how he spent his money. A sibling recalled,

Ben was all about trying to make money. He was a shoeshine boy first, then a newspaper boy, and everybody had to pay Ben. He demanded payment for his services. He would not wait, not one week; he wanted his money now. He often said, “I gave you the paper; now give me my money.” He was always striving to make money and to do better. He was stingy now; he was very aggressive. If you didn’t give him his money, you heard some nice words from him. Mother would have to get after him all the time saying, “little boys don't talk like that, you can’t be cursing people out.” He would say, “I carry these papers all week, now you going to have to pay me my money.” Once Ben earned his money, he did not let it go easy. He was stingy when he got money. He would put it way down in his pocket and wouldn’t
give it away unless it was absolutely necessary. If you asked for some money, he would reply, “why do you need this, what do you need it for, when are you going to pay me back.” Then when you start reminding him what you had done for him, he would reply, “okay.” And, when you came back the next day, he’d say, “didn’t I just give you a quarter.” He would remember that (Interview A).

Ruffin was remembered by his brother and sisters as a leader. One example shared by his siblings took place as he traveled with friends to Atlantic City, New Jersey. A sibling summarized, “He was an aggressive leader and always in charge. Ben and his friends would go to Atlantic City, and he would hold all the guys’ money and give them a certain amount to spend. He kept it so that they would have some money when they returned” (Interview A).

It is evident from talking to his siblings that they saw him as caretaker and guide even in the most unusual circumstances. Moreover, the people around him evidently trusted him to be in charge and make good decisions on their behalf. While many looked up to him, he looked up to his older brother.

My Brother’s Keeper

Military service beckoned Ruffin’s older brother Fred. His brother’s departure for the military two days out of high school left a void in Ruffin’s life. A sibling stated, “Ben cried his eyes out. They told Ben his brother was leaving, and he went into that bathroom and you’d think he lost his long lost friend. While everybody was saying goodbye, someone questioned, where in the world is Ben?” (Interview A).
Upon his departure to the service, Ruffin’s brother sent an allotment back to help support his family. Ruffin recalled this support and often spoke about how Fred Ruffin supported his family while away in the military. His brother had often wondered how Ruffin knew about the allotment. He stated, “One thing Ben knew when I got into the service, that I paid an allotment back to mother. He mentioned this in some of his speeches, and I don’t know how he knew but he always knew exactly how much that allotment was for” (Interview A). A sibling said that the whole family knew. She stated, “Ben knew because Mother Dear told him; she showed us all the check. This is what we got, and we are going downtown. We would grab hands and we would walk downtown to cash the check and get some groceries” (Interview A). Many black soldiers supported families back home during the war. Military stipends fed many families back in the United States according to Fred Ruffin.

One of the things Ruffin always remembered was giving back to his community, according to his brother Fred. Ruffin made a practice of giving back to his community and it appears Fred Ruffin was one of his primary role models. Ruffin also frequently acknowledged his mother’s role in teaching him to share (B. Ruffin, personal communication, October 25, 2005). Ruffin noted, “Mother always reached out to help people, she taught us to share with people” (as cited in Greene, 2005, p. 101).

**PHASE II  High School and College (16-22)**

“If there is no struggle, there is no progress. Those who profess to favor freedom, and deprecate agitation, are men who want crops without plowing up the ground, they want rain
without thunder and lighting.” (Frederick Douglass as cited in Ben Ruffin Memorial Service Program, “Ruffin’s Favorite Quotes Used for His Speeches,” December 11, 2006).

Ruffin attended Hillside High School in Durham and graduated in 1960. According to his siblings, the relationships he forged with his classmates lasted a lifetime (Interview A). He regularly attended class reunions and maintained close connections with those individuals with whom he spent time. The turbulent sixties shaped much of Ruffin’s activism, which started with a quiet determination for personal success. According to Ruffin’s sister he was an average student at Hillside. His desire to attend college was heightened by his high school principal, according to his sisters. The principal of Hillside High School played a pivotal role in motivating Ruffin to consider obtaining a college education. A sibling stated,

When Ben was in the 11th grade preparing for the courses for college, the principal told him that he might as well take shop or something like that because nobody from the West End had ever made it to college. While this sentiment may have persuaded some young people to rethink their college aspirations, Ben became more determined. I think it just made him a stronger person to show Mr. Holmes that somebody from the West End could and lots of people before Ben had. There were doctors, nurses, and schoolteachers. It could have been really damaging to someone who did not have Ben’s spirit (Interview A).

Ruffin’s sister stated he had originally aspired to be a football coach. She said Ruffin liked sports but never participated in organized athletics although he often talked about
becoming a coach. She stated, “He told Mr. Holmes and others he wanted to coach football. He worked as a trainer and loved to walk behind Mr. Cal Easterling” (Interview A).

Hillside High School had a program that trained young people for future careers. The Distributive Education Clubs of America (DECA) Program allowed students to study a trade and work in the field prior to graduation. Most students worked part time in the afternoon. A sibling recalled, “A lot of students were allowed to get out early and get prepared for jobs through DECA, and Ben took tailoring” (Interview A).

Ruffin was well known for his dapper appearance according to his siblings, and he later became a licensed tailor. He took tailoring courses and maintained his interest in tailoring into his adult life. As an adult, he continued sewing and had a room set up in his home with a sewing machine. As a student, he worked as a tailor for a prominent businessman in downtown Durham. While Ruffin honed his tailoring skills, he also learned about the politics of Durham from this experience. A sibling recalled,

Ben was a tailor for Mr. Boykin. Mr. Boykin was a very influential man in the Hayti area. Everyone went to his shop, not just to get tailoring done, but also to talk to Mr. Boykin about political things. Ben stayed in the back on his machine listening. The customers were prominent leaders in the community. They would greet Ben. I believe that is how Ben got a feel for politics, and that is how he learned who the influential people were in Durham. He learned if you wanted to talk about this, you go to him; if you want to talk about that, you go to him. I also think that is when his ideas developed about going to college (Interview A).
Ruffin understood the correlation between education and social economic mobility. In the October 25, 2005 interview, he stated,

I always believed education was the bridge to improve the quality of life. More education – more opportunity. I believed that if you acquire education, you will have more choices. Poverty equals lack of options. I grew up poor. I talk with people everyday, especially young guys, about opportunities. When I was young, we would walk through Forest Hills; they had plush houses back then, more modest now. We would walk around and dream about having more. We grew up poor and my mother worked hard to support us but there wasn’t much to go around (B. Ruffin, personal communication, October 25, 2005).

Ruffin attended North Carolina College in Durham, North Carolina. North Carolina College later became North Carolina Central University (Davidson, 1996). Ruffin enrolled as a freshman in 1960 and majored in Health Education. He arrived on campus without money for books and paid his own tuition. In the October 25, 2005, interview he said,

I went to Central with $110, and tuition was $99. I had enough money to pay first semester tuition. I knew I needed a job. I went to a tailor shop. He told me “no, go away,” he didn’t have any jobs. I went back every day for about two weeks. I think he got tired of me coming by. I worked three years and never missed a day. He trusted me. I worked my way through school with that job (B. Ruffin, personal communication, October 25, 2005).
Taking a Stand

Ruffin had a sibling who also attended North Carolina College and witnessed Ruffin emerge as a leader. When asked what kind of student he was, she noted, “Ben was an average student who became an active member of the college community” (Interview A).

Ben had a way of getting people to listen long before he arrived on campus. As a vocal advocate for justice, he began to challenge the status quo early, but once on campus, he learned to mobilize others to take a stand. Ruffin’s siblings recounted the work he did in organizing early protest marches in Durham. One sister noted,

Ben emerged as a leader in the community within the Civil Rights movement. It started with the civil rights struggle largely, but he was always the one who was going to tell everybody what to do when he was younger. When Ben got on campus, that is when he really got involved in the community work, because he saw what was going on. Martin Luther King came down and spoke with us one time; he came over, and he gave us some ideas about some things. That is how the march started. I cannot remember where but it’s always accredited to Greensboro; however, I think that Durham had the first march. It is always accredited to different people, because the people who were there did not write about it, but we knew what was going on. Ben organized a group of students on campus. I recall him saying “we are going down to that Walgreen’s and Kress; we are going down there and we are going to walk quietly, we are not going to say anything but let our presence be known.” The plan was for one person to go to the lunch counter and order an ice cream cone. When that
person went in, they just stood there, and the lady just overlooked them and kept waiting on everybody else and never waited on them. I believe Ben said, “we’re not going down to cause any confusion we are just going to make our presence be known, and we are going to come on out.” I think it was John Edwards who was told to go in and sit on the stool. It was an ice cream parlor over there on Roxboro (Interview A).

The emphasis of the early protest marches was to draw attention, keep the situation orderly, and not start confusion according to Ruffin’s siblings. Unfortunately, there was always potential danger. One of Ruffin’s sisters acknowledged that her temperament kept her from getting involved in the marches. Ruffin’s sister noted, “I could not participate in any of the marches because I had too much temper and they wanted the marches to be peaceful” (Interview A). Another sibling recalled an incident when the other sister was accosted at a march. She stated, “We were walking down by Kress on Magnum Street, and this white girl was walking in front of us. She spat on us, and took a hatpin and stuck one of the girls in the arm. We could not do anything, but we were mad and ready to fight” (Interview A).

Ruffin’s work as an advocate for justice left a lasting impression on his siblings. They recounted numerous stories of his community involvement and activism. From these stories one could conclude that Ruffin was a strong advocate for social justice and did not hesitate to articulate his thoughts on equality. According to his siblings he did not advocate violence, nor hide from conflict. Their stories noted that when he saw or experienced discrimination, he challenged it and when he saw or experienced unfair treatment of blacks, he demanded
better. Their stories indicate that he did not hesitate to bring people together to address the injustice, and he rallied people to stand up and be heard.

Ruffin’s siblings vividly recall a particular march and his fervor for getting people to participate. They recalled his sentiment and words, “We are not going to buy anything else in any of those stores if they don't recognize us, if they don't give us jobs, if they don’t serve us, and give us equal opportunity like they were doing everybody else. We are going to start on Main Street, because that’s where they take all of our money on Friday and Saturday, and that's where they take our money for Christmas” (Interview A).

It is evident from his siblings’ stories that Ruffin stood witness to the social injustice of the time. The dual system of opportunity was present in the social stratification present in Durham. The few job opportunities for blacks in the department stores and drug stores were limited according to his brother and sisters. When asked about the inequity that Ruffin witnessed and experienced growing up, they summarized,

Blacks had jobs in the kitchen cooking in the major department stores, but they would not give blacks the front jobs, and black men took out the garbage at Belks. Ms. Daisy Gunn worked downtown, in the baby’s department, she could help you pick out something, but she was not allowed to ring it up (Interview A).

Ruffin’s siblings said they believed that he saw injustice and understood the concept of separate and unequal at a very young age. They also recall that as a much younger child, he would talk about equality. Ben witnessed the inequality and humiliation of how blacks were treated as second-class citizens according to his siblings (Interview A).
From Anger to Protest: The Rise of Student Activism

On February 1, 1960, Joseph McNeil, Izell Blair, Franklin McCain, and David Richmond went into the F. W. Woolworth Company in Greensboro, North Carolina. These four college students from North Carolina A & T bought a few items and defied Jim Crow laws when they sat down at the lunch counter and asked to be served (Carson, 1981). Their actions became known as the Greensboro sit-ins (Carson, 1981).

The students were refused service, but remained at the lunch counter until the store closed. The students had “expected to be arrested, and the peaceful tactic did not elicit the severe retaliation they expected” (Carson 1981, p.1). The students, who had planned the event the night before, returned to North Carolina A&T and recruited more students to participate the following day. On Tuesday, February 2, thirty students from North Carolina A&T occupied seats at the Woolworth’s lunch counter. The protest was peaceful, and local news reported the incident (Carson, 1981). The national news picked up the story and by Wednesday, the numbers grew even larger. The news media portrayed the protesters as “well dressed Negro college students who ended the sit-in with a prayer” (Carson, 1981, p. 10). As days passed the number of participants escalated and by the fourth day, hundreds of students became involved in the protests.

On February 8 in Durham, seventeen students from North Carolina College and four students from Duke University held a sit-in. In Winston–Salem, students at Winston–Salem Teachers College staged a sit-in, and students from Raleigh colleges staged a sit-in which led
to their arrests. “The arrest of student protesters in Raleigh for trespassing was the first mass arrest of protesters in the movement” (Carson, 1981, p. 11).

The Greensboro sit-ins that had sparked a national outcry for justice disrupted normal business activity in Greensboro, and bomb threats intimidated the community, prompting the closing of the Woolworth’s store. The students in Greensboro later agreed to halt protests for two weeks while the mayor sought “a just and honorable solution” (Carson, 1981, p. 10).

The Students’ Executive Committee for Justice, which originated with the students from Greensboro (Carson, 1981, p.10), had championed a nationwide movement of peaceful protest. It was estimated that by April some fifty thousand individuals had become involved in the movement once it had spread to neighboring states in the South.

According to Carson (1981), “students and other young activist acted on suppressed resentments that preceded the development of an ideological rationale for protest. The spontaneous and defiant acts in support of social justice resulted in a movement” (p. 9). While the premise of the sit-ins was nonviolence, on occasion violence did erupt. As the protest grew larger and spread across the country, local communities and states responded differently. However, the nonviolent face of the student protest movement resulted in a new face and a new approach to the freedom struggle. The early civil rights activities addressed the broader concept that marches, sit-ins and other forms of social unrest broke the silence of oppression (Carson, 1981).
PHASE III Civil Rights Activist


Ruffin became very active with the civil rights movement. He became known as a freedom fighter. He was identified as an outsider who dared to challenge the status quo. When Ruffin was on the outside, it was noted by several interviewees he became a powerful force. Many people who spoke of his work in the civil rights movement remembered him as a passionate and strong advocate for justice, a person who knew no bounds, had no fears, and accepted no less than equal justice. Much later as he moved into his roles in government, corporate America, and higher education, he began to affect change from the inside.

Ruffin took the civil rights struggle personally according to his siblings. From 1964 to 1977, he took the fight for social justice to the streets, to the churches, to the businesses, to the boardrooms, and to the council chambers. The streets of Durham became his training ground and some of the prominent leaders of Durham became his mentors. While some people acknowledged Ruffin publicly, others were comfortable supporting him from behind the scenes (Interview A).

A fellow civil rights activist stated, “Our relationship with the black leadership, the John Wheelers, Jack Stewarts, was closer than most people realized. We were considered the young militants and they, the old guard, but we had good relationships with them” (Anonymous, personal communication, 2007). One of Ruffin’s siblings noted, “Mr. John
Wheeler was instrumental in Ruffin’s growth; he was the President of Mechanics and Farmers Bank” (Interview A). It was evident from this interview that there was support from the more established black leadership. On occasion, a fellow civil rights activist said, the black leadership would indicate that maybe they had gone too far or they would have done some things differently. The activist also noted that many young blacks were visibly supportive and active, while the older generation was supportive in different ways (Anonymous, personal communication, 2007).

A sibling recalled that when Ruffin organized the marches, he would call upon black leaders to support them. She noted,

A lot of them did not support him publicly, but in the background. Some did not support him at all. There is one guy, I won’t call his name, but this guy did not leave the state, he left the country, he left the country so he wouldn’t have to participate (Interview A).

A fellow civil rights activist reinforced this belief noting, “From day one, Ben had a commitment to do something about what was happening to poor black people. I think the irony of all this is that at Ben’s service all these people were getting up talking about how great Ben was, which was true, but there were times when these same people would not want Ben near them” (Anonymous, personal communication, 2007).

When Ruffin emerged as a vocal advocate for the disadvantaged in Durham, his support in the early days of his civil rights activity was tenuous at best. He was labeled as a militant. A sibling reflected on his earlier civil rights work and said, “Some people labeled
Ben as a black militant. They said, “Be careful of that short black fiery militant Ben Ruffin, because when he comes in, it means trouble, it would be good trouble for us, for black folks” (Interview A).

The image of protest and defiance against an unjust system left vivid memories with Ruffin’s siblings. It was not uncommon for Ruffin to challenge authority in hopes of improving the circumstance of another human being. His siblings captured the essence of his rebellion in numerous stories. One sister stated how Ruffin pushed for jobs. She said, Ben was very bold. He would just go into the stores and talk to the head man. Whether it was over at Belks, Overtown, Kress, or Walgreen’s, he would tell the merchants, “look you’re going to have to give my people jobs, because they are spending all their money down here. At Christmas time, they are some of your biggest spenders; give them a job.” He went to the public gas company, and they told Ben they would hire somebody but that person had to look like them. They agreed to hire a man or women but they had to be light. Ben said, “I don’t care as long as they hire someone black” (Interview A).

Not all of the protest in Durham occurred in the streets. According to one civil rights activist, “There were several black churches that supported the civil rights activity. There was a center on Pettigrew where we set up an office; we had space there to meet. We had meetings in people’s homes; we met all over the place (Anonymous, personal communication, 2007).
Ruffin’s brother and sisters believed once he was motivated, he never looked back. He kept on going, according to their recollections. In one incident when Ruffin was determined to do something, they recall him reminding his Mother that there was a calling for his life. Many of the people who had long been aware of Ruffin’s potential were not surprised to see his increased involvement in leadership roles around issues that would level the playing field for blacks in Durham. One such person whose ties to the Ruffin family go back to the days when she picked strawberries with his mother stated: “Early on, he was like everybody else but as the civil rights blossomed, you could tell he was going to be a leader” (Interview P).

The many injustices suffered by blacks in America juxtaposed to the experiences of blacks in Durham perhaps propelled Ruffin to leadership roles but as noted above and recognized by many who interfaced with Ruffin, there seemed to be a calling in his life to lead and make a difference. Arluna Dunn’s prophecy seemed to have come to fruition.

Ruffin’s social activism extended from his early civil rights activities as a high school and college student to a leadership role in a newly established grassroots organization in the Durham community supported by the North Carolina Fund. He assumed more responsibility and had an opportunity to make a sustained difference in the way blacks experienced life in Durham.

The North Carolina Fund: Fighting Poverty in North Carolina

Governor Terry Sanford established the North Carolina Fund in 1963 as a five-year initiative to fight poverty in the state of North Carolina. The underlying concept was to
involve the poor in self-help efforts to solve self-identified problems (UOCI, Description and History, NC Fund).

Through grassroots efforts, community action agencies and initiatives were developed to combat poverty. Experimental programs in health, education, job training, housing, and community development were created with $9.5 million in grant funding provided by the Ford, Z. Smith Reynolds and Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundations (Barnes, 1966). The North Carolina Fund created eleven community action agencies.

The North Carolina Fund reported that issues of hunger, poor health, illiteracy, and prejudice were linked to perpetuating the cycle of poverty (Barnes, 1966). They cited the 1960 census data and concluded many North Carolina residents lagged behind in education, income, and employment. They reported that one-third of all housing units in North Carolina were dilapidated, and 36% of homes occupied by non-whites were overcrowded (Barnes, 1966). The identification of these social ills and the relationship to perpetual poverty provided the foundation for the creation of the North Carolina Fund.

When President Lyndon Johnson announced a war on poverty as his primary domestic program, the federal government provided unprecedented support for antipoverty programs (Barnes, 1966). The North Carolina Fund was already in existence and became a model program. The Fund, being one of a few agencies already involved in this work, agreed to support broad efforts to include mobilization of college students, volunteers, and community development (Barnes, 1966).
Howard Fuller was hired to address issues of poverty in North Carolina. At the time Fuller arrived from Chicago, he believed that North Carolina would be further ahead given the large number of middle and upper middle class blacks in the area. He found, however, significant poverty and few efforts to alleviate the plight of the poor. He began his work with a grassroots door-to-door campaign in the poor section of Durham (Wallace, 1967).

Howard Fuller worked with Operation Breakthrough as part of the community action program. He soon learned that Durham was divided into three areas. Area A was the Black Community known as Hayti area, Area B included low-income whites, and Area C was in the county. Fuller decided to hire college students and train them as organizers. Ruffin, a recent college graduate, was one of those individuals.

Operation Breakthrough organized neighborhood groups to demand neighborhood improvement. They demanded paved roads and trash collection, pushed property owners to repair their property, and organized clean up drives (Anonymous, personal communication, 2007). A community organizer stated, “We were cutting edge organizers at that point, and I actually though the objective of the war on poverty was to win” (Anonymous, personal communication, 2007).

Ruffin’s earlier work with Operation Breakthrough had him working side by side with the communities’ poor and the communities’ power elite. When Operation Breakthrough expanded their activities to other communities, neighborhood councils came together and developed the United Organization of Community Improvement (UOCI, Description and History, NC Fund).
Ruffin was hired as Executive Director of United Organization for Community Involvement. (UOCI, March, 21, 1968, NC Fund). Patrick Thomas was hired as Assistant Director. Ruffin and Thomas would then hire Ann Atwater as a community organizer (Wallace, 1967).

UOCI was established as a nonprofit organization representing twenty Durham neighborhood councils, and these councils represented approximately 700 members. Under Ruffin’s leadership, UOCI received grant funds to develop neighborhood programs.

The purpose of UOCI was to provide opportunities for citizens to exchange ideas for promoting the general welfare of all the citizens of North Carolina; to develop citizen leadership and promote participation in city, state, county and civic affairs in communities throughout North Carolina; and to develop citizen action to improve housing, employment, health, education, welfare, and other living and working conditions in communities throughout North Carolina. Membership in the organization included individuals and members of neighborhood councils (UOCI, Development and History, NC Fund).

When UOCI began in the summer of 1965, the principle behind UOCI was that no one knows the impact of poverty better than the poverty-stricken. The major emphasis of the work involved supporting neighborhood councils in Walltown, Hayestown, Crest Street, McDougal Terrace, Fayetteville Road and the Demar housing projects. The organization also managed community action committees.

UOCI established a number of programs to help poor people in Durham. The initiatives provided a wealth of resources and included a credit union, consumer buying club,
Friends of UOCI, a small business program, employment initiative, a welfare steering committee and a housing initiative. The credit union provided loans; a consumer buying club purchased consumer goods and resold items to UOCI members at much lower prices than retail. The Friends of UOCI, allowed individuals not qualified for membership to support UOCI, and were instrumental in setting up emergency funds and services. The small business program was planned for future expansion of services and the employment initiative supported job development. The welfare steering committee assisted welfare recipients in understanding and interpreting the rules and regulations of the welfare program and the housing initiative sought to ensure safe, decent and sanitary housing while assisting tenants in understanding and interpreting tenant rights and tenant-landlord relationships. The housing program also supported relocation for individuals displaced by urban renewal projects (UOCI, Development and History, NC Fund). The welfare committee reported to Ben Ruffin, the credit union reported to Patrick Thomas, and the neighborhood councils reported to Ann Atwater (Wallace, 1967).

The United Organization for Community Improvement received support and active participation from the community. The records indicate the first organizational meeting brought three hundred and fifty people to the table, and at the second meeting, five hundred people participated. UOCI became a strong voice for the neighborhoods (UOCI, Introduction, NC Fund).

The effectiveness of UOCI was measured by participant attitudes and involvement as well as policy and procedural changes regarding tenants’ rights, welfare programs, and
building maintenance. UOCI documented changes in tenants’ treatment, maintenance, and the tenacity and unity among the membership as evidence of success. Additionally, UOCI members began serving on the Board of Operation Breakthrough as well as the Low Income Housing Authority (UOCI, Introduction, NC Fund).

UOCI helped to empower numerous individuals to become self-advocates. The following is an example of UOCI’s work to promote self-advocacy as documented by the Southern Historical Association.

A mother of six and a welfare recipient who lived in the Edgemont community became chair of the UOCI Health and Welfare Committee. She wrote a letter to the local newspaper and said,

We are a group of welfare recipients who have gotten together to discuss our problems. Welfare recipients feel that for too long welfare agencies have had little regard for the persons they are to serve. We are welfare recipients who have seen ourselves shuttered around the bureaucracy of the welfare department with no real help. The welfare system does not enable us to get off welfare” (as cited in Wallace, 1967, p. 2).

The UOCI Health and Welfare Committee was able to voice its concerns publicly and work toward addressing particular concerns. The committee met with Howard Williams, Director of the Durham Community Welfare System, and caseworkers to learn about operational problems and to lodge specific complaints. The committee chair noted the
success of the group and stated, “something is starting to change, and we are all sorting it out together” (as cited in Wallace, 1967, p. 2).

Another observation by a Neighborhood Council member reinforced the importance of the community action work being done by UCOI. The member noted,

I see a lot of changes, housing, welfare, jobs, and more people getting together in the black neighborhoods like we have never had before. We stand up for our rights and go to the right people and make them listen to us (UOCI, December 20, 1967, NC Fund).

The success of UOCI could be demonstrated by the countless stories of individuals whose lives were changed by UOCI’s work.

Although the community action programs had much success, they were not without controversy and challenges. “Community organizations were viewed as a threat to the stability of the power structure in Durham,” according to Howard and Redburn (1968, p. 1). They noted that UOCI was subject to both internal and external controversy, and internal tension escalated as a black power ideology escalated.

Internal tension existed between Ruffin and Thomas, according to historical records. Howard and Redburn (1968) noted, “As the black power ideology grew, Pat was cut out of communication” (p. 42). They also reported that Ruffin evaluated his own role in the organization and said “he could feel the pulse of the membership and he would be no more or less militant than the organization, yet at the same time be creative in planning, strategies and programming” (Howard & Redburn, 1968, p. 47-48).
Howard and Redburn (1968) examined the relationship between Ruffin and Thomas and surmised “Ben needed Pat to do detail work. Pat had a steadying hand administratively. Thomas had more support than Ruffin; he was considered a better administrator and had a more stable personality (Howard & Redburn, 1968, p. 47-48).

External controversy surrounded Operation Breakthrough and UOCI as they often challenged the status quo. When Republican Jim Gardner ran for governor, his platform and campaign strategy was to challenge financial support to the community action organizations. According to historical records, in May, 1966, the Breakthrough Community Development staff transported representatives from the neighborhood councils to a Democratic precinct meeting. The appearance of poor blacks at a meeting attended by middle and upper level white citizens caused an immediate reaction (Anonymous, personal communication, 2007). Voter registration activity was also another point of controversy. UOCI members regularly attended meetings and sometimes packed biweekly sessions of the Durham City Council, particularly when lax enforcement of housing codes was being discussed (Wallace, 1967).

In July, 1967, a meeting to consider zoning property recently annexed by the city brought tension to the surface. It was believed that the zoning would add more people to an already high-density area located in the southern warden of the city (Wallace, 1967). The proposition brought strong black protests. UOCI members packed the July 18 meeting. Howard Fuller read the first statement, and Ben Ruffin read a second statement. Ruffin’s statement was interpreted as threatening violence if demands were not met, according to UOCI records (Wallace, 1967). Protest marches were held the following two nights. The first
night a window was broken, and the second night the mayor of Durham called in the National Guard (Wallace, 1967). As a result of the controversy, the Durham City Council established an ad hoc committee called the Calton committee, where representatives from the communities could meet and discuss their concerns with some of the city council members. A series of meetings were held to address concerns. The meeting schedule included discussions of relevant issues for the city of Durham: (July 21) Marketing, (July 26) Urban Renewal and Recreation, (July 28) Chamber of Commerce, (August 19) Public Housing, (September 29) Promotion of Police Officers and (October 10) Duke Power (Wallace, 1967).

A list of requests was made to the city of Durham and the city agreed to four of the ten requests (Wallace, 1967). The level of discourse and engagement of UOCI leaders was evidence of the power of the organization. The organization demanded to be heard and subsequently affected change on behalf of the community.

There is evidence that UOCI provided a voice for low-income people in Durham and acted to help mobilize communities to become self-advocates. As a result of that first year's evaluation, UOCI learned the organization had to move from a protest to a policymaking body (UOCI, Support for UOCI and Peoples Poverty Program, NC Fund).

The project was designed to uplift communities and examine the following issues and questions: (1) What effect do rural, urban, piedmont, and coastal plains community organizations have on influencing community development or alternative self-help strategies? (2) What is the relationship between organizations? (3) What variables optimize the multiplier effect of the spiral of participation? (4) What is the best vehicle for community
action? (5) What is the essential combination of variables to produce the spiral of participation regardless of the vehicle around which they are focused? (UOCI, Support for UOCI and Peoples Poverty Program, NC Fund).

It was believed by the North Carolina Fund, this project and others like it were actually experiments in ways to discover or discern the directions to lead the country and result in tested solutions to the problem of enabling the poor to help themselves (UOCI, Support for UOCI and Peoples Poverty Program, NC Fund). UOCI championed the replication of successful strategies to engage participants across neighborhoods. UOCI also connected people across communities and agencies enlarging the sphere of communication and engagement. The spiral of relationships appeared to be a strategic method to connect people at all levels, collaborating in ways to establish a wide circle of support and strong links within neighborhoods and agencies. Thus began the foundation of Ruffin’s leadership style and future work.

Surveillance

Ku Klux Klan activity exploded in North Carolina in the 1960s. By 1965, federal investigators called North Carolina the most active “Klan state” in the country (Davidson, 1996, p. 189). It was noted that there was an estimated 8,000-9,000 Klan members in the Tarheel State. “The presence of Klan was accompanied by the racist rhetoric of Jesse Helms. Jesse Helms filled the airways with vague but alarming allegations of conspiracy and demanded authorities investigate civil rights groups” (Davidson, 1996, p. 149).
Howard Fuller and Ben Ruffin became a powerful force in the fight for social justice in Durham. According to Ruffin’s siblings, the potential for danger and violence was never far away. Ruffin and Fuller made many friends and just as many enemies. Death threats, hang up calls and police surveillance were not unknown to the Ruffin family (Interview A).

A fellow civil rights activist reflected on the intimidation of civil rights protesters by the police and the Klan during this time. He acknowledged the reported existence of a bounty on Howard Fuller. He witnessed the presence of Klan members at some marches (Anonymous, personal communication, 2007). He said that during a march on Main Street in Durham to protest the assassination of Martin Luther King, police were stationed on rooftops with shotguns (Anonymous, personal communication, 2000). When asked if there were discussions between Howard Fuller, Ben Ruffin, and John Edwards regarding their safety, the individual noted, “they were aware, but probably thought they were invincible” (Anonymous, personal communication, 2007).

Howard Fuller was arrested three times and beaten on occasion during his time in Durham. There was no recollection of Ben Ruffin being arrested at a specific protest (Anonymous, personal communication, 2007).

It is believed by Ruffin’s siblings that the heavy police surveillance may have protected Ruffin on a number of occasions. Ruffin’s family remembers the watchful eye of the police in Durham. Although he was the subject of surveillance, Ruffin managed to avoid arrest during the civil rights movement. A sibling reflected on the police presence that came all too familiar to the Ruffin family in the middle of Ben Ruffin’s activism. She stated,
When we used to come out of the house on Canwood, there was a cop on this end of the street, and there was a cop on that end of the street. If you went to this end of the street, they were going to follow you. If you went to that end of the street they were going to follow you. They knew every morning what time we left the house. They followed me every morning. They followed us to Chapel Hill Boulevard, then they would turn around. When we moved up on Roosevelt, there was one car down at the bottom of the hill, and they would follow us. When we pulled out of the driveway they would pull out. Our family was surprised that we didn’t have a cross burning in front of our yard (Interview A).

Ruffin family members said they will never forget those experiences and that level of intimidation (Interview A). Ben Ruffin was also the subject of many newspaper articles, according to his siblings. A sibling stated, “They would write about him in the newspapers in a very dramatic fashion. They would get the facts all mixed up, and Ben would get mad” (Interview A). They remember Ruffin responding, “I could sue them for defamation of character” (Interview A).

Ruffin believed the attacks were based on the good work he was doing in the community. He stated in a television interview in 1979, “I never got good press. When you're fighting for social change and for justice and equality it matters not on what level you are fighting for it; people will always misunderstand you” (WTVD, Video Tape Collection, 1979).
The media were not the only parties to scrutinize Ruffin’s work in the community. A sibling remembers a prominent couple questioning their mother about Ruffin’s work in civil rights. The sibling shared what her mother conveyed to her,

Mother worked down in Hope Valley for some prominent people, and the wife could not understand why Ben was involved in civil rights work. She would say, “Catherine, what’s Ben trying to do, you need to talk with Ben.” Her husband would comment, “My hat is off to Ben, because I don’t like the way they are treating these people.” He was a doctor from the north, who treated the people working at the factory. He saw the difference, and he could understand Ben, but his wife was a southerner and did not understand (Interview A).

Integration

The protests in the streets of Durham forced many to acknowledge racial unrest. On April 6, 1968 in the aftermath of King’s assassination, violence erupted in Durham. Eleven buildings and cars were set on fire, and Durham became a city under siege (Davidson, 1998). “For a week, there was the presence of the National Guard, and a 7PM to 6AM curfew was enforced” (p. 225).

Two years later, a federal district court issued a desegregation plan for the city. Seventy-five million dollars in federal funds were allocated for use by school districts to help desegregation efforts, and Ann Atwater, UOCI and C.P. Ellis, head of the North Carolina Klan were selected to co-chair the committee to spearhead this effort (Davidson, 1996).
As time passed, the separate but equal principle was ushered out as integration was established. However, the hearts and minds of the people were slow to change. As policies and procedures were rewritten daily the practice of inclusion was slow. Firsthand accounts of these activities demonstrated how Durham grappled with this change. One of Ruffin’s sisters recalled,

As a nurse, I was working in public medicine. I was surprised when they sent the order up that we were going to integrate. The head nurse told us what we had to do, and she put all the blacks on one side and all the whites on one side. Later, administration told us to mix it up, and that is what we had to do (Interview A).

During this period, few issues escaped Ruffin’s awareness, according to family and friends. From personal stories shared at home with family to firsthand experiences with discrimination, Ruffin understood the problems in the community. Ruffin’s brother and sisters recalled, “Ben often talked about what was happening in the black community, and as he got older, he became determined to speak on behalf of the black community” (Interview A).

Another example of Ruffin’s zeal for social justice was demonstrated through his involvement with a new housing development in Durham. This project promised greater opportunities and improved living conditions for many of Durham’s black residents. When Ruffin learned the houses were not being built to code, he went to the building sites, according to his siblings. Ben had been informed the builders weren’t putting insulation and firewalls in the houses. He went back to the builder, the siblings recalled, and said, “I asked
for nice homes for my people and you’re going to just throw anything together, you’re going to come back in here and do these walls.” The builder fixed the problem (Interview A).

According to many interviewees, Ruffin’s concern for equity put him at the forefront for many issues confronting the people of Durham. There was no issue or project too big or too small to propel him into action. It appeared to some he tackled anything that disenfranchised or discriminated against another human being. When asked what was the greatest challenge confronting the grassroots work of Howard Fuller, Ruffin, and John Edwards, one civil rights worker replied, “the greatest challenge was twofold and connected: first convincing the people they didn’t have to take it, and they actually could make a difference, and the next challenge was actually making the difference” (Anonymous, personal communication, 2007).

Ben Ruffin met and married Avon Long during this period in his life. They went on to have two children together. Avon Ruffin stood witness to much of Ruffin’s civil rights activities. She supported her husband and witnessed his transformation from civil rights activist to political insider, corporate executive, and later to one of the top education leaders in the state of North Carolina.

PHASE IV Hunt Administration

“We have hard work to do, and loads to lift, sharing not the struggle for its God’s gift. Be strong” (Ben Ruffin comments, WTVD, Video Tape Collection, 1979)

Benjamin Ruffin served as Special Assistant to Governor James B. Hunt from 1977-1984, following a short appointment as Executive Director of the North Carolina Human
Relations Council. Ruffin’s prominent role during this time was captured in a 1979 interview on WTVD. The commentator stated,

While many role models across the country were found in the homes, in the legislative halls, and in important positions in state and local government, one of the most visible role models across the state of North Carolina in the sixties and seventies was found in the Governor’s office, and his name was Benjamin Ruffin (WTVD, Video Tape Collection, 1979).

Prior to his appointment with the Governor’s office, the commentator stated, Ruffin was known across the state as a community grassroots leader. From his early years in the civil rights movement, he led groups of people young and old in protests and marches for civil rights and equality. While working as Special Assistant to the Governor, Ruffin felt he was still a part of the Civil Rights movement (WTVD, Video Tape Collection, 1979).

When Ruffin was asked about his work in civil rights, during the 1979 interview he stated,

I think the civil rights movement is certainly alive and well. It's probably more alive today than it was a few years ago. It's alive and well because the seed was planted by Dr. King, by Malcolm, by others, and now we see the fruits springing up. You see it springing up in John Baker, sheriff; Joe McQueen of Wilmington; Jackie Goodson, sheriff; Henry Frye on the Supreme Court bench; Charles Becton and Cliff Johnson, appellate court bench; Karen Callaway as the first black female judge in Durham
County; you see it springing up in 15 black judges as opposed to 4 just two years ago (WTVD, Video Tape Collection, 1979).

The Hunt Administration made tremendous strides in including blacks in state government and in the political process. Ben Ruffin was instrumental in helping to achieve this goal. His words during the 1979 interview clearly demonstrated the progress he felt had been made and the work he had done to bring it to fruition. The state of North Carolina during the early days of the Civil Rights movement and in the early and mid-sixties had fifty black elected officials, and there were almost four hundred by the second year of Governor Hunt’s first term. Acknowledging the progress of the Hunt Administration, Ruffin noted in the 1979 interview, there was still more to do. He stated,

Some people get frustrated, get down, and give up, but I believe in hanging in there and pushing and pushing and pushing. Now we have a Supreme Court judge. It's really something to think about the progress we made in this state: Richard Ervin, a Federal Judge and a Supreme Court Judge; a black man on the Utilities Commission; chair of the Parole State Board in the state of North Carolina; another black Deputy Secretary; associate and assistant secretaries in every department in state government; and the list goes on and on. And not just in these high classes but in the middle-income, secretary level throughout the state government. We have more blacks working in state government, I bet you, cumulatively than we ever had before, quite a record, quite a tribute. Not a tribute to me but a tribute to the grassroots, to the people out there in the community who stuck with it when they were working in the parties,
working on the politics and not getting anything but still were going to stick with it. (WTVD, Video Tape Collection, 1979).

Ben Ruffin accepted the challenge to work within the halls of state government. As Special Assistant, he was the primary conduit between the Governor’s office and the minority population, assisted in the facilitation of the State’s Affirmative Action Programs, supported Boards and Commissions activity, and studied and made recommendations on a number of issues related to state government (WTVD, Video Tape Collection, 1979).

Not everyone embraced Ruffin with open arms. He stated, “There are people who misunderstood me, didn’t work with me when I was out protesting. Now in this position some of those same people, in addition more people, don't appreciate it, don't understand what I do” (WTVD, Video Tape Collection, 1979).

Ruffin said, that did not dissuade him from continuing the fight to help citizens in North Carolina. He was very comfortable with the progress being made in the late seventies. When he reflected on the work being done and his role, he said,

You have to do what's right in your heart, what’s right in your soul. I go to bed every night, and I sleep real good, I know that every day Ben Ruffin goes to bed he fought the good fight, he fought the good fight for blacks in the state of North Carolina, he fought the good fight for the state to make the state decent and fair, the kind of state it ought to be. So I live with my self, and I take an inventory of myself and what I’m doing, I go to sleep, and I sleep well (WTVD, Video Tape Collection, 1979).
Governor Jim Hunt commented on the work of his Special Assistant during the 1979 interview. He said,

I think he's made a tremendous difference, obviously, for blacks and minorities. I think Ben has been responsible for seeing minority citizens have an impact in their government at the state level in a way that they never had before. Ben constantly is there, not in an antagonistic way but in a firm, strong, and concerned way, saying have you considered this, have you looked at it this way? I'll bet he goes longer, drives more miles, makes more speeches, takes more telephone calls, listens to more people than any one else in state government. And I don't think there’s anyone more valuable to me than Ben (WTVD, Video Tape Collection, 1979).

Ruffin’s desire to give voice to the often unheard was what initially brought him to the attention of Jim Hunt. Governor Bob Scott had appointed Hunt to chair a commission of the Democratic Party in 1969-70. The goal was to broaden the base of the party (Interview G). Jim Hunt heard Ruffin speak about the “democratic process and giving all a full voice in it, and opportunities for leadership in it” (Interview G).

Hunt had seen in Ben Ruffin “an individual who recognized the unfairness we had in society.” He saw in Ruffin “a strong and powerful consciousness for fairness, and equal and full opportunity” (Interview G).

It was reported by an elected official that Ruffin ran for City Council in Durham many years ago (Interview Q). However, Ruffin initially described himself as content to do the good work from behind the scenes. Ruffin said,
I do not really have political aspirations; I enjoy working with other candidates. I think some of us really have to hang loose to help support and move other candidates along. Sure I'd like to see us have black congressmen one day in the state. We deserve it; the state deserves it. I'm really proud of the work I've done with minority elected officials to see us move from when we came in this administration there were fourteen black county commissioners. Now we have thirty-five. Fourteen to thirty-five; that is not bad (WTVD, Video Tape Collection, 1979).

Moving inside, perceptions from the field

Ruffin was very active with the Civil Rights movement when he was appointed to the Hunt Administration. He was characterized by Durham residents as being the outside person who challenges the inside (Interview A). He soon became an insider. And according to one of Ruffin’s siblings, “some people in the minority community thought Ben was a traitor when he took the position in Governor Hunt’s administration; they did not understand his purpose at this time.” She recalled a conversation she had with Ruffin when he said, “I am doing a lot of things out here in the community and I’m touching the community, but we need to move a step up higher in order to get these things done” (Interview A).

Many people believed working for the governor expanded Ruffin’s horizon, because he saw poverty and hardship beyond Durham and the surrounding communities. One of Ruffin’s sisters stated,

When Ruffin started working with the Governor, that gave him a chance to go around to all the counties in North Carolina to see how people where living. These counties
were poor with little help. He solicited help from the Governor. He got people involved. He was instrumental in changing lives (Interview A).

As Ruffin traveled across North Carolina his family warned him of the dangers of being on back roads alone at night. A sibling recalled a conversation she had with Ruffin about his travels. She said, “Ben, you need to stop and get a driver. These people still don’t want to be integrated, and you’re going to these back counties, where the Klan might be on that road late at night. You need somebody with you.” He would say, “I’ll be all right” (Interview A). She then told a story of how one night Ruffin was stopped by the police in a small southern town in North Carolina,

One night he was coming through a small town. A cop pulled him over and said “boy let me see your license; you better be glad you stopped.” Ben said, “what did I do officer.” The officer said “Don’t smart talk me, let me see your license.” Ben said he went down in his billfold and realized he had left his wallet at home so he was thinking, “Lord what can I do?” He used to tell this story, when he went through his billfold again he saw his NAACP card. He pulled it out, and the man took it. He said when he pulled out that NAACP card, the officer stood there a long time. Ben said, “Lord please take this.” Ben was not thinking this man could not read. He said the cop handed it back and said, “Boy you better be glad you had your license with you. Get on up that road.” The cop couldn’t read (Interview A).

Ruffin experienced many things during this period, and each experience motivated him to continue the fight for justice. When Ruffin left the halls of state government after
seven years, he said he walked away believing that he fought the good fight. He said, “When you're fighting for social change and for justice and equality it matters not on what level you are fighting for it” (WTVD, Video Tape Collection, 1979).

Ruffin moved from the political arena to corporate sector when he accepted a position with the RJR corporate family. He was appointed Director of Community Affairs at RJR Nabisco and Vice President for Corporate Affairs at R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Corporation. An education leader articulated how he saw Ruffin’s transition and rise to prominence in this new environment. He noted, “Ben soon became an example of people doing well against the odds in corporate America. Ben rose to the senior level position of Vice President. Ben took that same passion and commitment he had in state government to R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company and his role as Vice President” (Interview B). The education leader shared notable examples of Ruffin’s vision and success. He stated,

Ben pushed for the corporation to increase business with minority contractors. A large number of smokers in America using tobacco products were black or representatives of minority groups, Ben used this knowledge to build on some of the earlier work of Marshall Bass. Marshall Bass served as Director, Community Affairs at R.J. Reynolds prior to Ruffin’s appointment.

When asked to identify the impact Ruffin’s work, the education leader stated,

Ben’s work in Community Relations was evident. There was a significant growth in the number of minority employees. R.J. Reynolds contracted work with minority businesses, and the company saw a significant investment. Ben helped the company
to create support of urban initiatives that included the Urban League and NAACP. R.J. Reynolds is a major sponsor of their events annually, and you saw evidence of that. Ruffin’s work increased minority representation in positions of responsibility at R.J. Reynolds (Interview B).

Ruffin moved from a full-time position with R.J. Reynolds to an advisory relationship in 1999. With mixed emotions, he relinquished his position to focus more time and attention to the UNC Board of Governors. In a press release, Ruffin stated, “After careful consideration and discussion with my family I have decided that the time has come to move on to the next phase of my life” (Ben Ruffin Moves to Advisory Relationship, R.J. Reynolds Press Release, 1999). Andrew J. Schindler, president and chief executive officer R.J. Reynolds in 1999, said,

Ruffin has played an integral role within RJR and has been an invaluable part of our team, and we are extremely pleased that Ruffin has agreed to remain an advisor to the company as he embarks on the next phase of his life. For many years to come RJR will benefit from the work Ruffin has done and the strong, productive relationships established (Ben Ruffin Moves to Advisory Relationship, R.J Reynolds Press Release, 1999).

Ruffin acknowledged his enthusiasm to devote more time to his work in education and noted,

In 1998, I was elected Chairman of the Board of Governors of the University of North Carolina system; this is an awesome responsibility. I have been fortunate to have the
full support of R.J. Reynolds in carrying out this task. I am pleased to maintain an advisory relationship with the company in the future. This arrangement will allow me to remain involved with a company I love while focusing more on my role with the UNC Board of Governors and a number of civic and community organizations (Ben Ruffin Moves to Advisory Relationship, R.J. Reynolds Press Release, 1999).

Ruffin remained on the Advisory Board for R.J. Reynolds Company until his death in December, 2006.

R.J. Reynolds, like many tobacco companies, did not escape criticism or close scrutiny from those critical of tobacco use in the black community. Yerger and Malone (2002) contend, “The tobacco industry established relationships with black leadership to increase black tobacco use, defend industry policies and practices, and defuse tobacco control efforts” (p. 17).

Black leaders refuted this sentiment and noted the financial support received from the tobacco industry in support of the African American community (Yerger & Malone, 2002). For example, Brown and Williamson Tobacco established a “fair share agreement” with the NAACP in 1983. These efforts promised major economic opportunities for blacks and minorities. It was announced at the NAACP annual convention, “these efforts are projected to have a result of $26 million in purchases from minority vendors in the first fiscal year, with approximately $4.75 million to minority advertising and marketing services companies, and approximately 21% of the corporate contributions budget (Yerger & Malone, 2002, p 3).
The Shaping of a System: UNC Board of Governors

The Board of Trustees of the University of North Carolina was designated effective July 1, 1972, as the Board of Governors. The UNC Board of Governors was established to foster development of a well-planned and coordinated system of higher education, to improve the quality of education, to extend its benefits, and to encourage an economic use of the states resources (Scott, Robert, Committee Substitute for Senate Bill 893, House Bill 1456).

Governor Robert Scott led the battle to reorganize the system of higher education in the State of North Carolina in 1971. He reflected on the state of higher education in North Carolina in 1970 and believed that change was necessary to move the state forward. A review of his personal records reveals his concerns about the higher education system and the subsequent sequence of events that led to the reorganization of the system. He stated:

North Carolina has accomplished much in higher education, and credit is due many; however, now is not the moment to reflect on past achievement but rather to focus on an old problem already serious in moving into an acute stage. The problem, of course, is how to allocate functions to ensure the wise use of our limited resources. At the heart of the problem are problems or programs at the graduate level (Scott, Robert, Remarks by Governor).

Governor Scott acknowledged in his writing that Governor O. Max Gardner had been aware of the problem. In a special message to the General Assembly on February 13, 1931 about the first consolidation, Governor Gardner had stated,
Try to visualize what the situation will be unless this tendency is controlled; 10, 20, 40 years from now we shall have no less than four state-supported universities, each trying to carry forward a fast overlapping program and because the state cannot adequately support all, all quality of service rendered by all must of necessity be mediocre. Important decisions need to be made soon concerning the management of the business of higher education. The time has come for the General Assembly to entrust an agency of the state with authority to allocate the resources authorized by it without such authority. Experience demonstrates that no agency can plan, promote, and develop a sound, vigorous, progressive system of higher education in North Carolina, any restructuring higher education unless under great delegation, will be one form and not of substance (Gardner as cited in Scott, Robert, Remarks by Governor).

The following chronology documents some key elements and actions that led to the University of North Carolina System’s transformation from the Consolidated University representing six institutions and ten independent campuses to the University of North Carolina Board of Governors representing all sixteen universities.

Public discourse on the issue of governance in higher education began in 1970. William Friday stated on his television show, “We the People,”

Many people have been grappling with the problem, including the State Board of Higher Education. We don’t have a real answer yet. But I am inclined to believe that we face a structural reorganization of North Carolina’s entire system of higher
education – that we can’t avoid it if the State wants to continue an orderly, economical, and logical growth in higher education (Scott, Robert, Excerpts of Interview with President Friday, 1970).

On October 10, 1970, the State Planning to Enlarge Educational Opportunity in North Carolina report was released examining policies concerning open access and efforts to improve educational opportunities in North Carolina without regard to race. The report discussed the Civil Rights Act and a letter from Health Education and Welfare, Office of Civil Rights, regarding compliance with the Act. The report cited The Governors Commission on Education Beyond High School and reinforced the state philosophy to make post high school education opportunities available to all (Scott, Robert. State Planning to Enlarge Educational Opportunity in North Carolina, Confidential Draft).

In mid-December of 1970, trustees of public senior institutions met in North Carolina with Governor Scott to discuss methods of improving the structure of governance in higher education. The governor also met with the Executive Committee of the Board of Higher Education and recommended that the Board set as its first priority a study of the governance of higher education. The executive committee pledged its unanimous support of the governor's efforts and expressed their commitment to participate fully with trustees of all other state-supported institutions in the Board of Higher Education. The committee thought the resolution of these issues would result in the development of the best system and structure of state-supported higher education for North Carolina.
In January, 1971, the president, chairmen, and chancellors of the senior public institutions met as an advisory committee and discussed the restructuring of higher education. The Boards of Trustees of five regional universities had responded to the Governor's request for institutional recommendations on restructuring higher education, favoring retention of local boards of trustees and a strengthened coordinating agency with increased budgetary support.

The governor announced the appointment of a twenty-three member advisory committee to study the structure of higher education in the state and to make recommendations for its improvement to the General Assembly. The committee was comprised of one member from each of the Boards of Trustees of nine public universities, and the North Carolina School of Arts; seven members from the Board of Trustees of the University of North Carolina; and five members from the Board of Higher Education.

While addressing the newly formed committee the governor stated, “This effort is to halt what must be called the in-fighting, the maneuvering, the overlapping, the duplication that is all too prevalent in higher education in our state today” (Scott, Robert, Remarks by Governor). He further explained that the Board of Higher Education only had limited success because of its limited authority to bring about some semblance of coordination. He indicated,

   It is like one referee in a ring with 16 fighters all going at the same time. My request that the Governor be made Chairman of the Board of Higher Education allowed me to see what a mess we are in. It took two years to see the picture. Two years of listening to arguments, two years of listening to quarreling, two years of refereeing
personalities, two years of watching institutions apply for more and more programs without dropping any that were outmoded and unresponsive. And I am tired of it. Let us respond to the challenge that lay before us with a determination that the total program of higher education in North Carolina will be enhanced (Scott, Robert, Remarks by Governor).

The Development of the Board of Governors

Governor Scott set in motion the idea that North Carolina higher education was in dire need of change. After months of battles, challenges, and several proposed new structures, the North Carolina General Assembly established the University of North Carolina Board of Governors as the official governing body for the sixteen-campus system, effective, July, 1972.

“The UNC Board of Governors was established as the policy-making body legally charged with the general determination, control, supervision, management, and governance of all affairs of the constituent institutions” (UNC Board of Governors, Chapel Hill, North Carolina). Solow (1999) identified a unique feature of the Board’s governance structure in that “each of the sixteen individual campuses was allowed to retain a local board of trustees” (p. 1). The UNC Board of Governors was designated to elect a president to administer the University system. “As they still are today, the thirty-two voting members of the Board of Governors were elected by the General Assembly for four-year terms. There were also special members, non-voting members with varying terms, who would include former chairs of the board, former governors, and the president of the UNC Association of Student
Governments, or that student's designee” (UNC Board of Governors, Chapel Hill, North Carolina). Since its creation, “the state’s dual board system has been held up as a model for education governance” (Solow, 1999, p. 4).

The Board of Governors as a consolidated system of governance promised a more equitable distribution of state resources. The Board of Governors allowed all budget requests to be combined into a single system wide budget presentation. Previously, the Consolidated University of North Carolina, composed of UNC at Chapel Hill, North Carolina State University, UNC Greensboro, UNC Wilmington, and UNC Asheville, made a joint budget presentation through the President to the Governor and Advisory Budget Committee (who formulates the recommended State budget) and the General Assembly (though each of these campuses were treated as a distinct entity for budgeting purposes). Each of the other independent institutions, Appalachian State University, East Carolina University, Elizabeth City State University, Fayetteville State University, North Carolina Agriculture and Technical University, North Carolina Central University, North Carolina School of the Arts, Pembroke State University, Western Carolina University and Winston Salem State University previously made direct and independent presentations to the Governor, the Advisory Budget Commission, and the General Assembly. The new structure created a more equitable distribution of state resources.

The development of the Board of Governors and the emerging system of governance in North Carolina shaped postsecondary educational experiences for thousands of North

Diversity within the Board of Governors

Ben Ruffin was appointed to the Board of Governors in 1991. The participation of blacks on the UNC Board of Governors in 1991 was significant given the history of black involvement in education, both nationally and in the state of North Carolina.

After Reconstruction, blacks enjoyed a “sort of racial truce exemplified by tolerated integration” (Bradley & Fishkin, 1998, p. 12). However, “Jim Crow policies were cemented by passage of numerous segregation laws near the turn of the century,” according to Bradley and Fishkin (1998, p. 13).

By 1900, only a few southern states had enacted laws expressly requiring segregation in railroad cars. Most laws were enacted between 1898 and 1900. Between 1873 and 1898 the Supreme Court issued a series of rulings that guttered the privileges and immunities guaranteed by the constitution (Bradley & Fishkin, 1998, p. 13).

By 1907, “North Carolina and several other states had adopted laws requiring segregation in street cars” (Bradley & Fishkin, 1998, p. 13). A succession of laws followed, and by 1910, “all southern states had adopted laws separating whites and blacks in areas of public contact” (Bradley & Fishkin, 1998, p. 13). On a national level, Plessy v. Ferguson granted states a constitutional justification for segregation. Education and public accommodations fell under this domain. This ruling allowed states to create separate facilities for minorities as long as they were equal (Bradley & Fishkin, 1998).
Historically, the segregated public school system created a dual and unequal system of education. The North Carolina Constitution declared that the people have a right to education, and it is the duty of the State to guard and maintain that right (North Carolina State Constitution). However, the separate but equal doctrine provided unequal educational opportunities for the citizens of North Carolina.

On May 17, 1954, the Supreme Court struck down the separate but equal doctrine and barred segregation. Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka challenged the separate but equal doctrine and destroyed legal barriers to segregated education. The Supreme Court ruled that segregated schools were unconstitutional and as a result transformed the educational system in America. The landmark case was a class action suit representing plaintiffs from Kansas, South Carolina, Virginia, and Delaware. The plaintiffs, black elementary and high school students, alleged that segregation in public schools violated their Fourteenth Amendment rights and they thus sought admission to the public schools of their choice in their respective states of residence. The court ruled in favor of the plaintiffs, outlawing segregation in public schools. Chief Justice Earl Warren rendered the opinion. In part, the opinion said,

Today, education is perhaps the most important function of state and local government. Compulsory school attendance laws and great expenditures for education both demonstrate our recognition of the importance of education to our democratic society. In these days, it is doubtful that any child may reasonably succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education. Such an opportunity,
where the states have undertaken to provide it, it is a right, which must be made available to all. We come to the question presented, Does segregation of children in public schools solely on the basis of race, even when the physical facilities and other tangible factors may be equal, deprive the children of the minority group equal educational opportunity? We believe it does (Brown v. Board of Education, 1954).

The court decision called for “all deliberate speed” in the desegregation process and not immediate action. The Governors Commission on Education Beyond the High School reported in 1962 that in pursuit of its duty the state must make appropriate post high school educational opportunities available to all of its citizens who have the ability and the ambition to benefit from them (Scott, Robert, The Report of the Governors Commission on Education Beyond the High School, 1964).

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Public Law 88-352) provides in Title VI, Section 601, that “No person in the United States shall on the ground of race, color, or national origin, be excluded from participation in, denied the benefit of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance”(Civil Rights Act, 1964).

A public opinion poll in 1970 showed that “Americans overwhelming favored integration but were opposed to busing” (Bradley & Fishkin, 1998, p. 144). In North Carolina, the Supreme Court ordered the busing of students after the Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg case in 1971. Shortly thereafter, President Nixon signed education legislation amended by Republican Representative William Bloomfield of Michigan to prohibit future court-ordered busing until all appeals or the time of appeals had elapsed. Representative John
Ashbrook of Ohio amended legislation to outlaw federal spending for busing, and “Nixon signed a bill preventing the federal legal service office from using public or private funds to litigate school desegregation cases” (Bradley & Fishkin, 1998, p. 145).

With All Deliberate Speed

Unfortunately, the state of North Carolina did not move aggressively to make educational opportunities available to all its citizens in accordance with its constitution, Brown v. Board of Education, the Governors Commission, or the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The Department of Health, Education, and Welfare Office of Civil Rights propelled North Carolina to respond. The Civil Rights office sent a letter on February 16, 1970, to Governor Scott and Dallas Herring, President of the N.C. Community College System, regarding compliance with the Civil Rights Act. The correspondence indicated the office found that, after several visits to North Carolina and a review of several compliance reports, North Carolina was operating a system of higher education in which certain institutions were clearly identifiable as serving students on the basis of race and manifesting the State’s racially dual system of higher education (Scott, Robert, State Planning to Enlarge Educational Opportunity, Confidential Report, 1970, p. 2). The correspondence noted,

To fulfill the purposes and intent of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, it is not sufficient that an institution maintain a nondiscriminatory admissions policy if the student population continues to reflect the formerly de jure racial identification of that institution. Institutions must discharge their affirmative duty by adopting measures that will result in desegregation as soon as administratively possible. Accordingly, I
am directing you the request that a desegregation plan for the public institutions of higher education in North Carolina, which are under state control, be submitted for comment to this office in outline form in 120 days from receipt of this letter, and that a final desegregation plan be submitted for our approval no later than 90 days after you have received comment on the outline of the plan (Scott, Robert, State Planning to Enlarge Educational Opportunity, Confidential Report, 1970, p. 2).

A Move to Action

North Carolina responded by developing a plan to insure that the public system of higher education in North Carolina was operated in compliance with the requirements of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and that all citizens of the state were afforded real equality of opportunity for access to, participation in, and derivation of benefits from the public systems of post secondary education. Beyond this North Carolina State Plan that espoused inclusive practice, North Carolina established policies and procedures to ensure minority representation in university governance. The General Assembly also allocated additional resources to strengthen Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU’s) who had previously been underfunded.

The Reorganization Act of 1971 mandated inclusive practice in the identification and selection of Board members (Solow, 1999). The Act required for the first time that there be minority racial representation on a governing board for higher education. Formerly, the Boards of Trustees of the University of North Carolina and the other ten institutions were not required to have minority representation. In 1971, there were no blacks in the North Carolina
Senate. Henry Frye was one of only two blacks in the House of Representatives. Frye spoke out in favor of more diversity on the Board of Governors. He stated, “if you build in a requirement, you’d also be building in a limitation; I would have rather left the language out but knowing the history, it is necessary” (Frye as cited in Solow, 1999, p. 35).

The composition of the Board of Governors beginning July 1, 1973, consisted of thirty-two members: twenty-four persons selected by the Senate and the House of Representatives and eight persons appointed by the Governor. The legislation stipulated that at least three of the twenty-four persons elected by the General Assembly shall be women, at least three shall be members of a minority race and at least two shall be members of the minority party in the General Assembly. At least one of the eight persons appointed by the governor shall be a woman and at least one shall be a member of a minority race (Scott, Robert, Committee Substitute for Senate Bill 893, House Bill 1456). Solow (1999) noted that in 1971, Republications were the minority party in the General Assembly representing 18% of 170 legislators (p. 38).

None of the predominately white institutions had a non-white member on the Board of Trustees after it became a senior institution. “Once the reorganization occurred, each institution had at least one minority on its Board of Trustees. The predominately black institutions had predominately black Boards of Trustees, although each board included five, six, or seven white members out of thirteen” (Scott, Robert, Revised North Carolina State Plan for Further Elimination of Racial Duality, 1974, p. 43).
The North Carolina State Plan (1974) acknowledged that the racial composition of governing boards and staffs influences the decision of students and prospective students to enter the public institutions. The State Plan proposed that constructive changes in the diversity of staff and governing boards could contribute significantly to realizing two principal objectives articulated in the State Plan. “Increasing the representation of minorities on governing boards and staff would affect students’ choices of institutions in a favorable manner, thus furthering the racial integration of student populations within the public systems of post-secondary education” (Scott, Robert, State Planning to Enlarge Educational Opportunity, 1974, p. 129).

It was noted in the plan that one assumption with respect to the operation of a dual system of higher education formally required by law is that the institutions maintained for blacks were treated less well in the allocation of resources by the State than those institutions maintained for whites. The November 10, 1973, letter from the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare addressed these issues to assure that “resources provided by the State to predominately black institutions were comparable to white institutions in size, level and specifications” (Scott, Robert, State Planning to Enlarge Educational Opportunity, 1974, p. 200).

The North Carolina General Assembly had responded to the needs of the black institutions as articulated by the State Board of Higher Education. The General Assembly had allocated one million dollars in 1967 and one million three hundred thousand in 1969. These dollars were designed to make up for some of the deficiencies in funding allocations from
previous allocations. The catch-up funds were in addition to regular appropriations. HBCUs also received money from library appropriations (Scott, Robert, State Planning to Enlarge Educational Opportunity, 1974).

The history of higher education in North Carolina illustrates a history of inequity and marginalization for blacks in the early years. The reorganization of the higher education system and consolidation of the sixteen campuses under one governing structure in 1971 provided the vehicle for necessary change within the system. The North Carolina Constitution declared that the people have a right to the privileges of education, and it is the duty of the State to guard and maintain that right (North Carolina State Constitution). The current governing structure is affording that opportunity.

**PHASE V  UNC Board of Governors**

“People may not get all they work for in this world, but they most certainly work for all they get” (Frederick Douglass as cited in Ben Ruffin Memorial Service Program, “Ben’s Favorite Quotes Used for His Speeches,” December 11, 2006).

The development of the University of North Carolina system transformed higher education in the state of North Carolina. Ben Ruffin was appointed to the UNC Board of Governors in 1991. The period from the development of the Board of Governors in 1972 to Ruffin’s appointment in 1991 was one of monumental change. Continuous and flexible planning continued to be a major activity of the Board of Governors. The board adopted the first long range plan in 1976, and extensive and significant revision of that plan was adopted in 1992.
The increasing demand for limited resources, changing demographics, and a rising and shifting local and global economy forced education leaders in North Carolina to examine priorities. The education context in the 1990s demanded visionary leadership to provide educational opportunities for all the citizens of the State of North Carolina.

Ruffin’s role as a member of the UNC Board of Governors began at a time when the rate of North Carolina’s “population growth exceeded the national average, with projected escalating numbers throughout the decade” (UNC Board of Governors, Long Range Plan 1992-1997, p. 6).

The percentage of blacks in North Carolina was 22% vs. 12% nationally. “The Hispanic population was not recognized as a separate racial group in census data and therefore there were no official projections for the Hispanic population at that time” (UNC Board of Governors, Long Range Plan 1992-1997, p. 6). Furthermore, it was noted that the “rapid growth in population in the 1980s was accompanied by rapid growth in employment and income” (UNC Board of Governors, 1992-1997 Long Range Plan, p. 6).

The 1992-1997 Long Range Plan included eight interrelated strategic directions to pursue in fulfillment of the mission. The first strategic direction was to provide opportunities for all North Carolinians to participate in higher education, consistent with their abilities and needs (UNC Board of Governors, 1992-1997 Long Range Plan).

The 1994-1999 Long Range Plan identified critical elements to consider in developing strategies to provide educational opportunities to North Carolinians. “The population of 6.6 million in the 1990s was projected to reach 7.5 million in 2000” (UNC
Board of Governors 1992-1997 Long Range Plan, p. 20). The population growth was projected to be concentrated in the coastal and metropolitan area of the Piedmont. The 18 to 24 year old population was declining, and the population over 25 years of age was increasing. The pool of high school graduates was declining. “The increasing demographic diversity meant more minorities, women, and immigrants would enter the workforce, economic growth was narrowing, and the labor market was undergoing a major reconstruction due to globalization” (UNC Board of Governors 1992-1997 Long Range Plan, p. 20).

Ruffin began his tenure on the Board of Governors facing the challenges of the time, the greatest of which appeared to be issues of access and equity. The Board of Governors had to confront how the state would meet the growing demand for higher education with limited resources and competing interests.

Ruffin approached his new role as a member of the Board of Governors with the same conviction evident in his early work, according to one observer (Interview M). It was noted by his siblings that his earlier work with Governor Hunt allowed him to travel throughout North Carolina and listen to the concerns of the people across the state. This foundation is believed by some education leaders to have helped him understand the broader landscape of North Carolina when he entered into higher education. An observer noted when Ruffin was elected to the Board of Governors it was at a time when,

There was heavy representation of business and political leaders from one of the larger predominately white institutions, particularly Chapel Hill and so representation
on the board at that time had very few if any black advocates for the HBCU’s. People pushed for abundant support for select campuses and you saw that fragmentation on the board around advocacy for certain campuses. When Ben arrived on the board, Ben had what I would characterize as no fear of speaking his mind and sharing his perspective about matters of fairness in decision-making and resource allocation (Interview B).

Ruffin served as secretary, completed a two-year term on the Board’s Committee on Business and Finance, and served on numerous ad hoc committees (UNC Board of Governors, Press Release, July, 14, 2000).

On August 7, 1996, C.C. Cameron was elected chair, and Ruffin was elected vice chair. During this term, the Board of Governors adopted a two-year planning cycle intended to allow the Board more opportunities for strategic planning. The Board also established a new self-assessment plan (“Study looks at how tenured faculty are reviewed,” University Gazette, 1996). Under the leadership of C.D. Spangler, the UNC System also began the year examining faculty tenure performance. According to records, “a comprehensive examination of financial aid programs was done to help ensure that the cost of higher education did not bar qualified, motivated students from attending UNC system schools (“Study looks at how tenured faculty are received,” University Gazette, 1996, p. 2).

Ruffin served as vice chair for two terms and decided to run for chairman in 1998. He ran for election in what was reported as a well run and close race. He ran against C.C. Cameron, former First Union Corporation chairman and former state budget officer
Cameron was a popular and well-liked incumbent. Many interviewees spoke highly of Mr. Cameron and his work on the Board of Governors (Interview B, M, Q).

On July 10, 1998, “Chairman Cameron called for the election of officers pursuant to Section 201 (A) of the Code, which stipulates that the election of officers of the board be held after July 1 in each even numbered year, each for a two year term” (UNC, Board of Governors Minutes, July 10, 1998, p. 9).

“Governor James Holshouser nominated Cameron as Chair and Coward seconded the nomination. Broadwell nominated Ruffin for chairman and Collins seconded the motion. Chancellors Bardo, Burim and Sullivan were selected as tellers to count the votes and Robinson served as parliamentarian” (UNC, Board of Governors Minutes, July 10, 1998, p. 9).

The vote was held by written ballot. An observer noted the room was quiet as people cast their votes, “you could cut the tension with a knife” (Interview R). One board member rose from his seat and walked over to another board member. The member, Larine G. Horton, is said to have passed a note to Governor Holshouser (Interview R). There is much speculation as to what was in the note. The votes were counted. Ben Ruffin was elected chair by a vote of 16 to 15. Chairman Cameron continued the election process for vice chair and secretary and relinquished the chair to Ben Ruffin. Ruffin then made the following remarks,

This Board of Governors is one of the best BOG’s I have ever witnessed. And it has been a pleasure of mine to work with each and every one of you. The beautiful thing
about that, we don’t always have to agree, but we respect each other. And on many Boards you don’t have that theme {respect} running through it. We know that when we disagree, we are disagreeing for the betterment of the state and betterment of the students, and betterment for the institution. So I want to thank you for your trust, I want to thank you for the confidence that you have bestowed on me this morning. And I pledge I shall never let you down. I look forward to working with each and every one of you, collectively and individually (UNC, Board of Governors Minutes, July 10, 1998, p. 11).

Ruffin then thanked many people for their support and acknowledged the work ahead. He spoke of his experience as a student at North Carolina Central and how they welcomed him with $100 in his pocket. He said he didn’t have money for books, indicating, “I thought they were free, and somehow they nurtured me, and made the best of what they had” (UNC, Board of Governors Minutes, July 10, 1998, p. 11). He went on to say,

When a system like this takes a young person from 720 Carroll Street, Durham, North Carolina, whose mother was a domestic worker and father was an alcoholic, and gives that person a chance to become a vice president of a corporation, and gives that person a chance to serve the State of North Carolina, it is the greatest calling anyone could have. So I accept this challenge as a calling, not as an assignment. But I accept it as a calling to serve because this state has been good to me (UNC, Board of Governors Minutes, July 10, 1998, p. 11).
The election of Ben Ruffin as the first black chair of the Board of Governors was a history-making event. People across the state watched the contest unfold. There were many people behind the scenes who promoted their choice for Board chairman. One observer indicated, “Many calls were made to count votes prior to the day of the election” (Anonymous, personal communication, 2005). The researcher, in an earlier discussion with Ben Ruffin, confirmed the importance of “counting the votes” as he discussed his election as chair (B. Ruffin, personal communication, 2000).

News outlets highlighted the election across the country. The Durham Herald Sun newspaper editorialized that “Ruffin's rise to chairman of the powerful board is a testament to what one individual can accomplish with hard work.” A national magazine reported,

By a single vote, tobacco executive Ben Ruffin was elected the first Black chairman of the board of the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill. In a historic shakeup, Ruffin, the vice president of R. J. Reynolds Tobacco company in Winston-Salem, NC, eked out the narrow margin to defeat sitting chairman Cliff Cameron (Jet, August 10, 1998).

A fellow member of the board of governors sharing his perspective on the race and election, stated,

When Ben decided to run for chairman of the Board of Governors, he sought the support of those who knew him well and those who were new to the Board of Governors. Those who knew Ben personally understood his convictions. Many
people knew Ben by reputation, if not personally. Those who knew Ben by reputation quickly got to know him (Interview C).

When Ruffin decided to run for chairman, it was evident that he sought the counsel and support of a number of people both within and outside of the Board. One board member stated,

Ben approached us and said that he would like to be chairman and asked to see if he could get our support, I told him I would take a while and decide whether I could do to that. I wanted to get to know him, because I knew him by reputation. It didn't take me long to understand that it didn't take long to make a commitment, and I made a commitment to Ruffin when he ran for chairman and believe that I played a role with many other people, a very pivotal role in helping him get the votes that he needed, and my life is much better for having become his friend (Interview D).

The election of Ben Ruffin as the first black chair of the Board of Governors was an important victory for the black community as well as the state of North Carolina. The presence of a person of color serving at the highest level of leadership in higher education sent a strong message of inclusion to members of the community. The Revised North Carolina State Plan for the Further Elimination of Racial Duality in the Public Postsecondary Education System (1974) underscored Ben Ruffin’s election as chair of the Board of Governors as a clear and significant message of inclusion. The State Plan affirmed that the “composition of staff and governing boards can influence the decision of students and prospective students to enter both the public postsecondary education systems and
constituent institutions” (Scott, Robert, State Planning to Enlarge Educational Opportunity, 1974, p. 128). The perception of what this meant to the Board of Governors and the citizens was discussed by fellow board members and elected officials in the state of North Carolina. One board member said,

The election of the Board chair had undertones of both race and class. I guess you would have to say that race played a role in both getting votes and losing votes. However, it was not a top line issue; it was not on the surface. It was as much between the competition, between those that have a lot and those who grew up not having a lot. That is kind of what it came down to. The incumbent was very well established and very entrenched in the business community. There was a segment of the people who had just come on the board that were not quite as established as the incumbent, and Ben appealed to those people for inclusion, in looking after those who didn't have as much as other people (Interview D).

Ruffin personally understood the significance of race and the importance of his election as the first black chair. “There is no way in the world you can ignore the symbolism,” he stated in the N.C. Center for Public Policy Research Center report on the Board of Governors, “My focus is not on symbolism. It is on significance. The significance of my election is being able to place the Board of Governors in a position where we can go and get support from more of the citizens of the state” (Winston-Salem Journal, December 9, 2006, p. 3).
After the votes were counted and Ruffin was declared the new chair of the Board of Governors, he moved forward to bring the Board together to work for the citizens of North Carolina. A fellow board member noted,

Once Ben was elected chair, he began work on reconciliation. It took at least a year because it was a well-fought campaign on both sides, and the supporters of each of the candidates believed very firmly that their candidate was the most qualified. It was refreshing, if not surprising, how quickly Ben was able to prove to everyone his leadership capabilities and his willingness to include everybody. Ben moved easily into the role of chair. Having served as vice chair, it was not a major adjustment. He was already vice chair, and because of Ben’s personality and background, he was a force to deal with. No matter what the position was, Ben did not change, and that's a credit to him. He was Ben: he acted the same way before he became chair and the year after that (Interview H).

An education leader who witnessed the election reflected on Ruffin’s attributes, why he was elected chair, and the challenges he faced after the election. He stated, “Ben was able to communicate. That was the humanistic side of the job. Nevertheless, he had to know his presence, he had to know his power base and transform all of those into action” (Interview H). He indicated that he saw “Ben Ruffin, as a communicator, a man of action, a trailblazer, and a risk taker who made some enemies when he became chair of the board” (Interview H). He also noted, “There are people still angry about it. Ruffin understood that the decisions he made in the first six months determined how effective he was going to be as chairman of all
the people.” He further stated, “Ruffin did not succumb to that kind of pressure, he was astute enough to go ahead, and let the board operate as it had been operating” (Interview H).

A board member elected during Ruffin’s tenure reflected on the man he knew and the importance of his being elected as the first black Chair of the Board of Governors. “I’ll tell you, it was a great day in North Carolina when he became Chair, because Ben would always do what was just and right” (Interview I).

Another colleague elected to the Board in the class of 1997, shared Ruffin’s enthusiasm for the top leadership position. “Ben was pretty excited to be elected to the Board. Ben clearly wanted to be chairman of this Board.” The aforementioned board member spoke of what he perceived to be Ruffin’s intrinsic leadership qualities that were manifested in everything in which he was engaged. He noted, “Ben was a champion for access, affordable tuition, and equal opportunity for all institutions in the system. His legacy as a strong and powerful advocate for education will long be remembered in the state of North Carolina” (Interview S).

Another colleague who was also a long time mentee contextualized his leadership style, “I can remember almost no issue during his tenure in which we didn’t eventually end up with a consensus. Almost without exception, we would end up with a consensus. Every Board member would acknowledge that” (Interview L).

Ruffin’s advocacy for low affordable tuition, the plight of the HBCUs, and his willingness to ensure that student voices were heard were often identified as key elements of his effectiveness and were reported by many observers. However, Ruffin’s work on the bond
referendum in 2000 and his work on the Presidential Search Committees for both Molly Broad in 1997 and Erskine Bowles in 2005 appear to be his greatest legacy. One education leader shared his perspective on the impact on the search process and the bond referendum.

Ben participated in the search process and ultimately the selection of Molly Broad as president of the system. And that was in many ways a historic event. To select [Molly Broad] a “non white male” and a non-North Carolinian implied a new day for higher education in North Carolina. Ben began working with President Broad to plan for unprecedented enrollment growth for the University of North Carolina, which created a tremendous opportunity for a variety of discussions as the system planned for growth. Ruffin had been hearing a lot about the poor equity in funding allocations for facilities and maintenance of the facilities. It was probably through these discussions that the General Assembly called for a study of the facilities at HBCUs and funding facilities. The study began narrowly focused on HBCUs and the General Assembly pushed to broaden that whole conversation. The study was broadened and called for recommendations for significant investment in facilities, and planning and renovation funds for all campuses, which led to the bond referendum. This occurred under Ben’s leadership as Chair of the Board of Governors. Ben was very visible; he had to go out and sell the idea to the citizens of North Carolina: the importance of the bond (Interview B).

Developing support for the bond referendum emerged as a significant challenge and necessary funding source for the state to meet the growing demand for higher education in
North Carolina. The UNC Board of Governors had outlined a $5 billion dollar need to support building infrastructure across the 16 campuses (NCSU, BulletinOnline, June 18, 1999, p.1). It was reported that at the June 11, 1999 board meeting, “the board officially approved a five year 2.4 billion dollar proposal to pay for the most critical capital spending needs (NCSU, BulletinOnline, June 18, 1999). In the same article, Ruffin was quoted as saying, “This is the most important pieces of work that we will engage in. This is the landmark moment in guiding the future of our campuses” (p. 1).

The Bond Referendum was passed by the General Assembly in May, 2000, and the $3.1 billion Higher Education Facilities Bond was set for a vote in November, 2000. The bond referendum called for $600 million for community colleges and $2.1 billion for the University of North Carolina system (North Carolina Community College, Press Release, May 19, 2000).

Ruffin joined with UNC President Molly Broad and others to advocate support for the bond referendum. On May 19, 2000, he addressed the North Carolina Community College Board with a bold message that said we are in this together. He stated, “This is our effort. The partnership between the two systems is historic. We have a partnership between education and economics that has made our state great.” He concluded by saying, “I pledge we will take every opportunity to walk step by step to get this done” (NCCC Press Release, May 19, 2000, p. 1). UNC TV aired “A Building Crisis” on May 3, 2000; the program provided a comprehensive look at UNC system facility needs. Ruffin and Molly Broad were
among the many interviewed subjects (University News, Appalachian State University, April 26, 2000).

Ruffin used every opportunity to promote the bond referendum. He urged UNC Board Members to work together (UNC Board of Governor Minutes, June 9, 2000). He traveled across the state, meeting with whomever would listen to the message about the bond referendum (B. Ruffin, personal communication, 2000). Ruffin was called the “Quarterback” for the Bond Referendum (Interview R).

At the same time, George Leef, director of the Pope Center for Higher Education and Vice President of the John Locke Foundation, disagreed with the necessity of the Bond. He stated, “the gigantic campaign to sell voters on additional state debt to fund higher education has worked hard to create the impression that it’s a cost free way to ensure educational opportunity” (News and Observer, October 22, 2000, pp. 21A-21B). He argued “there may be a more frugal plan, and they’re spending a buck fifty for a 75-cent problem” (News and Observer, October 22, 2000, pp. 21A-21B).

The bond referendum passed overwhelmingly, in November, 2000 and the landscape of higher education in North Carolina was changed. What was unknown to most is that, in passing, it pushed additional support for small institutions and support for enrollment growth. According to an education leader, “the bond pushed plans to frame a select group of the institutions considered focused growth campuses, which were the smallest campuses, and included the five HBCUs and Western Carolina” (Interview B). It was noted these institutions have the greatest capacity for growth and an investment of 30 million dollars was
made to enhance infrastructure, support hiring of new staff, advancement in facilities and enrollment management, all critical areas for these institutions” (Interview B). Also under this umbrella was a decision by the General Assembly to fully fund enrollment growth every year. This education leader stated, “Ruffin’s impact was significant when he put his entire energy and effort in” (Interview B).

As previously noted, observers of Ben Ruffin indicated that in addition to his support for access, affordable tuition, and providing an opportunity for all voices to be heard, helping secure passage of the bond referendum and his work in the presidential search process were his most significant contributions to the system of higher education in North Carolina.

The researcher had the opportunity to observe Ben Ruffin within the context of the presidential search process in 2005. Upon the announcement on April 6, 2005, by Molly Broad, of her planned retirement in the spring of 2006 (News and Observer, April 7, 2005), As the researcher, I contacted Ben Ruffin to inquire about observing the search process, and permission was granted.

The search process initially began with a proclamation by Brad Wilson, UNC Board of Governors Chair, to establish a search committee composed of Board of Governors members. The committee was selected by Chairman Wilson to reflect the diversity of the Board. The process began with four public forums to gather information about the process and the needs of the state. The forums were held at UNC Chapel Hill, East Carolina, North Carolina A&T, and UNC Charlotte. Members of the search committee were Brad Wilson, Chair; Craig Souza, Vice Chair; Patsy Perry, Secretary; and John Davis, Amanda Devore,
Ray Farris, Dudley Flood, Hannah Gage, Peter Hans, Peter Kebler, Jim Phillips, Ben Ruffin, and Pricilla Taylor. The committee interviewed all of the systems chancellors, two past UNC system presidents, and several senior administrators to obtain information on the type of leader needed for the system. The leadership statement was designed to reflect this information (Robinson, 2005).

Once permission was granted to observe the process, Ruffin instructed the researcher to contact Bart Cogniti, Secretary of the Board. Cogniti coordinated the researcher’s access to search committee and sub committee meetings, effective July 6, 2005.

Ben Ruffin served on the Search Committee, the Leadership Statement Subcommittee, and the Compensation Subcommittee. The researcher served as a participant observer on the Search Committee, Leadership Statement Subcommittee and the Compensation Subcommittee. The researcher observed Ben Ruffin during July 7, 2005, Leadership Statement Subcommittee teleconference; the July 11, 2005, Compensation Subcommittee teleconference; the July 11, 2005, Leadership Statement Subcommittee teleconference; the July 20, 2005, Presidential Search Committee Meeting; and August 12, 2005; UNC Board of Governors Meeting of the Search Committee. The process was concluded with a personal interview with Ben Ruffin on October 25, 2005 (Robinson, 2005).

The search committee selected the search firm of Baker and Parker. The search committee members were active participants in establishing compensation guidelines and finalizing the Leadership Statement and the interview process. The search firm reviewed initial applicants, the pool was narrowed, and a short list was established. The search firm
completed the background and reference checks. The search committee interviewed candidates and forwarded a finalist to the Board of Governors for consideration (Robinson, 2005).

Erskine Bowles was selected as the President of the UNC System, effective January 2006. The NC Press Association, News and Observer, and other media outlets challenged the process and claimed the search process violated the open meetings laws. They moved to file a lawsuit and later decided not to do so. Erskine Bowles promised, “The University will closely follow state laws on open meetings and public records (“Bowles averts suit for UNC”, News and Observer, January 4, 2006). Rip Wooten responded with the following statement, “We are willing to give Erskine the benefit of the doubt” (“Bowles averts suit for UNC”, News and Observer, January 4, 2006).

When interviewed about the search process and the selection of Erskine Bowles, Ruffin stated, “Watch Erskine, he is the right person. He may not have direct education experience but he will surround himself with the people to get the job done” (B. Ruffin, personal communication, October 25, 2005). Ruffin responded to the concerns from the media, stating,

It was a public search with a good committee. They said the process was not open. They will sort it out and can confer with Marc Basnight about open meetings laws. The way public institutions are structured the interview process should be confidential. Personnel issues require confidentiality. We said we would present finalists. We had one finalist (B. Ruffin, personal communication, October 25, 2005).
Ruffin also spoke at length about Erskine Bowles’ commitment to North Carolina, his relationships on a number of levels, and his strong business sense. Ruffin noted Bowles personal leadership and genuine honest caring nature. When asked about some of the expectations for the system president, Ruffin said, “collaboration and building relationships” and noted that higher education is important in providing public education and economic education. “We have a responsibility to help people develop economic power” (B. Ruffin personal communication, October 25, 2005). When asked what Bowles’s legacy may be, Ruffin replied, “education and economic connections in North Carolina” (B. Ruffin, personal communication, October 25, 2005).

Ruffin did not live to see the Bowles legacy unfold. It was Erskine Bowles who spoke at Ruffin’s memorial service on December 11, 2006, acknowledging Ruffin’s legacy. On Ruffin’s 65th birthday, December 11, 2006, Erskine Bowles recognized his friend and the role he played in supporting his selection as President of the University of North Carolina system (Robinson, personal observation, December 11, 2006).

The narrative biography questions “how men and women live, give meaning to their lives, and capture these meanings in written, narrative, and oral form” (Denzin, 1989, p. 10). The narrative biography has attempted to answer this question for Ben Ruffin. Chapter four attempts to show how Ben Ruffin lived his life and gave meaning to his life from the perspective of others. In 1979, Ben Ruffin was asked, when the annals of history are written, what would you like people to remember about Ben Ruffin. He said,
I want to be remembered as a team player, as a person who tried to work with other folk, tried to inspire, tried to work along, and didn't try to build himself as a person; who was more concerned about other people than himself, a person who had high ideals; a person who had high principles; who had high integrity; who believed in his people; who believed in his state, and had the respect of people; who tried to right the wrongs, straighten out crooked places, and gave all that he had to try to do it (WTVD, Video Tape Collection, 1979).

Ben Ruffin died unexpectedly of a massive heart attack on December 7, 2006. Since that time, people from all of walks of life have honored his legacy in numerous ways. Individuals and organizations that were touched by Ruffin’s work have commemorated his life’s work with memorials, proclamations, scholarships, and dedications. In January 2007, as the Board of Governors convened the first meeting after Ruffin’s passing, a long stem red rose was placed at his seat, and words were spoken to remember his work.

The following chapter will provide an analysis of the findings about the life and time of Ben Ruffin.
CHAPTER V
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The qualitative study examined the life experiences of Benjamin S. Ruffin. This project brings to the fore how life experience shapes decision making and problem solving skills. Ruffin’s role as a civil rights leader and community organizer provided a foundation of networking and negotiating skills that continued to develop over his lifetime. These skills supported his climb to greater positions of accountability and influence. Ruffin became a transformative leader and as this biography demonstrates, his life experience helped shape his understanding and method of leadership. Benjamin S. Ruffin died suddenly of a massive heart attack on December 7, 2006. To gather and report his story, the researcher employed narrative biography and portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997).

This study provides an example of individual leadership development. The purpose of this chapter is to provide an interpretation and discussion of the major findings.

This interpretative biography of Ben Ruffin was organized into topical and chronological categories that were divided by life stages into four distinct periods: The Formative Years (Birth-15), High School and College (16-22), Civil Rights Activist (22-36) and Hunt Administration and UNC Board of Governors (36-65).

The narrative presented in Chapter 4 highlights Ben Ruffin’s life experience through the lens of people who knew and interacted with him over the course of his lifetime. Ruffin grew up in very humble beginnings in the West End section of Durham, North Carolina. His
early experiences with poverty, racism, and discrimination provided a foundation for a unique understanding of the social ills that plague American society. Within his small community of family and friends, Ruffin developed a personal agenda and commitment to affect change. Ruffin developed into a vocal advocate for social justice. He believed he had a calling. Ruffin worked to create educational, economic and political opportunities for blacks. He believed that blacks could and should be a part of the leadership of the state of North Carolina. Ruffin moved from civil rights activist to a position of prominence in education. He steadily expanded his focus from uplifting the black community to service for all North Carolinians. Underscoring the study is a discussion of social activism during the Civil Rights movement.

The study examined the following question: How does life experience inform practice in university governance? The data from the study clearly support that black consciousness, cultural cohesion, and leadership informed his practice in university governance. The study examined the schema, opportunities, and decisions Ruffin made over his lifetime to create greater educational options for the citizens of North Carolina. Ruffin moved from the circles of a segregated black environment to an integrated and more inclusive environment over the course of his life. While Ruffin expanded his interactions and work to the broader community, his influence and power grew.

Ben Ruffin’s life experience provided him with a consciousness that helped him analyze and empathize with black sadness, sorrow, and suffering. He used this understanding to help himself and others transcend negative circumstance.
Ben Ruffin lived a life of passion and courage that was developed over time in response to the adversity he faced daily. The sanctuary of his family and his neighbors provided a shelter where he could feel safe and loved and reflect on how he could implement change. His development of key leadership skills strengthened his resolve to not only enhance life for blacks but to reach beyond the boundaries of race and class to affect change across North Carolina. He utilized three main strategies: Black Consciousness, Cultural Cohesion and Leadership.

Black Consciousness

W.E.B. Du Bois spoke of the role of black leaders, when he stated, “I believe in the higher education of the Talented Tenth who through their knowledge of modern culture could guide the American Negro into higher civilization” (Du Bois as cited in Provenzo, 2002, p. 75). W.E.B Du Bois believed “the Negro race, could only be saved from oppression by its exceptional men” (Provenzo, 2002, p. 76). This philosophy was the foundation for Du Bois’s writing on the Talented Tenth.

Du Bois believed that only a select few were capable of higher learning and leadership (Provenzo, 2002). Cornell West examined Du Bois’s position on the Talented Tenth and concluded that Du Bois had an elitist attitude and was far removed from the lives of everyday black folks. West notes that Du Bois “saw, analyzed, and empathized with black sadness, sorrow, and suffering but his own personal and intellectual distance lifted him above them as he addressed their plight” (as cited in Provenzo, 2002, p. 77-78).
Cornell West’s examination of Du Bois writing challenges the reader “to question if a black elite class could have their own class and social bias that did not conform to the needs and interest of the black masses” (as cited in Provenzo, 2002, p. 76).

As the researcher, I contend that Ben Ruffin developed a black consciousness from his early experiences growing up in the segregated South. I contend that Ruffin (like Du Bois) saw, analyzed, and empathized with black sadness, sorrow, and suffering. However, the distinct difference between the two men was that Ruffin experienced the sadness, sorrow and suffering first hand and was able to overcome his circumstances. Ruffin rose above poverty to a level of affluence. He was able to improve his social standing and not lose touch with issues that often plague the disenfranchised. As the participants in the study explained, it was Ruffin’s humility and regard for the common man that endeared him to so many. As Ruffin’s economic and social status was elevated, he did not lose touch with the less fortunate. He used this insight to inform his practice in addressing issues within disenfranchised communities. Ruffin believed that all individuals should be afforded opportunities and access to education.

W.E.B. Du Bois (2003) also spoke of the duality of the experience of black Americans. Du Bois was the architect of the theory “double consciousness.” Du Bois posits that black Americans experience life through the lens of their personal experience as a member of a minority group and the lens of how they are viewed by the majority population.

Du Bois introduced the term “double consciousness” in the first printing of Souls of Black Folk in 1903. The concept was titled “Of Spiritual Strivings.” Du Bois (2003) noted,
“the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with a second-sight in this American world” (p. 9). He contends, “It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this 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” (Du Bois, 2003, p. 9). Du Bois explained:

The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife, this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He would not wish to Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa; he does not wish to bleach his Negro blood in a flood of white Americanism, for he believes that Negro blood has yet a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of opportunity closed roughly in his face (Du Bois, 2003, p. 9).

The concept of “double consciousness” implies a constant awareness of one’s self as well as an awareness of how others perceive that person. The peril of double consciousness resides in confronting and or altering one’s identity to the perceptions of others (Du Bois, 2003). Evidence from this study illustrates that Ben Ruffin experienced life through the double lens of race and social stratification. As the researcher, I contend that a cultural construct shapes consciousness and the socialization process.
Cultural Cohesion

Individuals who achieve success against difficult odds appear to do so in spite of personal, environmental, and situational factors (Gordon & Wang, 1994). As the researcher, I assert that Ben Ruffin achieved success against difficult odds despite many personal, environmental, and situational factors that could have derailed his success.

Americans who grew up poor and black in the segregated South experienced the world through the lens of racial and social inequality.

Durham, North Carolina, was economically diversified and had thriving black upper and middle class communities as well as poor communities during Ruffin’s formative years. He saw class inequities, which highlighted the gap between black “have” and “have-nots.” His personal experience and circumstance relegated him to the have-nots and Ben Ruffin came to understand the world through the double lens of race and social stratification.

According to Marable (1991), the Civil Rights movement was based on the concept of equality. Ruffin demanded remedies for the racial injustice he encountered. He reacted to the “white establishment” and was a vocal advocate for black issues. He quickly learned that issues of race and poverty often intersect in marginalizing people. As Ruffin matured, he became a more vocal advocate for social justice. His dual consciousness expanded to multiple consciousnesses and strengthened his determination to be a voice for those less fortunate.
This is consistent with Marable’s (1991) findings that “under difficult conditions, blacks sought to overcome the burden of race, to redefine the boundaries of democracy, and thereby to reflect the multicultural spectrum of the total society” (p. 207).

Data from this study illustrates that Ruffin was acutely aware of his race and socioeconomic status. I contend Ruffin sought to overcome economic hardship and embraced his racial identify, he carried it as a badge of honor and not as a cross to bear.

I contend Ruffin’s black consciousness, cultural cohesion, and leadership informed his practice in university governance. Ruffin’s leadership potential was acknowledged at an early age and his leadership skills developed over time as he became more engaged in addressing issues endemic to the black community and the poor. Ruffin pushed for access and educational opportunity as a means to address poverty and social inequity. His rise to chair of the UNC Board of Governors provided a platform to address these issues.

**Leadership**

As institutions of higher learning grapple with the need to educate a rapidly growing and diverse population of students with limited resources, prudent leadership is necessary. Quality leadership emerged as a significant theme throughout interviews conducted for this study.

As the researcher, I discovered emergent themes through “triangulation of data from different sources and underscoring the points of convergence” (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997, p. 214). Several leadership themes emerged from the interviews and were triangulated with documents and observation field notes. The leadership themes were then synthesized into
four broad and distinct categories. The themes centered on ethical and transformative leadership; consensus building; passion for justice; and a voice for the people. From these themes four distinct leadership categories were identified and are discussed in the following sections.

*Ethical and Transformative Leadership*

Ruffin was as ethical leader. Most of the interviewees stated Ruffin was the most ethical person they have ever met. One interviewee noted, “Most people have never been in a conversation with Ben where he didn’t make sure that everybody was doing the right thing, the right way that was a part of the process and expectation, not just an outcome, but an expectation.” Another interviewee concurred, “Ben had a belief system or personal system that dictated whatever he did. He guided individuals to see other points of view with an understanding that transformation influences sustained change.” The interviewees concurred that Ben studied the issues and acted upon what he felt was the right thing to do. A colleague noted, “Ben acted the same regardless of the arena and remained steadfast in positions particularly about access and equity.” The researcher contends Ruffin acknowledged that true acceptance of an idea/concept was transformative in nature, noting ethics and consensus building paved the way for others to embrace his ideology.

*Consensus Builder*

Ruffin was a consensus builder. An interviewee stated, It was not about Ben [saying] “here's where I stand, and that’s what we are going to do,” as he did in many walks of life, he brought everybody together; he wanted everybody to discuss the merits of the issue and
wanted [everyone] to reach a consensus.” An interviewee who is an elected official noted, “Ben’s desire is to have everyone work together in problem solving. He always made sure we understood the rights and wrongs of every category, [to enable us] to make the right decision.” Another interviewee stated, “Ben tried at every turn to reach a consensus.” The researcher argues that Ruffin understood the power of consensus and utilized it to bring people together. Ruffin was able to rally people around concepts of justice and equality.

A Passion for Justice

The notion of fairness and equity were always part of Ruffin’s constitution, according to the data from this study. Ruffin, they said, was passionate about social justice, and this characteristic was reflected both in word and deed. Many people spoke of his commitment to social justice and the long list of his civic engagements demonstrated his involvement in causes related to social justice. There was a general consensus among those interviewed that Ruffin worked tirelessly to make sure that everyone had a voice, and that voice was not limited to the most powerful or the most influential.

A Voice for the People

Ruffin understood the issues of the community he served and often became the spokesperson. Many interviewees agreed Ruffin was the voice for people who were often not represented. An interviewee stated, “Ben always argued his point, he always went after what he thought was right, and the most important difference between Ben and most people, is that Ben did not mind bringing up issues. He did not mind how you particularly felt about it, and it was within his determination to be heard” (Interview D).
Moral and Transformative Leadership

The study explored how life experience informs practice in university governance. The researcher contends that black consciousness, cultural cohesion, and leadership informed Ruffin’s practice in university governance.

The four leadership categories - ethical and transformative leadership; consensus building; passion for justice, and a voice for the people - provide insight into how Ruffin’s leadership informed his practice in university governance.

The themes that emerged and formed the four distinct categories can be characterized as key leadership traits according to research conducted by Stogdill. The first systematic studies of leadership used the trait approach (Northouse, 2004). Stogdill suggested,

No consistent set of traits differentiated leaders from non-leaders across a variety of situations. An individual with leadership traits who was a leader in one situation might not be a leader in another situation. Rather than being a quality that individuals possessed, leadership was re-conceptualized as a relationship between people in a social situation (Northouse, 2004, p. 15).

Stogdill produced seminal work on leadership traits. He analyzed and synthesized more than 124 trait studies conducted between 1904 and 1947. He completed a second study in 1974 examining 163 studies conducted between 1948 and 1970 (Northouse, 2004). Stogdill’s initial research implied “leadership is determined principally by situational factors and not personality factors” (Northouse, 2004, p. 17). The second study argued, “Both personality and situational factors were determinants of leadership (p. 17).
The major leadership traits identified by Stogdill in his second study identified achievement, persistence, insight, initiative, self-confidence, responsibility, cooperation, tolerance, influence, and sociability (Northouse, 2004, p. 18), these traits embody in many ways what emerged as leadership categories in the research on Ruffin.

Ben Ruffin’s reputation as a charismatic leader was grounded in his success as a leader in several arenas. His role as a community activist, political insider, corporate liaison, and education leader relied on the same fundamental leadership traits for success. Ruffin honed and developed these key leadership skills as he occupied different positions of power and influence. With each transition, he expanded his power and influence while sharpening his ability to affect change. The general consensus from all interviewees was Ben Ruffin was a natural leader, who grew from experience and became a truly noteworthy individual.

Ruffin was a transformational leader. As Burns contends the transformative leader recognizes an existing need or the demand of a follower. Transforming leaders create a relationship of mutual stimulation and elevation that converts followers into fellow leaders, “Moral leadership is yet another concept that is based on a relationship, one not of power but of mutual needs, aspirations, and values” (Burns, 1978, p. 4).

Ben Ruffin was both a transformational leader and a moral leader. The definitions of transformative and moral leaders espoused by Burns epitomize the spirit of Ruffin’s character. The data from this study indicate Ruffin typified the transformative leader in his work as a community activist and organizer. He skillfully empowered the disenfranchised to believe in the power of change and then to become self-advocates and agents of change. He
personified moral leadership as he influenced the practice of inclusion in the identification of leaders for the state of North Carolina. His practice of giving voice to the neglected and disenfranchised while building consensus is an example of moral leadership. He embodied moral leadership as a strong and persistent advocate for equal access and opportunity in education.

Power and Influence

According to Burns (1978), to understand the nature of leadership, it is necessary to understand power, for power is the essence of leadership (p. 12). Power is a relationship among persons. Burns (1978) asserts that power is a process that has three critical elements: the power and resources of the power holder, the motives, and the resources of the power recipient, as well as the relationship among them.

Power as defined by Max Weber is the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his will regardless of resistance (as cited in Burns, 1978, p. 12). As previously stated in chapter 1, Weber’s theory of power also links power to influence. According to Weber, power, in the sociological sense, subsumes both physical power and political power and need not include coercion. One could define power as the real, perceived, or potential ability to bring about significant change through the actions of oneself or of others (as cited in Pels, 1998, p. 19). “Power is basically the capacity to produce an effect of some sort on the external world” (as cited in Pels, 1998, p.18).

What we may ascertain from these different perspectives is that there is a noted relationship between power and influence. “The role of purpose within the construct of
affecting change appears to underscore the role of power in most conversations about power” (Burns, 1978, p. 43). Ruffin’s perceived morality and sense of justice allowed others to understand and relate to his purpose, thus, allowing potential collaborators to follow a noble cause. Ruffin’s perceived undying sense of fairness propelled others to follow his leadership. The expectation that he was doing the right thing often paved the way for his success as a leader. To explore Ruffin’s power within the context of leadership, it is necessary to examine the power-based relationship. If power is indeed the ability for one actor to carry out his will over another then Ruffin’s consensus building would be in sharp contrast to this philosophy. Burns (1978) contends all leaders are power holders but not all power holders are leaders. In this context, the researcher questions if consensus building is not a form of power. Drawing again on the work of sociologist Dennis Wrong, as the researcher, I argue that power is simply the ability to produce an effect. Ruffin had power because he was able to produce a profound effect.

Ruffin’s work in consensus building produced an effect, but the process of building consensus requires negotiation and compromise. Thus the leader is more focused on compromise and agreement than individual will. According to the research on Ruffin’s life experiences, conducted during this study, his philosophy on leadership and power evolved over time. As a civil rights activist, he used power to affect change. As a power wielder, he exercised power by mobilizing a power base and connecting with the constituents’ basic needs. His experiences taught him that there were many ways to affect change. The tactics for community action and engagement differ from the political, corporate and education
arena and Ruffin learned the difference. Ruffin continued to mobilize a power base and connect with the constituent’s basic needs; however, he employed delicate negotiation and consensus building in his leadership practice as chair of the UNC Board of Governors.

Ruffin enjoyed a large network of friends, associates, and colleagues whose relationships spanned decades and disciplines, and were spread across many sectors of the community. Ruffin was connected. He operated with multiple streams of direct and indirect influence because of the relationships he established over time. Ruffin used his network to stay abreast of issues, allowing him to be proactive instead of reactive in times of conflict. His ability to always know what was going on impressed many individuals. “I spoke with Ben” was the recognized stance in many circles.

Leadership as conceptualized by Burns (1978) is grounded in conflict. The nature of relationships in leadership almost always dictate that conflict will arise (p. 38). While conflict will arise and vary within organizations, leaders are expected to mediate and control conflict. In 1978, Burns offered an interesting analysis of managing conflict.

The essential strategy of leadership in mobilizing power is to recognize the array of motives and goals in potential followers and to appeal to those motives in word and action. Conflict invigorates the mobilization of consensus and dissension. But the fundamental process is very basic; it is to make conscious what lies unconscious (p. 38).

Burns (1978) also contends that the purposeful awakening of issues to a state of consciousness is critical to conflict resolution. The ability to carefully put conflicting
positions, delicate situations, and sensitive topics on the table is a proactive strategy in anticipating potential conflict and bringing issues to the forefront for open consideration (p. 39).

Ruffin was an outspoken advocate for access and equity. He challenged political leaders, corporate leaders, and education leaders to examine issues of discrimination, inequity, and fairness. He skillfully and successfully brought uncomfortable issues to the table for open discussion and consideration. He pushed those around him to make conscious and public what often goes unspoken.

The foundation of Ben Ruffin’s leadership style was built at the grassroots level. As Ruffin successfully managed a system or process, he took the best of the experience and built upon it for later success.

One example of this is his work with UOCI. His work championed the replication of successful strategies to engage participants across neighborhoods. UOCI connected people across communities and agencies, enlarging the sphere of communication and engagement. The spiral of relationships was a strategic method to connect people at all levels, allowing collaboration in ways that established a wide circle of support and strong links within neighborhoods and agencies.

The UOCI project examined the relationship between organizations and the variables that optimize the multiplier effect of the spiral of participation. The work identified the best vehicle for community action and the essential combination of variables to produce the spiral
of participation regardless of the vehicle around which they are focused. The general concept of collaborative work and relationship building was at the core of this work.

The data for this study support that Ruffin learned and honed his skills in engagement as a civil rights activist. The same skill set of engagement, mobilization, building a close network, and influencing the spiral of relationships for the good of the masses was at the core of his success in his community as well as in the business, political, and education arenas. As a leader in each of these areas, his effectiveness was determined by his ability to examine the relationship between people and organizations, to ascertain what motivates and drives, to find a common denominator, to expand the spiral of relationships and identify the form of influence to affect positive change.

Conclusion

The study presented the life experiences of Ben Ruffin using interpretative biography and portraiture. The narrative was organized into topical and chronological categories that were divided by life stages into four distinct periods: The Formative Years (Birth to age 15), High School and College age (16 to 22), Civil Rights Activist (23 to 35) and Hunt Administration and UNC Board of Governors (36 to 64).

The data drawn from interviews, observations, document review, photo elicitation and archival research concluded that Ruffin’s black consciousness, cultural cohesion, and leadership development informed his practice in university governance. When Ruffin moved from the circles of a segregated black environment to an integrated and more inclusive
environment, his interactions and work expanded to the broader community, and his power and influence grew.

Power and influence are key elements in university governance. To examine how life experience informs practice in university governance, it is important to reexamine the essential elements of governance.

Power may be achieved through delegated authority, social standing, expertise, force, money, persuasion, or a particular relationship (Aldrich and Wotherspoon, 2001).

Foucault’s view of power links power to knowledge. Noted for having a more broad based view of power, he articulated a modern view of the importance of power in human activity. According to Aldrich and Wotherspoon (2001), Foucault outlines a form of power that works through people rather than on them. He claims belief systems gain momentum (and hence power) as more people come to accept the particular views associated with that belief system as common knowledge. Such belief systems define their figures of authority (as cited in Aldrich & Wotherspoon, 2001).

A constant theme that emerged throughout the research was Ruffin’s vast knowledge of civic, educational, political, and economic affairs, both within and outside the community. Not only was Ruffin recognized for his knowledge base, he was also the sought after expert on a number of issues. He worked through people. At every level of his work, he was able to accomplish his goals by recognizing and mobilizing his base, connecting with an established common denominator, forming consensus, and moving toward the goal together.
Lukes (1974) theorizes that all social interaction involves power because ideas operate behind all language and action. In essence, it is the understanding of human nature and the ability to connect with people that facilitates power. Ruffin’s successful leadership practice was supported by his understanding of human nature and ability to connect with people at all levels.

Formal and functional authority was an important area for Leslie (2003) to consider in the evaluation of power and influence in higher education. Leslie’s discourse on formal and functional authority lends creditability to the value of authority in the process of governing, stating that “inside and outside of formal structures, policies and actions are often negotiated in ways instead of ordered in authoritative ways” (p. 22).

Leslie (2003) summarizes the writing of Borzel and Risse (2003): “Governing functions are increasingly taken over by negotiating networks. Modern organizations look increasingly less like hierarchical structures of legitimate authority, and more like multilevel bargaining and negotiating networks who can only fulfill their functions by co-operating with others” (p. 21).

Leslie (2003) believes that universities as complex organizations also mix hierarchical (formal) and negotiated (functional) authority. He states that “governing involves the accommodation of formal structures to the realities of the functional structures” (p. 22). In essence, university systems such as individual universities need to mix formal and functional practice in governing the institution. The most important element is finding the
balance of formal and functional authority that connects important entities while respecting boundaries (Leslie, 2003, p. 22).

As the researcher, I argue that Ruffin utilized a mix of formal and informal authority, while skillfully using a combination of multilevel bargaining and negotiating networks to advance his agenda. I contend Ruffin’s early experience growing up poor in Durham, North Carolina, set his agenda. Ruffin understood poverty from a very personal perspective, yet he also saw the affluence of a black prospering middle class. Ruffin drew a correlation between socioeconomic status and education.

Ruffin grew up believing that he was called to service and internalized Arluna Dunn’s prophesy that he was sent to save his people. His actions appear to support that belief. As the researcher, I contend that once Ruffin understood the multiple means of uplifting the black community, he sought education, access, fair treatment, and equality in housing and jobs to uplift the black community.

Studies show that experiencing injustice has strong influences upon people’s attitudes, feelings and behaviors (DeCremer, 2007, p. 109). Ruffin was the recipient of unfair treatment. He grew up in the segregated South in the Jim Crow era and experienced first hand the inequity in opportunity for poor blacks. But, the evidence from this study suggests he believed that he could stand up to the injustice and become a voice for those who could not stand up for themselves. His work in the Civil Rights movement demonstrated that conviction. As the researcher, I propose that Ruffin set a personal agenda to improve circumstances for people of color in Durham, North Carolina. His work with the Durham
Housing Authority is an example of this work. I maintain that Ruffin expanded that agenda to include all marginalized people as he became increasingly aware of the effects of poverty and disenfranchisement on poor whites. As Special Assistant to the Governor, his power and influence grew. His work affected both black and white communities across the state of North Carolina. When Ruffin moved into the higher education arena, I contend he maintained his core beliefs about education. As the researcher, I argue Ruffin’s bedrock belief that education changes lives forever is grounded in his belief that you can gain and lose material possessions, but you never lose an education. The correlation between higher education and improved socioeconomic status was real for Ben Ruffin. Overcoming adversity and achieving success through educational attainment is at the core of the Ben Ruffin story.

**Theoretical Contribution**

This study provided the backdrop to explore how social activism is manifested in leadership development and how leadership influences governance. The Civil Rights movement facilitated the examination Ruffin’s experiences through the lens of race. The impoverished conditions under which Ruffin lived facilitated the examination Ruffin’s experiences through the lens of class. The researcher was able to capture the essence of Ruffin’s experience through listening to his family, friends, and colleagues as they shared stories about him. The stories shared helped me conclude that Ruffin was acutely aware of the role race and class has on an individual’s life path and development.
The issue of race and equality was at the very core of Ruffin’s life. In his daily conversation and in his actions, he promoted and supported marginalized people. Ruffin’s black consciousness and cultural cohesion is evident by the way he embraced his heritage and sought to improve the circumstances for those less fortunate.

RUFIN MODEL OF LEADERSHIP AND INFLUENCE

“The journey from poverty to economic success and civic leadership is the American story. It never grows old: intellect, hard work and moral compunction turn disadvantage to opportunities and propel an ordinary person into someone who works to help others” (Charlotte Observer, December 15, 2006).

The researcher created the Ruffin model utilizing the data collected in the study to demonstrate Ruffin’s journey from poverty to economic success and civic leadership (see Fig. 2 Ruffin Model of Leadership and Influence).
As the researcher, I propose the Ruffin Model of Leadership and Influence demonstrates how life experience informs practice in university governance. Ben Ruffin’s life experience provided him with a black consciousness that helped him analyze and empathize with the difficulty of growing up poor and black in America. His formative years, which include high school and college, found Ruffin immersed in the experiences of the segregated South. His schooling, extra and co-curricular activities, church, and work were all entwined in the black communities of Durham, North Carolina. Ruffin experienced the world from a black perspective. He lived in an all-black community, attended an all-black church, attended all-black schools, and his family and community support system was all-black. The segregated South and its Jim Crow practices did not foster an understanding or appreciation of other cultures or their needs. This phase of his development shaped how he would come to view the world. America, on the precipice of redressing inequalities, provided the context for Benjamin Ruffin’s development as a leader.

Through cultural cohesion, he achieved success against difficult odds and recognized the role of poverty and racism in the marginalization of first a community and then a people. The Civil Rights era resulted in the development of Ruffin as an activist. As Ben Ruffin became more engaged in civil rights work, his role as a leader and activist in the black community expanded his awareness of the white infrastructure. His encounters with those outside his community as he worked to affect change in his own community allowed him to see disenfranchised blacks and whites across communities. Ruffin’s formal and informal roles within organizations propelled him to assume leadership positions as he engaged in
activities that ensured social justice and access to opportunities for blacks in the Jim Crow South. This phase would define Ruffin’s leadership style, one that would require him to create a bridge between his world in black Durham and that of white Durham.

The development of key leadership skills strengthened his resolve to enhance life for blacks and also to reach beyond the boundaries of race and class to affect change across North Carolina. His outspoken manner and pursuit of social justice brought him to the attention of politicians. Ruffin’s role as Special Assistant to Governor Jim Hunt fostered a greater role of his service for the state of North Carolina. Ben Ruffin evolved into a passionate advocate for the disenfranchised across the state. Ruffin’s direction changed from advocating community-based initiatives to addressing the broader social inequalities faced by citizens of the state of North Carolina, and his influence and power ascended to great heights. Using acquired power gained through work in North Carolina’s political arena, Ruffin was able to yield influence and effectively engage two greatly divided communities - black and white North Carolina, making historical strides personally and professionally helping North Carolina move closer to leveling the playing field for those who had been historically marginalized.

The Ruffin model demonstrates an individual’s ability to transcend circumstance and move beyond circles of race and class to affect change on significant levels.

The narrative biography of Ben Ruffin has attempted to give a true account of Ruffin’s life through the many voices of those who loved, knew, or worked with him. However, there is “no clear window into the world of a person for any window is filtered
through the lens of language (Denzin, 1989, p. 14). The interpretative biography is a window of sorts. The interpretative biography is subjective writing that is filtered through the paradigms of the actors (Denzin, 1989). When Denzin stated, “life is a production” (1989, p. 9), he was reinforcing his belief that biographical properties belong to the larger society and not just the person. Within this context, it is important to note that stories, like the lives they tell are open-ended, inconclusive, and subject to multiple interpretations, yet as these stories become testimonials to lives, it is imperative that we give an accurate and true account (Denzin, 1989, p. 81-83). According to Freire (2008) “Human existence cannot be silent, nor nourished by false words, but only by true words, with which men and women transform the world” (p. 88). As the researcher, I have attempted to give a true account of Ben Ruffin’s life through the voice of those who knew him. The research has identified key leadership skills that impact practice in university governance.

Implications for Practice

As previously noted, universities have become the major agents of social mobility and significant providers of social services as well as primary agents of research in the United States (Rhodes, 2001). American colleges and universities are essentially the gateway to most major professions and multicampus statewide systems have developed into the dominant models of public higher education in the United States (Gaither, 1999).

Quality leadership is necessary for institutions of higher learning to educate a rapidly growing and diverse population of students. As institutions address the challenges of the 21st century, it is critical to have leaders who are trained to address the many issues that confront
academia. The study identifies key leadership skills necessary for successful practice in university governance. Universities must identify strategies to develop education leaders that are equipped to manage large systems. As the researcher, I propose the incorporation of research on governance and leadership development into the curriculum in higher education administration as well as professional development opportunities addressing the key leadership skills identified in the research to enhance the effectiveness of education leaders. The development of the Board of Governors highlights how the university system responded to a growing need for collaboration and consolidation to address the growing needs of the citizens of North Carolina. As the researcher, I assert that a review of the past can help future leaders avoid previous mistakes.

Recommendations for Future Research

The complex assortments of challenges that occur day-to-day in the field of higher education help organizations conceptualize leadership needs. This study allowed the researcher to explore the world of Ben Ruffin, an accomplished education leader in the state of North Carolina, through the collective voices of those around him. Through these voices, stories were told to enhance the understanding of Ruffin’s life experience. The researcher interpreted these stories and identified black consciousness, cultural cohesion and leadership as the fundamental life experiences that informed Ruffin’s practice in university governance. This study also represents a gaze into the role of community action agencies. Implications for research and practice include the following:
1. A study on the impact of the education policies that Ben Ruffin championed during his tenure on the UNC Board of Governors and the effect of those policies on the higher education community in North Carolina.

2. A case study of black male leaders in higher education who participated in the Civil Rights movement to examine similarities and differences in decision-making regarding access and equity.

3. Succession plans for universities are becoming more important as senior leaders are beginning to retire in record numbers. As the researcher, I propose an in-depth comparative analysis of resiliency and success among black men and women in leadership roles at the system level in higher education.

4. An analysis of university succession plans and the mechanisms to enhance diversity in key leadership roles at public 4-year institutions.

5. An analysis of university succession plans and the mechanisms to enhance diversity in key leadership roles at private 4-year institutions.

6. An analysis of system level succession plans and the mechanisms to enhance diversity in key leadership roles at the system level.

7. Finally, as the researcher, I propose an assessment of the use of narrative and biographical text in leadership development programs in higher education.
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### APPENDIX A  Archival Records North Carolina Archives

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