THE LIVING-LEARNING COMMUNITY:

A BLACK MAN’S QUEST

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Wrenched from my past and heritage, carried off to a strange land as a slave, stripped of my identity, my language, and, as much as possible, my feelings of myself as a human being. I, a black man in America, have spent much of my life searching for freedom and attempting to establish a personal identity. No matter which road I have traveled in my search for freedom and identity, the costs have been great and painful.

The purpose of this paper is to put into writing some of my thinking related to my search for identity. I will make a presentation of processes by which some black Americans have searched for and found their identity. A chronological and autobiographical review of my search for the variables necessary for me, a black American, to actively pursue a life style of personal growth and development while seeking individual freedom and identity in an environment which minimizes the cost in terms of a loss of freedom, personal and physical safety and psychological health. The environment referred to is what I have chosen to call a living-learning community. Each of us needs a living-learning community, a “place” or a “home”, where we can explore our identity and personal growth in an atmosphere of freedom.
White folks wondering what Black folks are doing
Black folks getting themselves together
Black folks and White folks discovering they can be people
People discovering they can be human
Humans struggling to cope with an alternate culture
Reality - Strikes - The City
   Hate   Anger   Bitterness
Up with the armor
Down with Black-Beautiful Me

The sentiment expressed in this poem fits many experiences in my life which have caused me to search for the meaning of a living-learning community. I need to know how to create a living-learning community. If no workable theory of building a living-learning is forthcoming, the result for black people in American may well be genocide. We need a practical theory of building a living-learning community where the starting point is our identity and self-assertion.

This need for identity and self-assertion is expressed by Baldwin as he writes to Angela Davis.¹

The enormous revolution in Black consciousness which has occurred in your generation, my dear sister, means the beginning or the end of America. Some of us, white and Black, know how great a price has already been paid to bring into existence a new consciousness, a new people, an unprecedented nation. If we know, and do nothing, we are worse than the murderers hired in our name.

If we know, then we must fight for your life as though it were our own—which it is—and render impassable with our bodies the corridor to the gas chamber. For, if they take you in the morning, they will be coming for us that night.
The writings of blacks in America have been largely autobiographical and have, for the most part, described a patterned quest for freedom. They have been dominated by themes of escape from an oppressive home and the search for a true home, a promised land, where an authentic, a free, identity can fully emerge. In an attempt to demonstrate the need for a living-learning community as a refuge from an oppressive society and as a secure home in which black Americans are free to develop a sense of identity, I would like to mention the writings of several black authors who have skillfully examined black Americans' search for identity and freedom.

The search after an identity, states Ralph Ellison in an interview transcribed in "Shadow and Act", "is the American theme. The nature of our society is such that we are prevented from knowing who we are". In *The Invisible Man* Ellison expresses his personal feelings about being "invisible":

> You ache with the need to convince yourself you do exist in the real world, that you are a part of all the sound and anguish, and you strike out with your fist, you curse and you swear to make them recognize you. . And alas, it's seldom successful.

James Baldwin refers to this "nature" of American society in *Nobody Knows My Name*:

> American writers do not have a fixed society to describe. The only society they know is one in which nothing is fixed and in which the individual must fight for his identity.
The black American must struggle particularly hard for his identity. In fact, this quest after identity becomes his reason for living, for he is plagued with a complex identity problem that demands continual attention. In *A Rap on Race*, Baldwin expresses the severity of the identity problem:

> The cops aren't going to ask me my name before they pull the trigger. I'm part of this society and I'm in exactly the same situation as anybody else - any other black person - in it. If I don't know that then I'm fairly deluded.\(^5\)

He also states, in *Notes of a Native Son*:

> I know that the most crucial time in my own development came when I was forced to recognize that I was a kind of bastard of the West.\(^6\)

Alvin Poussaint, in an article in *The Black Scholar*, explains how the socialization process related to being lonely, alone, and unwanted has operated in American as he talks about the black child's need for aggression and self-assertion:

> Since slavery days, and, to some extent, through the present, the Negro most rewarded by whites has been the 'Uncle Tom', the exemplar of the black man who was docile and non-assertive, who bowed and scraped for the white boss and denied his aggressive feelings for his oppressor. In order to retain the most menial of jobs and keep from starving, black people quickly learned that passivity was a necessary survival technique. To be an 'uppity nigger' was considered by racists one of the gravest violations of racial etiquette.

> Vestiges of this attitude remain to the present day, certainly in the south, but also in the North: Blacks who are too 'outspoken' about racial injustices often lose their jobs or are not promoted to higher positions because they are considered 'unreasonable' or 'too sensitive'.\(^7\)
However, the socialization process and the lessons taught all black children ("Don't be aggressive; don't be assertive.") do not destroy the need for aggression and self-assertion. It only makes the search for a sense of self-worth and identity more desperate, more crucial, and more urgent.

An individual asserts himself for his self-expression, for achievement of his goals and for control of his environment. His success in satisfying his need for self-assertion is, to some degree, determined by his sense of control over his environment.\(^8\)

Black Americans, having a low sense of control over their environment, have attempted to gain this control and subsequent freedom in a variety of ways. One way of attempting to find his identity and freedom has been to escape to a place of belonging. J. Saunders Redding speaks of this search for a place of belonging in his autobiography, *No Day of Triumph*. He describes a discussion with Lebman, a Jewish student, while in college. After explaining to Redding that he had finally found a home after initially denying his Jewish identity, Lebman continues:

> That's what you want, a roost, a home. And not just a place to hang your hat, but someplace where your spirit's free, where you belong. That's what everybody wants. Not a place in space, you understand. Not a marked place, geographically bounded. Not a place at all, in fact. It's hard to tell to others... But it's a million things and people, a kind of life and thought that your spirit touches, absorbed and absorbing, understood and understanding, and feels completely free and whole and one.\(^9\)
The search for such a home pervades the life of Redding and the lives of black Americans in general:

My seeking grew in intensity and the need to find became an ache almost physical. For seven, eight years after that I sought with the same frantic insatiability with which one lives through a brutal, lustful dream. It was planless seeking, for I felt then that I would not know the thing I sought until I found it. It was both something within and something without myself. Within it was like the buried memory of a name that will not come to the tongue for utterance. Without, it was the muffled roll of drums receding through a darkling wood.\textsuperscript{10}

Booker T. Washington's \textit{Up From Slavery} dramatizes the journey of the black self into a place of prominence within American society. It represents the successful break into a community which allows authentic self-expression and fulfillment in a social role — that is, achievement of a place within society. On the other hand, there is the break away from an enslaving community which forbids authentic self-expression and fulfillment and condemns the self to an oppressive social identity. Richard Wright, in \textit{Native Son}, explores and finally exhausts the possibility of flight from the oppression of a social identity to a geographical place. In these examples, the break away from community becomes the recoil from and rejection of white society; the break into community becomes the acceptance of special black roles within the narrower black community.

These alternatives (self-expression in a social role within American society, escape to a geographical place, and acceptance of roles within the black community) may, however, be a return to imprisonment rather than a legitimate means to freedom and self-discovery. For Malcolm X and Eldridge Cleaver, a militant social role becomes a positive road to personal freedom. On the other hand, Claude Brown finds social roles of any kind to be unsatisfactory in terms of his quest for freedom.\textsuperscript{11}
Another way in which black men in America have sought their freedom and identity is through writing autobiography. Sidonie Smith, in *Patterns of Slavery and Freedom in Black American Autobiography*, discusses the autobiography as a means of self-expression in one's search for freedom and identity:

Autobiography becomes not only a narrative of the journey from enslavement to freedom; it becomes, moreover, a vehicle through which to escape imprisonment and achieve the freedom of self-definition and self-acceptance. For this reason the autobiographical impulse has been predominant in the experience of black Americans, whose racial and personal history has continued to be characterized by various forms of social imprisonment. ¹²
EXPLANATIONS OF A THEORY FOR
A LIVING-LEARNING COMMUNITY

As I trace my interest in community, I will present an autobiographical sketch of my search for the variables necessary to create a living-learning community, a "place" or a "home", where I can explore my identity and personal growth in an atmosphere of freedom.

Through an analysis of my experience of the Davis Campus of the University of California, I will develop a model which states four variables necessary for a living-learning community. I will test this model by analyzing three other communities which have provided me with the same feeling of freedom I experienced at Davis. Based on the analysis of these three communities, I will discount my first model and develop a second. Through a further analysis of one community, I will test my second model and show where it, also, is invalid.

In conclusion, I will demonstrate that the variables I have explored are important to the individuals experience of being in a living-learning community but are not sufficient within themselves to create a living-learning community and make a presentation of the implications of these findings.
Definitions of a living-learning community

The primary requirements of the living-learning community which I have conceptualized must provide an atmosphere in which I am allowed to be "free", to continually grow in very personal ways, and to seek and explore my identity. Carl Rogers best expresses what I mean by being "free" when he states:

However, the freedom I want to discuss is essentially an inner thing, something which exists in the living person, quite aside from any of the outward choice of alternatives which we so often think of as constituting freedom. It is the quality of courage which enables a person to step into the uncertainty of the unknown as he chooses himself. It is the burden of being responsible for the self one chooses to be. It is the recognition by the person that he is an emerging process, not a static end product.

The individual who is thus deeply and courageously thinking his own thoughts, becoming his own uniqueness, responsibly choosing himself, may be fortunate in having hundreds of objective outer alternatives from which to choose, or he may be unfortunate in having none, but his freedom exists regardless.

Further, this experience of freedom exists not as a contradiction to the picture of the psychological universe as a sequence of cause and effect but as a complement to such a universe. Freedom, rightly understood, is a fulfillment, by the person, of the ordered sequence of his life.

It is a freedom in which the individual chooses to fulfill himself by playing a responsible and voluntary part in bringing about the destined events of the world he lives in. ¹³

The freedom I speak of is further elaborated upon by Redding in his autobiography when he uncovers the crucial point in the quest of black Americans — the recognition that no tradition can grant freedom since tradition is a completed thing. Freedom, on the other hand, is not a completed thing. It is a living principle, a principle that each individual must seek to realize for himself. ¹⁴
I need to emphasize that I can only know what freedom is for me. Freedom, for me, is feeling that the world is mine, that there is nothing I cannot do. I have found personal freedom in a social role, in a geographical place, and in the experience of writing. However, I have most vividly experienced that feeling of freedom when I have felt part of a community. Within a living-learning community (specific groups of people) when I feel free, I become free. Therefore, it is significant for me to analyze what constitutes (these particular groups which I call) a living-learning community.

It is important for me to share the process I went through to arrive at my conclusions about an environment that fosters learning through freedom. As a black American, the manner in which I learn is, and always has been, experimental. Conceptualizations not based in an experienced reality to which I can relate are irrelevant to my learning process. Therefore, I want to attempt to present my conceptualizations here in the framework of some real life experience with which other black Americans can identify.

**Development of First Model**

The end of a dream... About two years ago, I left the University of California, Davis, to come to Cleveland, Ohio in order to attend Case Western Reserve University and the Gestalt Institute of Cleveland. At that time, I thought I was leaving a living-learning community in California to join an equivalent in Cleveland. Now, two years later, I have finally realized that there was no living-learning community in California, and there is not, and will not be, an equivalent community in Cleveland. My explorations in attempting to create a living-learning community and to better understand my perceptions of the Davis community have taken me down many paths — some dead ends — and finally to the realization that my dream is over.
The irony of my latest discovery is that, in fact, Davis was a living-learning community for me, and Cleveland is an equivalent community. The sad, disillusioning part of my discovery is that there is no common experience that I can share with other individuals. Over time any attempt to create a common experience will result in a training community (one in which the boundaries for one's personal growth are defined externally rather than by an individual himself), but definitely not a living-learning community. This alone is an easy statement to accept if we look at it in the most extreme form, where the goal of the community is to have everyone have a common experience. It is harder to accept that most of the communities we call learning, or living-learning communities have certain things which individuals must learn to be accepted, admitted, graduated etc.. Since the reality is that failure to pursue any of the above in whatever form required will eventually cause one to be removed or leave the community; the learning of individuals in the community is controlled by the community to some extent. The individuals learning goals are particularly controlled if membership in the community is placed above one's true learning goals in priority. I am not implying that a community must either be a training community or a living-learning community, but that the training demands of a community may be an impediment to some individual's learning.

A. Description of the Davis Campus

The disappointment I experienced upon reaching Cleveland was overwhelming, considering not only my expectations but the little understanding and integration of my past two years in Davis. The language, the rhetoric, the activities, even some of the people were the same. My experience, however, was so very different. As a result, I began to compare and contrast the primary community I had joined in Cleveland (the O.B. Group) with the Davis community.
Faced with the problem of being too closely involved in the O.B. Group to be very objective in my analysis, I decided to concentrate on the Davis experience. (The O.B. Group ceases to be of importance here and will not be mentioned again).

The following are some excerpts from a newsletter I wrote one week after I arrived at Davis to share my experience with friends:

Slow down world, this kid wants to get on! This first sentence, I believe, best expresses the feeling of my present utopia.

I have attempted to settle down and get to work on a couple of unfinished projects. However, it appears impossible to stay inside or isolate yourself here. People are so friendly that I want to get out and talk to them. As I'm new to the campus, everyone is concerned with making sure that I am constantly entertained. (I have enjoyed every minute!) Never before have I been so accepted as a total person with no regard to race, etc.

The town is definitely a college town and almost completely revolves around the college. (Hope you are not bored, the best is yet to come.) The main difference between this and other college towns appears to be that there is little or no working class (very little industry), and thus, no friction between the students and the town population....

Position-wise, the University is an example of what we considered the ultimate in our class and informal discussions while working on the masters in college administration. (For the curious, I finished my research study and thus completed all requirements before leaving.) The entire staff here is on a first name basis, and there appears to be no cliques. The whole situation is very unstructured, but quite workable, it seems. Takes a little adjusting to; but I have no complaints.

At the moment, Davis is experimenting with a no rules policy which actually makes it more liberal than Berkeley. However, because of the informality and open communication, I would predict that a "Berkeley" could not occur here....

Three years after my arrival at Davis, I described my experience of the campus in the following manner:

The feeling of having a community allows me to take risk and thus to be more a full person in everything I do. This phenomenon is now so clear as I look back at my entrance into the community at Davis. I entered that community as John Carter, super Negro — clean-cut, well-dressed, learned, and articulate — fulfilling every stereotype of what I had been taught or vicariously learned that I needed to do or be
in order to "make it". That facade lasted less than two weeks due to the caring, sharing, loving, and concern shown me by my co-worker and the person responsible for my being hired at Davis.

Before arriving at Davis, I had established one limitation for myself, but clearly intended to test everything else. The limitation was that I would not date anyone on my staff. When I took that risk within two weeks after I arrived at Davis, I should have known it was going to be one helluva year anyway I looked at it! Surely I was feeling freer than I ever had before to choose to get involved with a staff member, who was white, and in whom another white staff member was seriously interested.

Possibly an explanation for the freedom I felt was the commitment I had to myself at that point. I had waited 23 years of my life and had jumped all the hoops and hurdles necessary in order to find the opportunity to "be myself" that I had at Davis. To begin by not doing what I wanted to do (by not being myself) would have been contradictory to everything I wanted to do, and would have made invalid my primary reason for accepting the job at Davis.

In thinking back on my freeing experience at Davis, I began to search for variables which were significant in looking at the campus. I was able to isolate four variables which seemed important in analyzing the community:

(1) the low degree of authority, (2) the low degree of competition, (3) the low degree of rigid structure, (4) the low degree of ambiguity. I then attempted to analyze the Davis campus in terms of these four variables.

(1) Authority (Wide distribution of power and little reliance on authority figures and positions)

In the area of student life at Davis, one would have been hard pressed to find someone saying I have to do this or to be this way because of some authority figure. Deviant behavior which did not threaten the community was not only allowed and accepted, but also encouraged in the form of experimentation. In some cases, the tremendous degree of acceptance of deviant behavior and joining to help individuals or groups experiment was a stifling factor which contributed to apathy on the part of those who only wished to fight or to generate conflict with an authority or parental figure.
The Dean of Students Office and staff felt a high level of responsibility to insure a process which allowed the greatest degree of freedom for all involved. At the same time the administration attempted to make sure the freedom created did not cause outside and uncontrollable forces (city police, Governor's office, etc.) to become oppressive.

As often as possible, decisions were made on a consensus model, involving those persons directly affected by the decision. Where a decision could not be reached, a representative body would make a decision at the request of the undecided group. The undecided group would then operate according to that decision unless they chose to continue to consider the problem. The major criticism of this system was the time commitment required. However, I believe it was more than compensated for by the degree of power and influence individuals experienced in terms of their own lives. In many cases, students were literally forced to make decisions after discovering that no authority was going to decide for or against them.

(2) **Competition** (Conflict usually acted out in a win-win process rather than a win-lose process)

Having been in communities with competitive people for most of my life, I was struck by the non-competitive nature of the Davis students. I attribute this quality of the campus to a number of factors which seemed insignificant until I experienced the impact they had on the campus community.

The Davis campus had no athletic scholarships; however, it had the largest intramural program in the country and its varsity athletes were recruited from the intramural program. The attitude "It's not whether you win or lose, but that you played and how you played" pervaded the intramural and varsity athletics programs.
An intangible variable tied to the non-competitive spirit was the "Hi Aggie" spirit. This was a carry-over from when Davis was an agricultural school and everyone greeted each other with "Hi Aggie" and offered help to anyone looking the least bit confused, hassled, or busy.

The third variable which contributed to the non-competitive atmosphere was the honor system. In accordance with this system, there was no proctoring of exams by any professors on the campus. In fractions by faculty or abuse of the system by students was dealt with in a similar manner. Both faculty and students were judged by their peers. The results of this system were that the focus was on learning rather than on competing, on psyching out the professors, or on cheating.

(3) **Structure** (Task tends to be self determined instead of intentionally imposed and institutionally or traditionally determined)

Lack of rigid structure seemed important at Davis. Everything appeared to be a temporary system. New projects were born and died overnight. Rules and regulations varied from living group to living group and changed from week to week depending upon the needs and concerns of the individuals involved. The nature of the community moved from radical to conservative and back on a continuum depending upon the events of the immediate past and concerns of the present. Structures originally set up to facilitate the process of consensus decision-making became dysfunctional as individuals and groups learned to take responsibility for themselves and to live with the ambiguity created by the lack of emphasis of authority and the lack of structure.
(4) **Ambiguity** (Structure and process related to decisions affecting an individual open to his observation, scrutiny and participation)

Much of the pressure for individuals to take responsibility for themselves came from the ambiguity of the Davis community. It was necessary for students to expend time, energy, and effort if they were adversely affected by something and wanted to effect a change.

It is very important here to distinguish the ambiguity of the Davis community from the very negative aspects of ambiguity in other communities. The ambiguity in this situation was important in making individuals take responsibility for their own behavior, actions, and leadership. However, it did not create the sense of powerlessness that results when one cannot change or influence the direction of a community. It is this negative ambiguity to which I refer when I state that there is a low degree of ambiguity on the campus. Decisions of the administration were made openly and publicly rather than secretly. Tracing the source of a policy decision or statement was a very simple process and the people confronted responded honestly to the students inquiries.

**Summary**

In relation to the variables, authority, competition, structure and ambiguity the Davis community had a low degree of all four variables.

**B. Statement and Explanation of Model**

Based on my observations and analysis of the Davis community, I developed the following model: A low degree of authority, competition, structure, and ambiguity are essential to the success of a living-learning community.
In order to test my model, I looked for other experiences in my life where my perception of the experience was the same as my perception of my experience at Davis. However, I looked at those situations where there was a high degree of one or more of the four variables identified in the Davis community. I found three other communities in which I had had experiences similar to the experience at Davis; and in these communities, at least one of the variables was present to a high degree. The three communities I explored were (1) my family, (2) my peer group in grade school, and (3) my high school wrestling team. I analyzed these three communities in terms of the four variables I considered in looking at the Davis community.

C. Disconfirmation of First Model

A comparison of the four communities quickly convinced me that no one of the four variables was a controlling factor in determining my experience of a community. In addition, there was no evidence that any combination of two or more of the variables were significant in terms of creating a living-learning community.

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Analysis of Three Other Communities

(1) Family

In speaking of my family, I want to include not only my mother, my father, my two sisters, and my brother, but also another girl and boy who were (unofficially) adopted by my family and who have affected my life considerably. The amount of love, support, understanding, and direction given by my family seemed to be the right combination for allowing me to be independent and self-assertive, and to take risks, but never allowing me to feel I could escape responsibility.

(a) Authority (High)

My father destroyed the mythology of right and wrong for us by never supporting anything he did or degrading anything we did by using those categories. One of his favorite expressions was, "There is a wrong way, a right way, and my way; and we're going, to do it my way." Therefore we were clearly able to put responsibility for our situation on him and to be angry with him.

He used our anger as an opportunity to teach us to be incongruent. We were allowed to say anything we wanted as long as we smiled. In later conversations with my father, it became clear that this was partially an attempt to help us deal with authority. Built into his model was a safety valve, although it was seldom used. If our anger was such that we could not possibly maintain our cool, we were allowed to ask for a personal session. During this session we were considered equals and were allowed to say anything we wanted in any way that we wanted. His rule about smiling was waived and the interaction was considered off the record.

At this point, it is important to mention that my father's posture and training process completely changed for my brothers and I as we reached age twelve. We were then considered adults and equals. All previous rules were abolished and a new set of norms were developed. This set of norms read something like the following: "You must now take responsibility for yourself;
however, I will continue to attempt to control you and will do so until you make that impossible."

It took me six long years to make that break with my father; it took my brother ten years; and it took our adopted brother three years.

(b) Competition (Low)

There is no need for competition when it is very clear who has the final authority. The role my mother played in our family offset the possible negative effects of my father's authoritative role and set a non-competitive model for us.

A key factor which allowed us to feel free to express ideas and feelings and to act on behaviors which differed from those of my father was the role played by my mother. She played an extremely important role in developing an atmosphere of freedom. Her perspective of things was quite different from my father's and she felt free to express it. Therefore, as a child, I often explored areas which would have been closed to me had I only been able to rely on my father for direction, support, and approval.

(c) Structure (High)

There was a very high degree of structure in our family regarding not only who held the ultimate authority but also what our primary responsibility to the family involved.

I believe my first real sense of community was imbedded in my brain from a few words spoken by my father that I will never forget: "The primary responsibility of everyone in this family is the welfare and best interest of all affected by any action of yours. It doesn't matter to me what you may have done or may do. I only ask that you not lie to those of us who have only the interest of you and those most important to you to protect." To me, as a child, the message meant: "Do what you want, but don't get caught. If you do get caught, don't place the entire family in the position of taking responsibility for your actions unless you have given them all the data so they can choose
whether they want to be responsible or not.'

(d) Ambiguity (Low)

The structure and well-defined role played by my mother and father kept ambiguity at a minimum.

There has never been any ambiguity in my relationship with my family if I could ask a question which would clear up my misunderstanding or confusion. My mother was completely open with us as children about everything. As a result, she gained an incredible trust on my part. In addition, she helped me accept a number of things demanded by my father who saw his task as training us to live in what he saw as a dog-eat-dog world (now viewed as racist).

Summary

In relationship to the four variables being studied the family was high in authority, low in competition, high in structure and low in ambiguity.

(2) Peer Group

My peer group consisted of the ten to twelve boys who lived in a two block area surrounding my family's house. We lived in a neighborhood which was controlled by gangs and families. However, no one in our group belonged to a gang. Everyone thought we were protected by a gang called the Syndicate, which controlled the entire East side except for a portion run by a family called the Grundy's; and the two groups were on the best of terms.

(a) Authority (Low)

Authority in the group was based very much on the situation. Situational authority was determined by whomever knew the most, or if this was not clearly distinguishable, by physical prowess. There was an established pecking order which was known most of the time, so we seldom
had to actually fight physically among ourselves over disagreements. (We fought frequently to test each other and to prepare for fights with others.)

(b) Competition (Low)

Compared to other areas around us, we were fairly non-competitive with each other. Our focus tended to be on creating an image as a group which would allow any one of us to go anywhere we wanted on the East side and be left alone. To be seen as competing with each other rather than protecting and being cooperative with each other would have destroyed the image we wanted.

(c) Structure (High)

The structure of the group was clearly bounded by those who lived on the block. Anyone living on the block and willing to make the type of commitment we had to each other was readily accepted. This commitment was not a verbal thing, but rather a behavioral demonstration over a period of time.

Within the group, there was very little formal structure. Informally, however, there was a tremendous amount of structure, primarily in terms of personal commitment to each other. An example of this kind of commitment can be seen in the manner in which we dealt with the legal corrective system. Because the penal institutions for youth in our area were overcrowded, those youth who were up for their third offense were actually institutionalized. Aware of the severity of getting caught for a third offense, we would have a boy without two previous offenses admit to the crime which a boy with two previous offenses was being charged with.

Another example of this kind of commitment is the way in which the group protected my brother and I. The group wanted to prevent us from getting a police record because of our parents and the possible curtailment of our career plans. Therefore, we were not expected to take responsibility for any crimes of the others and often not even our own.
The biggest threat to our peer group community was an individual being taken out of circulation. So, in addition to having figured out how to minimize the power of the legal authorities by playing on the weakness of their system, we found equally effective ways of dealing with our parents.

An example of our commitment to protect one another from being taken out of circulation by our parents is the following episode. During the school popularity contest William was commissioned by our peer group to print five thousand of the ten cent tickets, for fifty dollars. William decided to hold out for more money after delivering twenty-five hundred of the tickets. Cornered one morning, he revealed where the tickets were in his house and told us how to enter through a rear window. Because we were small, Billy and I were chosen to enter the house and get the tickets. Upon entering the house, I awakened William's father who had stayed home from work. Thinking I was a robber, he immediately pulled a gun on me. I escaped through the front door, not in time to escape recognition. Billy and I got together and decided that although I had been caught red-handed, Billy would take the rap since I would be taken off the street for the incident. After a conference at school of all the students involved and their parents, there was a total airing of all information (except the role reversal which Billy and I held to and the fact that twenty-five hundred tickets were actually delivered.) In this way, all students involved ended up with the minimum consequences for their actions based on the event and their parents. The most important factor was that none of us were put on punishments which would take us off the street. 17
(d) Ambiguity (High)

In terms of our peer group relating to the larger community of gangs in the area, there was a great deal of ambiguity. The ambiguity surrounding who was and was not a Jones (my adopted brother was a Jones) and who was and was not protected by the Syndicate was a very positive thing for our group. I was left alone at numerous street confrontations because someone mentioned I was a Jones.

Within the group, as well, there was a high degree of ambiguity. Although we responded to each other as brothers (even cutting our wrists to become blood brothers), there was some ambiguity concerning exactly what this loyalty meant in terms of protecting one another. Rather than a clear, verbal understanding of our relationship, we shared more in a behavioral way. In spite of this ambiguity, we were able to trust one another in a way that we couldn't have trusted anyone else unless we had felt that we knew literally everything about them.

Summary

The peer group in relationship to the variables being studied was low in authority and competition, and high in structure and ambiguity.

(3) Wrestling Team

The wrestling team at Arsenal Tech High School included a group of about 80 people, although at the beginning of the season, the group might be as large as 150 to 200.

(a) Authority (Low)

Because of very explicity rules of wrestling, there was little need for any authority to determine who had won or lost. However, coach did have the final authority to make decisions since he was in a position to objectively assess what was best for the team.
(b) Competition (High)

The process by which the varsity squad was chosen and the spirit with which the varsity squad entered team matches made for and contributed to a highly competitive community. The process for team selection began by dividing everyone into twelve weight classes. Through challenging, everyone took part in a round-robin ranking process. The varsity squad from the previous year was eliminated from this process as there were often injuries resulting from inexperienced wrestlers. After this process, the varsity squad members were subjected to the open market of challenge in which they would take on the top one or two ranking people in their weight class from the round-robin. The winners of these rounds would be the varsity team.

An element which contributed to the highly competitive nature of the wrestling team was the fact that an individual could win on a personal level.

On the other hand, there were factors which made the wrestling team a non-competitive community in some aspects. In terms of challenging and moving up weight classes, there was the interest of the team to consider. Although the coach had authority over these decisions, in three years I never saw him have to change a decision made by the team members. No member ever placed personal gain over that of the team, although at one time or another, each of us had to make a difficult decision in this area.

Other dynamics which contributed to the non-competitive nature of the team were that it was not uncommon for the varsity member to be most responsible for training his closest challenger, who would challenge him once or twice a week. In addition, the closest challenger of a particular varsity member frequently put much time and energy into helping the varsity member lose weight to wrestle in the very position that he would fill if the varsity member could not make weight.
(c) **Structure (High)**

The wrestling team was a highly structured community. This is evident in the selection process which was previously described. Anyone choosing to challenge a varsity position was required to give two days notice to the person holding that position and to defeat him in a challenge match. In addition, the rules for a wrestling match were

(d) **Ambiguity (Low)**

There was little ambiguity in the wrestling community as everyone knew exactly where he stood at a particular time. If a team member was in doubt, there was a simple, structured process for immediately finding out.

**Summary**

In relationship to the four variables being studied the wrestling team was low in authority, high in competition and structure, and low in ambiguity.

**Development of Second Model**

A. **Identification and Definition of Eight New Variables**

As I analyzed the living-learning communities I have experienced, I discovered some variables which were present in all four communities and seemed essential to any further study of living-learning communities.

In each of the living-learning communities, I felt a sense of openness and trust among the group members. The personal responses to me were shared in the context of love, acceptance, respect, and caring feelings. There was a high degree of both verbal and non-verbal communication. For me, each of these communities was very supportive, highly collaborative, and fair in making judgements. An accepted task of each of the living-learning communities was to protect its members and the community at large from external threats.
In order to clarify the reader's understanding of the above mentioned variables, I shall define each in more specific terms and state an example.

(1) Openness

The freedom to share any thought or feeling. I might have with at least one person.

A key factor which allowed us to feel free to express ideas feelings and to act on behaviors which differed from my father was the role played by my mother. She played an extremely important role in developing an atmosphere of freedom. Her perspective of things was quite different from my father's and she felt free to express it. Therefore, as a child, I often explored areas which would have been closed to me had I only been able to rely on my father for direction, support, and approval.

My mother was completely open with us as children about everything and as a result of her behavior, I was completely open with her.

(2) Trust and (3) Personal Responses

The knowledge that at least one person with whom I interact feels free to be totally open concerning his feelings and thoughts about himself and me. In addition, the feelings expressed by this person must in the context of love, acceptance, respect and caring.

A quote from my analysis of ambiguity in my family gives some indication of what I mean by the above statement.

There has never been any ambiguity in my relationship with my family if I could ask a question which would clear up my misunderstanding or confusion. My mother was completely open with us as children about everything. As a result, she helped me accept a number of things demanded by my father who saw his task as training us to live in what he saw as a dog-eat-dog world (now viewed as racist).

The fact that my mother could disagree with, dislike and disapprove of some of my fathers' behavior yet accept and understand his behavior based on his needs gave me tremendous trust in her openness and her personal responses.
(4) Communication

The verbal and non-verbal giving and receiving of information about how individuals feel about each other.

An example of what is meant by the above statement is expressed in my analysis of authority in my peer group.

Authority in the group was based very much on the situation. Situational authority was determined by whomever knew the most, or if this was not clearly distinguishable, by physical prowess. There was an established pecking order which was known most of the time, so we seldom had to actually fight physically among ourselves over disagreements. (We fought frequently to test each other and to prepare for fights with others.)

Clearly authority was based on knowledge and capability rather than position and this information was communicated in acceptable ways which were both verbal and non-verbal.

(5) Support

Using one's influence to help me create the environment necessary for the experiences I want to have. There must be one person in my community with whom I can be open, whom I can trust, and who is in a position to support me.

My fathers' statement to me quoted in my analysis of my family structure best indicates what I mean by support.

The primary responsibility of everyone in this family is the welfare and best interest of all affected by any action of yours. It doesn't matter to me what you may have done or may do. I only ask that you not lie to those of us who have only the interest of you and those most important to you to protect.

The above is not a statement which says I will protect you at any cost, but rather one which says I support you in whatever you want to do and I can only make good decisions about how to do that in a way that is most productive for both you and I if you are completely honest with me.
(6) Collaboration

The relationship within which the above variables operate which allow each person to freely express who he is and what he feels as an individual while working toward any common task.

A statement from my analysis of competition on the wrestling team is a good example of what I mean by collaboration.

Other dynamics which contributed to the noncompetitive nature of the team were that it was not uncommon for the varsity member to be most responsible for training his closest challenger, who would challenge him once or twice a week. In addition, the closest challenger of a particular varsity member frequently put much time and energy into helping the varsity member lose weight to wrestle, in the very position that he would fill if the varsity member could not make weight.

Within this relationship feelings of anger, rage, hurt, fun, love, affection, resentment etc., were frequently shared without hindering the collaborative nature of the relationship.

(7) Fair Judgements

Judgements made by community members, or ones with which they agree are fair. One way to assure fair judgements is to guarantee fair consequences. (A process to assure that judgements which get made regarding me are fair.)

The example given below under external threats is an excellent example of his assuring me of fair judgements. Another example is the role reversal talked about in my analysis of structure in my peer group which was an attempt on the part of one of my peers to protect me from what we considered unfair consequences.
(8) External Threats

An external threat provides members of a community with a common task - survival.

Examples from the four communities I analyzed are Governor Regan (Davis), anything which would decrease the number of alternatives open to any one person or the whole family (family), parents and the police (peer group), and other teams and non-supportive teachers (wrestling team). The role of individuals within a community becomes one of minimizing the power of the external threat, or through their own power, assuring that external judgements are fair.

An example of an effective way to deal with external threats is the manner in which my father protected us from society's punitive system. For years, I say my father as the guy who provided the punishment. It is clear now that my perception was a reality. He punished us severely for infractions that were against him, our family or community, including some occasions where he protected us from others.

At the same time, my father created much of the freedom we were allowed by protecting us from the punitive aspects of society. However there was never a message that he was doing this, nor was there any comfort that I would be protected. In fact the reverse was true. The message was that I would have to take responsibility for my actions and would receive no support from him if I chose to do something with a full awareness of the risk involved. Since I was only protected from punitive actions that would be permanently socially damaging by him there was never an opportunity to escape the personal responsibility.
B. Statement and Explanation Second Model

Based on my observations and analysis of the Davis community, my family, my peer group, and the wrestling team, I developed a second Model: A high degree of openness, trust, personal responses in the context of loving, accepting, respecting, and caring feelings, verbal and non-verbal communication, support, collaboration, and fair judgements are essential to the development of a living-learning community. The success of this community is partially dependent on its willingness to protect its members from external threats.

In order to test my new model, I chose to analyze my family in terms of the new variables I had defined. I had to limit my analysis to my family, because, of the four original communities, it is the only one that remained intact. I designed a questionnaire and asked each member of the family to indicate to me verbally how he experienced our family environment (using his own meaning for each word). See Appendix.

In analyzing the data collected from the questionnaire I used, I made the following observations: Three members of the family experienced it as open, trustful, fair in judgements, supportive, collaborative, and experienced personal responses in the context of loving, accepting, respecting, and caring feelings. These three individuals felt that the family community was conducive to their freedom and personal growth.

Two members of the family experienced the family as open, trustful, supportive, collaborative, and experienced personal responses in the context of loving, accepting, respecting, and caring feelings. However, these two individuals did not experience the environment as conducive to their freedom and personal growth.
I wondered why one person experienced the environment as freeing, and others experienced the same environment as blocking their freedom. To clarify my confusion, I explored the experiences of the two family members who experienced the family community as blocking their freedom. I asked them to share with me what they would do if they felt absolutely free.

Their responses revealed that neither of them were free to behave in certain ways that they viewed as personally freeing. Both of their freedoms were blocked by a dependent relationship with another family member. With one, the dependency was financial; with the other it was emotional.

C. Disconfirmation of Second Model

From my analysis of the data I collected, I drew several conclusions which disconfirmed my second model. The most significant discovery was that in order to be free within a community, it is not sufficient to have the eight variables I mentioned. An individual must have alternative ways of meeting, his needs. This was particularly significant in terms of the two family members who felt their freedom was blocked by the family community. Both of these individuals could have experienced a sense of freedom if they had been aware of alternatives to satisfy their financial and emotional needs.

The importance of having alternative ways of satisfying needs caused me to re-examine the boundaries I had defined for the living-learning communities I analyzed. I will not explore the outcome of that re-examination here, other than to state that: None of the four communities I explored and analyzed could or did overtime provide me with the eight variables of my second model and alternatives for each. I concluded from this that the boundaries for my concept of living-learning community needs to be more situational and functionally oriented.
I further discovered that at times an external threat is irrelevant to my concept of a living-learning community.

**SUMMARY**

The purpose of this paper was to put into writing some of my thinking related to my search for identity. In ending the paper I would like to summarize the journey I have shared with you in order to present some of my thinking.

I started the paper by making a presentation of processes by which some black Americans have searched for and found their identity. You were then taken on a chronological and autobiographical review of my search for the variables necessary for me, a black American, to actively pursue a life style of personal growth and development while seeking individual freedom and identity in an environment which minimizes the cost in terms of a loss of freedom, personal and physical safety and psychological health. I called the environment a living-learning community.

I presented a definition of the primary requirements of the living-learning community as being simply an environment or atmosphere in which I am allowed to be "free", to continually grow in very personal ways, and to seek and explore my identity. I used quotes from Rogers and Redding to help you understand exactly what I meant by being "free".

I described my feeling and the experience of leaving the University of California, Davis, Campus (where I had the experience of being in a living-learning community), to come to Cleveland. The latter change in location being one of the factors important to my attempting to find the variables significant to a living-learning community. I described the Davis campus and my experience there and did an analysis which led me to explore four variables which seemed significant to my experience at Davis.
The four variables isolated were a low degree of authority, a low degree of competition, a low degree of structure and a low degree of ambiguity. I elaborated on each of the above variables and analyzed the Davis community in terms of each of the variables in some depth.

I developed a model from my analysis in which I stated the four variables, (a low degree of authority, competition, structure and ambiguity) were essential to the success of a living-learning community. To explore this model further I looked for other experiences in my life where my perception of the experience was the same as my perception of my experience at Davis. I picked three communities where my experience had been the same, but one of the four variables was present to a high degree. The three communities I chose to explore were my family, my peer group in grade school and my high school wrestling team. I presented a chart showing the outcome of my analysis and comparison of the three communities mentioned above and Davis. I then presented the actual analysis of the three communities I used to explore my model.

Having disproved my model I reviewed the four communities I had explored and found eight variables which appeared to be present in all four communities. I stated these eight variables and elaborated on the meaning of each giving a definition and examples from one or more of my previous community analysis.

I developed a second model: A high degree of openness, trust, personal responses in the context of loving, accepting, respecting and caring feelings, verbal and non-verbal communication, support, collaboration, and fair judgements are essential to the development of a living-learning community. In order to explore this model I chose to analyze my family, designed a questionnaire and did interviews to collect data.
My findings were that the eight variables were not enough for an individual to experience an environment as a living-learning community. Two individuals in my family experienced the family as having all eight variables operating highly in the family, but did not experience themselves as being "free".

The blocks for these two individuals had to do with interpersonal relationships within the family. This discovery was made by doing further interviewing with the two individuals.

At this point I have not discovered the essential variables for creating a living-learning community. However, the conclusions which I have drawn from my search and findings are significant to any further study which might be done by myself or others.

**Conclusions:**

1. That a low degree of authority, competition, structure and ambiguity are not sufficient or necessary for creating or experiencing a living-learning community.

2. That a high degree of openness, trust, personal responses in a context of loving, accepting and caring feelings, verbal and non-verbal communication, support, collaboration and fair judgements are not sufficient for creating a living-learning community.

3. That an individual having alternatives is a significant factor in his having the experience of being "free".

4. That the boundaries set to define a community may be inhibiting factors to some individuals being "free" within that community.

5. That a high degree of openness, trust, personal responses in a context of loving, accepting and caring feelings, verbal and non-verbal communication, support, collaboration and fair judgements are significant factors to some individuals feeling "free".

6. That an external threat is often significant to the creation of community feeling and commitment, but causes a community to set boundaries which may inhibit the freedom of some individuals.

7. When the variables necessary for creating an environment in which some individuals have the experience of being a living-learning community, the cause of others not having this experience is probably due to boundaries set by the individual- or the community and can be solved often by changing boundaries on the interpersonal level.
8. When there is a low degree of authority, ambiguity, competition and structure in a community it is likely that many individuals will experience it as a living-learning community do to the learning which will usually accrue from the dynamics of being in a situation very different from much of the typical culture one has grown up in.

**Implications:**

Interpersonal relationships and the quality of those relationships appear to be more important than any environmental factors to the experience of actively pursuing a life style of personal growth and development while seeking ones individual freedom and identity in an environment which minimizes the cost in terms of loss of freedom, personal and physical safety and psychological health.

Community control of institutions would be a positive step in the direction of assuring that those individuals who tend to control the environmental factors in the community would be engaged in personal relationships with the individuals whose lives they affect.

The alternatives which black Americans have used in the past to find their freedom and identity (self-expression in a social role within American society, escape to a geographical place and acceptance of roles within the black community) will all continue to be used by blacks and in each of the above the interpersonal relationships of the individual are probably the most significant element of his experience.

That more study and research must be done on the networks of relationships which blacks who have succeeded in finding a sense of freedom and identity through the above means have built for themselves and the learnings which would facilitate other black individuals accomplishing this task.
For further study the level of analysis must be changed from the community or group level to
the level of Individual needs. An individual living-learning community could then be a net of
relationships that one has with people who might not even know each other. It is my suggestion
that to separate this concept from the typical meaning of community to call this group of people the
individuals growth set. The growth-set would be a network of relationships which provide for the
eight variables mentioned in my second model and including alternatives where needed.

The eight variables in my second model are important to the creation of an environment which
would facilitate an individual feeling as though he belonged to a living-learning community.
However in order to provide those eight variables a community must have boundaries and it is the
very boundaries which allow a group of people to create an environment with the eight variable
which would limit their resources and thus not be able to create alternatives for every need of an
individual which might arise and was not being met by the resources available.

Consequently it should be possible for an individual to create a growth set for himself within a
community with clear boundaries while others within the same community would not be able to do
so because of their individual needs and the boundary imposed by themselves or the community.

Time and choice
living and learning
the pain and hurt
of my bitterness and anger
bite
I need to protect me
from you, blacks, whites, the world
off my back motherfuckers
the discovery
I am my greatest burden and enemy
For I and only I have the
power which allows me to be free
Black, beautiful, relevant and me

John D. Carter