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Manifesting the End of AmeriKKKan Theatre: Black Theatre's Healing Power to Eradicate Anti-Blackness

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Manifesting the End of AmeriKKKan Theatre:
Black Theatre's Healing Power to Eradicate Anti-Blackness

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts
in
Film and Theatre
Performance – Directing

by

R'Myni Watson

B.S. Jackson State University, 2018

May 2024

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Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my big brother, David Andere' Armstead III, who passed away in November 2023. Losing you shook me to my core, and there were moments when I didn't know if I could carry on. But I did... and ironically, your passing pushed me further along my path. I cherish memories of your silly jokes, gifs, and memes, but above all, your words of encouragement, unwavering support, and genuine interest in what I do. I know so many times you wanted to be there but couldn't because of work commitments, but your presence was always felt. Anyone who knew Andere' knows how much he loved movies and would always joke about seeing my work on the big screen one day. Your random praises and comments in the family group chat echo in my mind. I replay them repeatedly in moments when I feel this career field isn't for me.

“Go head on chicken leg, we strong.”

“Great job Myni.”

“Go head on director of 2 plays.”

“Happy Birthday movie producer.”

“What's the name of the playwright?”

“Did anyone make it to R'Myni's show. I wanted to but I was dog tired...” In reference to Blood at the Root.

“What's X rated, Tyler Perry?” In reference to Is God Is.

“Wyd lil Steven Spielberg?”

“Roll camera!”

“Pray and leave it with the Lord, one door closes for many others to open. Stay positive minded and trust in him, all storms pass over and come to an end.”

“Happy for you and the things you do, keep God 1st and your faith, the world is yours.”

“Good hearing, hope all goes well for you.” – In reference to the possibility of the KCACTF nomination. I wish I could tell you we got selected and went to Texas and that it was a life-changing experience.

There are so many more words I can share, but this is all I have space for. Until we meet again, I love you and miss you.

*Love,
Tiny Butt*

Acknowledgment

*“You’re going to wear yourself out – and the people, too.
This job is too heavy a burden for you to handle all by yourself.”*
(NLT, Exodus 18:18)

This document and my entire graduate journey must acknowledge all those who have supported me. This quote from the Bible sums up that experience. It was a tough journey that involved many sleepless nights and many tears. But being on the other side is a reward, and it is so great because I could not have done this by myself. I want to say thank you:

To God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, I would not be here today without your protection, guidance, and abundant love.

To J'aiLa, who **literally** carried me when I could not walk, you are my forever person, and I could not have made it the past three years without you.

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To my beloved Mama and entire family, your unwavering support and belief in me and my talents speaks volumes.

To Yoyo, Lauren, and LaKeshia, your success in this industry as Black women inspires me to strive for greatness. I am beyond grateful to have you all as role models as I navigate my journey.

To the Cast and Production team of *Blood at the Root*, I would not be here without you all.

To Jami'L, who helped me through the end, was always supportive, and ensured I ate every day.

To Diane and Kevin, thank you for always supporting my endeavors and connecting me to other artists in our community.

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To Justin, for always being my biggest supporter and advocate for my directing career.

To Henry, who rekindled my love for film and challenged me as a storyteller.

To all my friends who continue to share and support me, whether that be through a message, a share on social media, or a listening ear. I love you all and thank you for your continued love and support.

It takes a village—a village that I spent time cultivating. Again, thank you.

Foreword

Trying to explain what Black Theatre does for people, especially Black people. It is like trying to explain what it feels like to catch the Holy Spirit. It is something that cannot be put into words. You just know. You experience it. I found myself struggling to write and explain this concept. However, I discovered peace in *“What’s understood, don’t need to be explained”*. There is comfort in knowing that there will be those who will understand this work, but for those who will not, hopefully, one day you will. If you stumbled upon this thesis looking for a history lesson or in-depth directing concept, this is not that. But suppose you want to learn how Black Theatre has the power to heal anti-Blackness and what methodologies can be implemented alongside it. In that case, this thesis will do just that. I hope you enjoy your reading.

Peace, Love, & Prosperity,
R’Myni

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Abstract

This thesis explores the potential of Black Theatre as a catalyst for healing anti-Blackness within American theatre. Acknowledging the limitations of systemic change, this study advocates for incremental shifts within communities to combat ingrained racial biases through narrative change and theatrical exploration. Grounded in the theory of Black Theatre's energy force, Nommo, the study proposes the framework of *Acknowledge, Dismantle, Re-Educate* to address and eradicate anti-Blackness. Through directing the production of *Blood at the Root*, incorporating Black Theatre methodologies atop eurocentric foundations, this research documents the healing experienced by participants and audiences. Key findings reveal increased community engagement, support, awareness, and transformative experiences during the rehearsal process and performances. These findings underscore the potential of Black Theatre to combat anti-Blackness and emphasize the need for further research, education, and community-based initiatives to promote healing and awareness within the realm of theatre.

Keywords: Anti-Blackness; Black Theatre; *Blood at the Root*; Black Acting Methods; Black Ritual Theatre; Community; Activism; Social Justice Theatre; Post-Dramatic

Introduction

Sadly, America has suffered an unfortunate disease since its inception – that disease is racism, specifically anti-Blackness. The definition of anti-Blackness refers to the prejudice, discrimination, and systemic oppression against people visibly or perceived to be of African descent. Black Theatre has the power to heal anti-Blackness because its practices and methods defy the very systems created to impede it. Anti-Blackness is a disease that has plagued this country for far too long. Despite efforts to address its symptoms, the root cause of anti-Blackness remains essentially unchanged. Black Theatre emerges as a potential cure to confront this issue by positioning it as a potent force for societal healing and change. This change begins at the community level, radiating outward to set a new standard for justice and equity.

The current structure that American Theatre operates in has historically been and continues to be inherently anti-Black. This is evident in the limited representation of Black artists and narratives on stage, the perpetuation of harmful stereotypes, white dominance in leadership, unequal opportunities, and the emphasis on eurocentric theatrical practices that marginalize and discredit anything not considered to be “the standard”.

Now more than ever, this country needs Black Theatre in a society that seems to be crumbling in the very essence of what it means to be human; therefore, recognizing it as a vital element in building a fairer and more just society is imperative. Theatre has the propensity to heal, but Black Theatre's transformative nature places these healing capabilities and possibilities at the forefront. Distinguished theatre professor, Dr. Tawnya Pettiford-Wates states, “The traditions of Stanislavski, Chekov, and Grotowski may have prepared my physical instrument in

pursuit of a professional acting career, but they did not nurture my spirit nor feed my soul.”¹ The soul-fulfilling element of Black Theatre's transcendental nature is essential in the healing process because it challenges one's ethics, morality, and identity in a way that goes beyond the physical realm, profoundly impacting the human soul.

Anti-Blackness is an affliction of the soul; whether that soul is attached to a victim or an abuser, its effects are abysmal. It is like a cancer to society, continuing to wreak havoc – causing symptoms that negatively impact the lives of those who succumb to its effects. There is no way to measure change in the heart of an individual; however, collecting qualitative data can help determine trends that suggest growth toward change. For Black Theatre, a measurable change occurs in both the artists involved and the audiences who view it. However, before Black Theatre's healing capabilities can operate at the maximum level, there are some steps to consider first. The steps are *Acknowledge, Dismantle, and Re-Educate (ADR)*. These steps are part of my essential framework to aide in Black Theatre's healing potential because they establish a firm foundation that directly addresses and confronts anti-Blackness. When applying the *ADR framework* to a Black Theatre production, the alignment of *Acknowledge, Dismantle, and Re-Educate* creates optimal conditions for activating the Nommo force. Nommo is the spiritual force or energy present in traditional African performance practices. It is deemed essential for the effectiveness of rituals, storytelling, and theatrical performances, as it is supposed to animate words and actions with spiritual significance, bringing forth life and truth. Renowned scholar and playwright, Paul Carter Harrison, emphasizes that “Nommo's benefits are primarily received through ritual—a specific, formalized activity designed to achieve psychological, physical, or

¹ Tawnya Pettiford-Wates, “Ritual Poetic Drama within the African Continuum: The Journey from Shakespeare to Shange,” in *Black Acting Methods: Critical Approaches*, ed. Sharrell D. Luckett and Tia M. Shaffer (New York: Routledge, 2017), 107

spiritual results for individuals and communities.”² Activating Nommo becomes the driving force behind Black Theatre's healing power. By fostering an environment conducive to the fight against anti-Blackness, Black Theatre ultimately addresses and alleviates the symptoms. Through this theoretical framework, Black Theatre's healing impact can be fully realized and effective.

I implemented these steps into my directing process for Dominique Morisseau's, *Blood at the Root* (BATR) to test my theory. This thesis comprehensively explores Black Theatre's potential healing power to combat the detrimental effects of anti-Blackness in American society. Chapter One introduces the concepts of *Acknowledge*, *Dismantle*, and *Re-Educate*. This chapter offers actionable steps to harness the healing potential of Black Theatre by acknowledging the issues, dismantling oppressive structures by challenging ingrained biases and fostering a culture of re-education with an emphasis on learning new techniques to implore in practice. Chapter Two is an in-depth look into the play and process of BATR. This chapter provides a conceptual script analysis and displays my directorial approach for the play. I highlight how the theory and techniques acquired from the *Re-Educate* section in Chapter One were implemented into action through rigorous analysis, empirical investigation, and quantitative and qualitative data collection throughout the BATR process. Chapter Three examines Black Theatre's impact on the communities involved. This section highlights how utilizing Black Theatre-centered methods throughout the process of *Blood at the Root*, enhanced the performances, leading to intriguing outcomes in the audience experience. Chapter Four is a post-production analysis and self-reflection of my experience with the process and its effects on me. Chapter Five is a call to action for other artists to utilize this framework in their practices to further the growth of societal change. This thesis endeavors to inspire a renewed appreciation for the need for Black Theatre

² Harrison, Paul Carter. *The Drama of Nommo*. New York: Grove Press, 1972.

and advocate for its broader standardization within the theatrical landscape. This conceptual framework can be used and applied in a Black theatrical production – a depiction of the ADR framework concept map is displayed in Figure 1.

Chapter 1

Awakening the Revolution: Acknowledge, Dismantle, Re-Educate

Conceptual Framework

Before the healing process can take place, steps must be taken to ensure proper treatment of the symptoms and eradication of anti-Blackness. I believe that following these steps ensures the highest likelihood of success for the potential healing power of Black Theatre. We must begin to revolutionize the theatre industry. Starting at the community level, we must challenge and deconstruct the existing systems of oppression, shed ingrained biases and prejudices, and actively engage in education and reformation. Through the spirit of resistance, resilience, and the proactive pursuit of justice and societal transformation, we can eventually reshape American

theatre, birthing an entirely new theatrical realm that is unprecedented and remarkable.

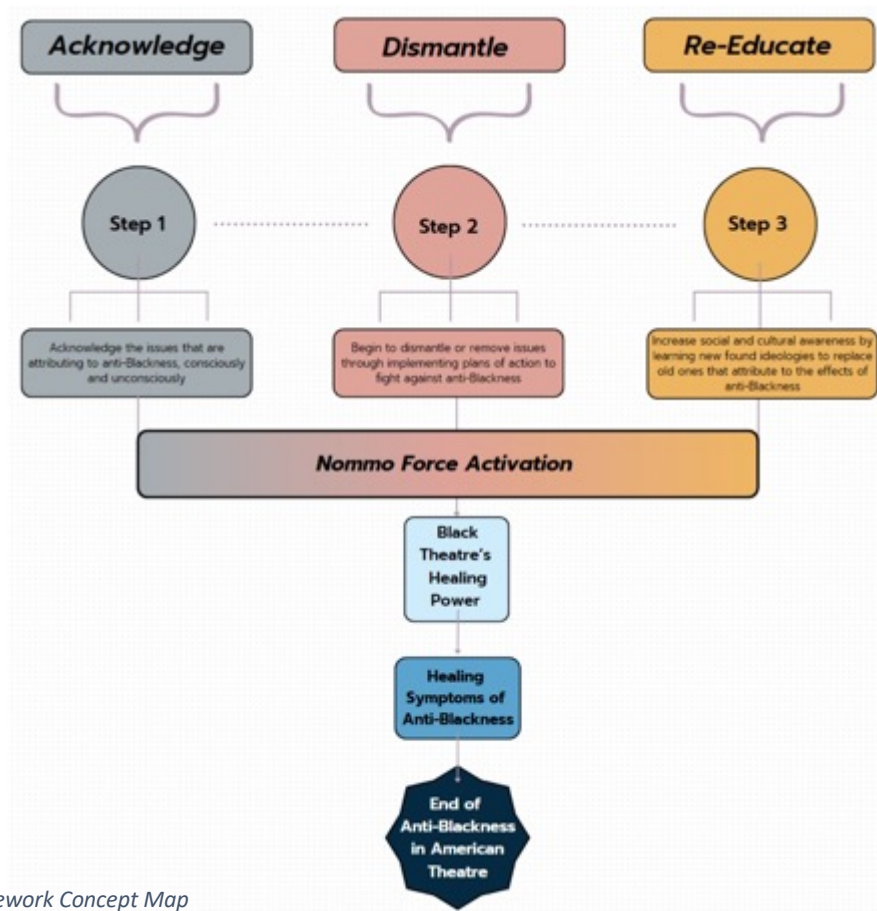


Figure 1- ADR Framework Concept Map

Acknowledge

The first step to revolutionizing American theatre is to acknowledge a problem with the current structures in place. The battle against anti-Blackness within the theatre industry is both a personal journey and a collective struggle – and not collective in the sense that the responsibility of change solely relies on Black artists, but is the duty, of all artists. According to a study conducted by The Asian American Performers Action Coalition, white actors, writers, designers, directors, and producers continue to dominate the industry disproportionately. In the 2018-2019 Broadway season, 29% of performers were Black compared to 58.6% of their white counterparts.³ The Broadway League reported that in 2020, only 2.6% of executive and artistic directors of Broadway theatres were Black.⁴ There are ninety-six Historically Black Colleges/Universities (HBCUs) in the United States. Thirty-four of the institutions offer theatre programs; however, there are zero Master of Fine Arts (MFA) theatre performance programs at these institutions.⁵ White supremacy in theatre culture manifests in various ways, reflecting broader societal inequities and historical biases. One prominent aspect is the lack of representation and opportunities for artists of color, particularly Black, Indigenous, and non-white performers, playwrights, and directors. The dominance of white narratives in classic and contemporary productions contributes to a limited and skewed portrayal of diverse human experiences on stage.

These statistics display the complicated reality that there are still evident disparities in various systems regarding the state of Black Theatre in America. The current structures that are grounded in white, heteronormative, eurocentric ideology are problematic in promoting growth

³Pun Bandhu and Julienne Hanzelka Kim, *The Visibility Report: Racial Representation on NYC Stages 2018-2019* (New York, NY: Asian American Performers Action Coalition, 2020).

⁴ The Broadway League, *The Demographics of the Broadway Audience 2022-2023 SEASON* (New York: The Broadway League, December 1, 2023).

⁵ “HBCU Schools Offering Theatre Programs - 2024 Ranking,” *HBCU-Colleges*, accessed April 4, 2024.

toward change, and Black Theatre must shift to the forefront. The primacy of the interconnectivity of art and activism occurs at the shifting of Black Theatre to a more widely accepted art form.

The intersection of art and activism in theatre must extend beyond mere awareness-raising to tangible action and advocacy. Through theatre, art and activism serve as a potent force for challenging the status quo and amplifying marginalized voices. To acknowledge means awareness and action. More than simply discussing the matter, encouraging people to act is required. Supporting and making space for Black Theatre artists is imperative. However, before actively trying to change things, we must be mindful of our prejudices, biases, and methods of approaching a problem. Otherwise, we will continue to reinforce the underlying white privilege of the systems, even unconsciously. We must undo the harm caused, unlock the potential to make a change and unlearn what we have been taught. This unlearning process begins on a much smaller scale, starting with the artists in production – this is how we approached *Blood at the Root*.

Dismantle

Understanding What Representation Looks Like

The second step in revolutionizing American theatre is dismantling outdated theories, techniques, and practices hindering progress toward healing anti-Blackness. For example, traditional casting practices often relegated Black actors to stereotypical roles, such as servants or criminals; thus, perpetuating harmful stereotypes and limiting opportunities for authentic representation. Color blind casting is also problematic because it fails to acknowledge the significant influence that race, and ethnicity has on the structure of the character. Similarly, the dominance of eurocentric narratives and aesthetic standards has marginalized stories rooted in Black culture and experience, reinforcing the notion that Black stories are less valuable or non-universal. These examples highlight a few outdated practices in shaping the landscape of American theatre and underscore the urgent need for systematic change and reform.

Blindly accepting the presence of a Black body on stage, without proper representation or acknowledgement of the lack thereof, forces one into a narrative that diminishes their identity – this is a practice that should be dismantled. The mere presence of a Black body on stage does not constitute Black Theatre. If there were an all-Black production of a contemporary European classic such as Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, it would not suffice. The original intent of *A Doll's House* did not include the consideration of Black audiences or performers. It does not contain Black culture; therefore, it is not a Black story. Nonetheless, a production of Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* meets “the requirements” of what constitutes Black Theatre.

Before the rise of Black Theatre and all Black casts/productions, Black artists succumbed to roles that were not always the best option. Performers were restricted to playing the roles of enslaved people, housekeepers, stereotypical Black caricatures, and stock characters because the

opportunity was limited. This approach to creating Black Theatre is also inadequate because “Black” is a cultural and racial identity. The contention is that Black Theatre is both an art form and an institution. The art form comprises theories, methodologies, and the innate structure of storytelling. Black Theatre is about defining a form, narrative, and space that belongs to Black artists to share Black stories, which still speaks to the universal human condition, just through the lens of being Black. Black Theatre is about us, by us, near us, and not just for us, but for everyone else as well. The unfortunate truth is that some members of white society view Black stories as an experience of whiteness or an attack for the edification of white audiences.

“At this juncture of contemporary African consciousness, which recognizes Blackness as a quality of sensibility and not a reaction to whiteness, Larry Neal's 1968 Black Arts Movement Manifesto, instructing Black artist to replace the Western esthetic tradition with separate symbols, mythology, iconology, and critique generated by the specific continuity of African cultural traditions, becomes a significant mandate.”⁶

While some plays and works poke fun at racial division, the creation of Black art itself is not intended to divide or promote a direct attack, nor is it about holding someone's hand as they navigate their white privilege or white savior complex. Instead of being forced to fit the mold of the Westernized world, Black Theatre embraces its distinct and unique forms of storytelling. The challenge of contemporary Black Theatre is to create a specific practice that can contextualize African-inspired values while overcoming the trauma of dislocation and subjugation. Paul Carter Harrison captures the true intentions of Black Theatre in the following quote.

At its expressive core is a spiritual connection between shadow and light, ancestors and the living. Most importantly, whatever value it might have as entertainment, the inventive process of Black Theatre must illuminate the collective ethos of the Black experience in a manner that binds, cleanses, and heals.⁷

⁶ Paul C. Harrison, *Black Theatre Ritual Performance in the African Diaspora* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002), 3.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

The Dismantle component of ADR aligns with Harrison's vision, acknowledging Black Theatre's power in confronting anti-Blackness through storytelling and artistic expression. Binding, cleansing, and healing are foundational to dismantling oppressive systems or practices among the global Black consciousness. Those who identify as Black or of African descent share experiences across the diaspora because of the shared trauma that exists through the fungibility and subjugation of Black bodies. Black Theatre emphasizes its profound spiritual connection in amplifying the voices of both the ancestors and the living. Through this effort, Black Theatre holds the potential to break generational cycles of harm and bring about meaningful change among those who participate. In reclaiming the right to tell their own stories, healing the depth of dislocation across time through self-advocacy, creates an eternal sense of belonging that assures the continuation of practices that “heal” instead of “harm”.

Calling Out How Some of Y'all Treat the I in DEI

Another example of dismantling would be challenging the current systems in place and how they can be enhanced to support the overall goal better. I believe that we (Black individuals) do not want to be given a seat at a table at which we were never meant to sit. We want to work together to build a new table where everyone is welcome to sit from the start – *that* is equitable inclusion. Following the events of the Black Lives Matter Movement and the murder of George Floyd, theatres across America began to promote and create Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives. These programs have done well, allowing more Black artists to be involved in greater sectors within the theatre community and has also promoted increased opportunity by acknowledging the need for fair access to Black individuals.

DEI is currently under attack. Many legislators are signing bills restricting the DEI programs in schools, universities, and government agencies. By no means am I against the

progression or the work of what DEI has done to advance change, especially within the realm of theatre. However, I want to address an issue regarding its execution. When it comes to the idea of inclusion, what we often see is “superficial integration”. It suggests that to be “included” means to be added to something else already established or appearing to be better. It promotes the notion that “being invited” into this world is a special privilege rather than innate right. Superficial integration refers to a situation where there appears to be inclusion on the surface, but the underlying connections or interactions lack depth or meaningful engagement. People may be physically present or included in a group or setting, but there may be barriers or limitations preventing genuine inclusion, understanding, or collaboration. This could occur due to tokenism, where individuals from underrepresented groups are included for appearance's sake without truly valuing their contributions or perspectives.

Equitable inclusion, on the other hand, is about creating environments where all individuals feel valued, respected, and supported. It goes beyond mere representation to actively involve and engage diverse perspectives, experiences, and identities. Inclusion is intended to foster a sense of belonging, empowerment, and justice for everyone involved – thus making space for liberation for all. True inclusion looks like making a conscious decision to put forth an effort to involve all people from the start, not add them for the sake of meeting a DEI requirement. The core issue with the current approach to inclusion arises from its foundational perspective influenced by white privilege. This approach reinforces systemic oppression because it suggests that inclusivity alone can address inequity. However, this overlooks that individuals

start from different positions of privilege and opportunity. A clear illustration to understand how equitable inclusion should work can be seen in Figure 2.

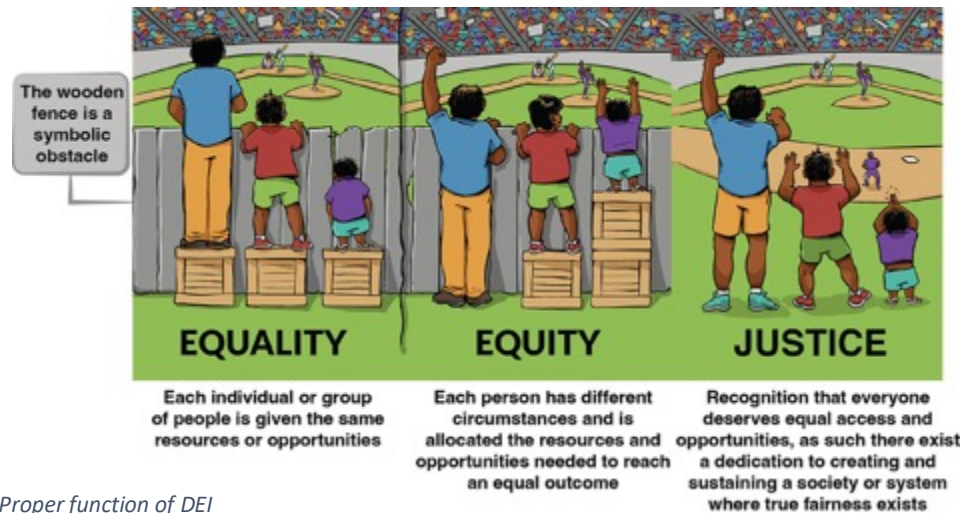


Figure 2 - Proper function of DEI

The essentialness of Black Theatre calls for a change within the realm of DEI, particularly regarding social mobility in the American theatre industry. This issue becomes apparent when some companies hire Black administrators merely as tokens to showcase diversity. For instance, a company may appoint a Black woman as CEO to project an image of diversity. However, when she faces challenges or fails due to systemic issues within the company, she is unfairly blamed, furthering the narrative that Black individuals are not qualified. This practice progressively exacerbates the problem of tokenism in the theatre industry – hence, inequitable inclusion for exhibiting diversity. In the current climate of DEI and the threat to abolish its initiatives, it is the responsibility of all artists to hold each other accountable for proper understanding, implementation, and protection of DEI to ensure a continuation of progress within our communities.

Re-Educate

Now that we have acknowledged the issues and dismantled existing structures, the final step in revolutionizing American theatre is through Re-Education. This step is the key to maximizing the healing potential of Black Theatre because the knowledge gained directly correlates with the ability to tap in to the Nommo force. Re-educating is the final and most crucial step in the framework because it provides new knowledge for artists to expand their scope and skill set. By re-educating individuals and their communities, we can further dismantle harmful ideologies and behaviors and foster empathy and solidarity across racial lines. This section covers research and theory that presents theoretical frameworks to provide a basis for understanding the functionality of various theories and ideologies in theatre. It also includes performance techniques that highlight essential Black Theatre practice methods and other performance techniques that complement it. In having a clear understanding of the frameworks and techniques, the potential healing power of Black Theatre elevates to a new level by addressing the mind, body, and spirit. These theoretical frameworks and performance techniques informed my directorial conceptualization and rehearsal process for *Blood at the Root*.

Research & Theory

Black Theatre Ritual Performance

I consider *Black Theatre Ritual Performance in the African Diaspora* by Paul Carter Harrison as the Black Theatre bible. It offers a vast collection of knowledge, theories, and pedagogical approaches that highlight common stylistic Black Theatre processes that resonate throughout the African Diaspora. *Black Theatre Ritual Performance in the African Diaspora* is a scholarly examination of how ritual shapes Black cultural and artistic expression globally, resonating with those who identify with Black and African cultures. One of the book's

contributors, Victor Leo Walker II, introduces mythology and metaphysics as it pertains to ritual in Black Theatre.

The epistemological underpinnings of these essays are rooted in the belief that “ritual is the affective technique common to most theatrical exercises in the Black world. . . It is, rather, a creative elixir –Nommo force – that activates the dramatic mode. . . Embedded in this mode are references to. . . myths and significations that define the collective moral universe.” Ritual drama rooted in the Nommo force of myth and metaphysics is a drama that is a “cleansing, binding, communal, recreative force,” where all aspects of life whether complementary or contradictory, absurd or sublime, poetic or prophetic, are integral to the human experience.⁸

This quote suggests that the essays discussed have a foundation upon a belief that ritual and energy play a fundamental role in Black theatrical practices. Ritual is seen not merely as a set of prescribed actions or ceremonies but as a powerful force that imbues theatrical performances with emotional and spiritual significance. The term *Nommo force* refers to a creative energy or power that activates the dramatic and healing elements within Black Theatre. In essence, the quote emphasizes the significance of ritual in Black Theatre, portraying it as a dynamic and spiritually charged form of expression that reflects the Black community's collective moral and cultural values. Regarding Black Theatre Ritual, one must understand the concept of Nommo as a fundamental principle in releasing the healing possibilities within the Black Theatre spectrum. In understanding Nommo, the principles of acknowledging, dismantling, and re-educating activate the full potential to heal anti-Blackness in American theatre.

Black Theatre Ritual Performance in the African Diaspora examines various forms of ritual performance, including dance, music, theatre, and other cultural practices. It analyzes how, historically, and contemporarily, they express, preserve, and transform Black identity and

⁸ Victor L. Walker II, *Black Theatre Ritual Performance in the African Diaspora* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002), 131.

experience. By centering on Black experiences, Black Ritual Theatre becomes a space for catharsis, reflection, and empowerment. The rituals present offers solace to those grappling with the legacies of colonialism, enslavement, and racial discrimination. Through ritualized performances, Black Theatre artists harness the power of storytelling and inspire collective action in the ongoing struggle against anti-Blackness. The artistic exploration of this thesis lies in recognizing the power of ritual to transcend mere performance and become a transformative force for healing. Black Ritual Theatre reveals how sacred practices serve as vehicles for cultural preservation, spiritual renewal, and resistance against oppression.

Throughout Harrison's book, the authors engage with interdisciplinary perspectives, drawing on anthropology, sociology, history, and performance studies to comprehensively understand Black Ritual Performance. Incorporating insights from *Black Theatre Ritual Performance in the African Diaspora* into this thesis allows for a deeper understanding of the cultural, historical, and spiritual dimensions of ritual performance within Black communities. Ritual within Black Theatre plays a crucial role in healing the wounds inflicted by anti-Blackness. By honoring the legacy of Black Ritual Theatre and its enduring significance in the fight against oppression, scholars, artists, and activists can amplify the voices of Black storytellers, preserve the richness of Black cultural heritage, and pave the way for a future where Black liberation and healing occur on both individual and societal levels.

Post-Dramatic Theatre

Hans-Thies Lehmann's influential work, *Postdramatic Theatre*, has broad implications for understanding and appreciating the nature of contemporary theatrical practices. While Lehmann focuses primarily on European avant-garde and experimental theatre, his theories offer insights that can be applied to various theatrical traditions, including Black Theatre. The relevance lies in how postdramatic concepts align with and enrich the expressive possibilities inherent in Black theatrical practices. One key aspect of postdramatic theatre that resonates with Black Theatre is its emphasis on breaking away from traditional narrative structures. Postdramatic works often prioritize the performative aspects over a linear plot, and in the same manner, Black Theatre has a history of utilizing non-linear and ritualistic structures.

In Black Theatre, storytelling can be fragmented, relying on ritualistic elements, music, and movement to convey meaning. This departure from conventional narrative aligns with postdramatic principles, emphasizing the immediacy of the live performance and challenging established storytelling norms. Lehmann's notion of postdramatic also involves reconsidering the relationship between text and performance. Black Theatre, with its roots in oral traditions and communal storytelling, often strongly emphasizes the performative aspect of the text. The emphasis on text aligns with postdramatic ideas that prioritize the live experience, where the physicality of the performance, gestures, and the presence of the performers is central to the audience's engagement. Incorporating non-textual elements, such as movement, music, and visual elements, is a common feature in both postdramatic and Black Theatre, enriching the sensory experience and expanding the expressive potential of Black culture on stage. Lehmann's concept of the "aesthetics of the performative" aligns with the embodied nature of Black theatrical performances. Black Theatre often emphasizes the actors' physicality, utilizing the

body as a primary means of expression. The postdramatic approach recognizes the significance of the performers' bodies and the performance's spatial dynamics. In Black Theatre, this emphasis on the performative resonates strongly, as the body becomes a vessel for the movement of the storytelling.

The theories presented in Hans-Thies Lehmann's *Postdramatic Theatre* resonate with and enhance our understanding of Black Theatre. The alignment in the departure from traditional narrative structures, the emphasis on the performative, and the recognition of the embodied nature of performance all contribute to a more nuanced exploration of Black theatrical traditions' dynamic and diverse practices. Lehmann argues that postdramatic theatre reflects broader cultural shifts and challenges traditional notions of representation, narrative coherence, and the authority of the playwright. Lehmann's ideas offer a theoretical framework that can be applied to appreciate Black Theatre's innovative and transformative nature.

Bone and Blood Memory

Erika Dickerson-Despenza, a Blk playwright, states, “None of us are self-made. I am the culmination of my ancestors’ brilliance, fortitude, rage, eroticism, fugitivity, creativity, and wisdom.”⁹ In her 2023 plenary speech, *A Useable Past: What We Owe the Pleasure of Ancestral Inheritance*, Dickerson-Despenza discusses the necessity of understanding the concept of long memory. She defines long memory as a way of keeping the spirit of things alive through an understanding that transcends historical recollection, drawing from the instinctual primordial wisdom in what she calls Bone and Blood Memory.

The concept of Bone and Blood memory refers to the idea that traumatic experiences and cultural knowledge pass through generations within the bodies and psyches of individuals, particularly within marginalized groups. For Black Americans, Bone and Blood Memory encompasses the enduring legacy of the Transatlantic Slave Trade, segregation, systemic racism, and other forms of oppression that have permeated into not only our history but bodies on a cellular level. The trauma of these experiences is not only remembered intellectually but is believed to be imprinted in the very fabric of Black bodies and psyches, passed down from ancestors who endured unimaginable suffering. However, Bone and Blood Memory is not solely defined by trauma; it also encompasses the resilience, talents, joys, and creativity that have emerged from the depths of the Black diasporic experience. Despite the pain, Black Americans have cultivated rich cultural traditions, expressions of joy, and forms of creative resistance that are deeply rooted in their collective memory. Black Theatre is a powerful medium for exploring and expressing the complexities of Bone and Blood Memory within the Black experience.

Through storytelling, performance, and artistic expression, Black Theatre provides a platform for

⁹ Erika Dickerson-Despenza, “Plenary with Erika Dickerson Despenza at No Dream Deferred,” HowlRound Theatre Commons, May 21, 2023, video,

Black artists to delve into the depths of their collective memory, confronting past trauma while celebrating the resilience and creativity that have emerged from it.

The theory of Bone and Blood Memory takes the ideology of Constantin Stanislavski's Emotional Recall to a whole new level. In comparison, emotional recall recognizes using cognitive memory or experiences to pull from for an actor to better connect to a character. Bone and Blood memory is innate, so a Black performer's choice in connecting to their character uses a level of impulse that supersedes cognitive memory and approaches memory from a cellular level. Thus, the performer utilizes their “personal emotional recall” and a collection of memories from their lineage. When a performer understands Bone and Blood Memory, their performance technique profoundly compliments the healing potential of Black Theatre in addressing the effects of anti-Blackness because it enables healing not only for the individuals and their encounters with racial prejudices but also for the intergenerational trauma carried from their ancestors, in turn, disrupting the generational cycle of passing on the pain caused by anti-Blackness.

In contrast, by bearing witness to the stories and experiences shared on stage, audiences can connect with their own Bone and Blood Memory, finding validation, understanding, and inspiration in the narratives portrayed. Bone and Blood Memory directly influences Black Theatre's healing power by guiding individuals into soulful catharsis, which initiates the purging of harmful biases and prejudices. This transcendental shift ensures that such traits are not perpetuated to future generations, fostering a cycle of learning and growth.

Performance Techniques

Trauma-Informed Directing: Intimacy & Cultural Sensitivity

One technique developed from increasing awareness of self-care and advocacy for performers is Trauma-Informed Directing. Trauma-Informed Directing is a means of unlearning and undoing the practices we have been taught, especially regarding cultural sensitivity and intimacy. When it comes to anti-Blackness being prevalent in theatre, this practice is critical in helping shape the narrative because it allows for advocacy of the performer, giving them a voice to address issues that they as actors may deal with when encountering work that could be potentially harmful and fuel the effects caused by anti-Blackness. Instances that warrant caution of subject matter and could benefit from the practice of Trauma Informed-Directing include working on plays that deal with the enslavement of Black people, dealing with police brutality, or touching on elements of the actor's body that they feel may be subject to harm. An example of physical harm includes touching a Black woman's hair on stage without consent, which crosses a physical boundary and displays a lack of understanding about the cultural relevancy of hair in Black culture.

In practicing this form of directing, the director needs to be knowledgeable and able to share the practices of intimacy and cultural sensitivity. Intimacy and cultural sensitivity work go deeper than just staging sexual scenes; it includes work and discussion centered around violence and racial tension as well. The practice of this directing technique also sets precedence for practices to be put in place when dealing with specific materials. Thus, this creates support for the creative process and does not risk the well-being of artists for the work's sake.

Many of my practices and knowledge of intimacy and cultural sensitivity come from Ann James and Cha Ramos. Ann James is an Intimacy Coordinator and Cultural Sensitivity

Specialist. Cha Ramos is an Intimacy and Fight director. In an article from HowlRound Theatre Commons, James and Ramos discussed their initial draws to the work in a conversation. They spoke about its healing and spiritual aspects. They discuss the significance of cultural influences on physicality and consent, the role of joy in healing, and the need for diverse voices in the industry. Ramos emphasized the interconnectedness of their various artistic disciplines and the importance of honoring the multitudes within each individual. Their practices allow for a shared appreciation for the complexity of human experience and the power of intimacy to create authentic connections.

In her dialogue with James, Ramos delves into the profound spiritual dimensions of her practice, revealing how her intimate connection to her ancestry shapes her approach to intimacy work. Ramos' cultural influences infuse her practice of intimate choreography with rich layers of meaning and understanding. As a first-generation Cuban American, Ramos draws on her upbringing immersed in Latin social dance, particularly salsa and merengue. These cultural experiences have instilled in her a deep appreciation for non-verbal communication and physical touch as integral components of storytelling and connection. For her, intimacy is not just about physical proximity but also about the cultural expressions of movement and expression that shape our identities and relationships.

James introduces the concept of Ubuntu, an African philosophy that emphasizes the interconnectedness of humanity and the recognition of each other's humanity, inherent worth, and dignity. This philosophy resonates with Ramos' approach to intimacy work, which prioritizes fostering authentic connections and honoring the autonomy and creativity of every individual. Through Ubuntu, practitioners like Ramos strive to cultivate environments where joy, consent, and mutual respect flourish, transcending cultural boundaries and fostering more

profound understanding and empathy. For James, this philosophy resonates deeply with her understanding of intimacy as a collaborative and communal endeavor. In James' practice, Ubuntu is a guiding principle for creating inclusive and consent-forward spaces where individuals feel valued, heard, and respected.

By embracing the idea that "I am, because you are," James promotes an environment where participants recognize and honor each other's humanity, regardless of cultural background, ethnicity, or identity. This philosophy underpins her commitment to centering joy, consent, and mutual respect in all aspects of intimacy work. By fostering connections based on empathy and understanding, she seeks to create environments where individuals can express themselves authentically and engage in meaningful interactions free from judgment or coercion. Ann James's incorporation of Ubuntu into her approach to intimacy work underscores her dedication to creating inclusive and empowering spaces where individuals can explore and celebrate their identities with dignity and respect. In the same essence, Cha Ramos's cultural influences and spiritual beliefs intersect to shape her holistic approach to intimate work. By drawing on her ancestral connections, embodying diverse cultural practices, and embracing philosophical concepts like Ubuntu, Ramos creates spaces where intimacy is about physical interaction, cultural storytelling, and profound human connection.

Moreover, these two leaders in intimacy recognize the diverse cultural backgrounds that inform individuals' perspectives on intimacy and cultural sensitivity. They explore how factors such as ethnicity, race, upbringing, and religious beliefs contribute to varied experiences with physical touch and movement. By acknowledging and honoring these differences, practitioners create inclusive, consent-forward spaces that celebrate the unique embodiments of everyone.

It is in this work that Black artists are gaining the proper tools to be advocates for themselves. Being a consent-forward artist means that one is intentionally placing importance on the ideas of self-care, self-preservation, and awareness. These practices were not as common as they are now, and the growth within this field is a testament to its necessity. Trauma-Informed Directing is a process that I believe all directors should practice, especially in Black spaces where safety and sense of belonging foster deep community connections and can potentially unveil moments to heal.

Black Acting Methods - Ritual Poetic Drama

My first Broadway audition was at the Public Theatre in 1977 for Ntozake Shange's *for colored girls who have considered suicide/when the rainbow is enuf*. I almost went into cardiac arrest when I looked at the script. The entire piece was written in "Black English," with no punctuation or scenes to study and no stage directions to follow. It is not in the standard of "the well-made play," the standard held to be the best in the traditional American theatre industry for which I had been trained. No. It was poetic drama, a choreopoem, as defined by the playwright. Poetic drama had not been anywhere in my training.¹⁰

As I reflect on my journey, Wates' recount of her experience strikes a chord within me. Despite the four-decade gap between her audition and mine in 2017, I faced similar challenges. There is a clear educational gap regarding Black Theatre methodology in the grand scheme of American theatre. There is no data that records gaps in Black curriculum being taught in institutions, especially within the arts at predominately white institutions. Like Wates, I felt a wave of uncertainty wash over me as I grappled with this unfamiliar form of poetic drama. This choreopoem had been largely absent from my theatrical education. The realization that this type of work remained uncommon and less taught serves as a reminder of the ongoing need for greater recognition and celebration of diverse theatrical forms.

¹⁰ Tawnya Pettiford-Wates, "Ritual Poetic Drama within the African Continuum: The Journey from Shakespeare to Shange," in *Black Acting Methods: Critical Approaches*, ed. Sharrell D. Luckett and Tia M. Shaffer (New York: Routledge, 2017), 107.

The *Choreopoem*, coined by the iconic playwright and poet Ntozake Shange, refers to a unique fusion of poetry, dance, music, and dramatic expression within a theatrical framework. It is a specific performative art form born from defiance of Western structure. This form of artistic expression plays a significant role in Black Theatre, providing a multidimensional platform for exploring and articulating the diverse narratives of the African diaspora. At its core, a choreopoem is a synthesis of movement and language married into the rhythmic power of poetry with the physicality of movement. This interdisciplinary approach allows for a more diverse representation of Black experiences, acknowledging that their stories are not solely conveyed through words but are also deeply embedded in movement, music, and cultural traditions to aid in carrying the story forward.

My encounter with Shange's choreopoem, *for colored girls who have considered suicide/when the rainbow is enuf*, was my first experience with Ritual Poetic Drama within the African Continuum (RPD). RPD is "a tool for artists to access their creative content, potency, and power as artists."¹¹ This methodology shifts the focus from artists as imitators to creative entities. RPD's approach aims to empower artists to discover their authentic voice, assume responsibility for their contributions to the community, and engage as active participants in their artistic endeavors.

Ritual Poetic Drama within the African Continuum has emerged as a holistic, powerful method to nurture and transform both creative artists and the creative process. It is rooted in the inner knowing that with every sunrise, there will be a sunset and that the power of theatre in performance is life, death, and transformation of not only the artist but also the audience and community.¹²

Ritual Poetic Drama is designed to enable individuals to achieve self-actualization and empowerment by delving into impactful lived experiences. This self-actualization process

¹¹ Ibid.,

¹² Ibid.,121

exposes emotional blocks and psychological barriers that often inhibit our innate creative potential and purpose. RPD serves as a means of cultural expression and liberation for Black artists, enabling them to reclaim their narratives and challenge systemic oppression. By fostering authentic expression and engagement, RPD provides a platform for confronting and dismantling anti-Black narratives, thereby contributing to the healing and empowerment of Black communities.

Chapter 2

Getting to the Root of it All

Now equipped with the tools to recognize oppressive systems, challenge harmful pedagogy, and engage in comprehensive re-education, we now focus on examining the practical application of these principles within the realm of Black Theatre. Specifically, this chapter investigates how my conceptual framework ADR contributes to harnessing the healing potential of Black Theatre in addressing anti-Blackness, using the stage play *Blood at the Root* as a case study. This section discusses directorial concepts and the rehearsal process, examining their alignment with the core principles of acknowledging, dismantling, and re-educating. The importance of exploring the directorial concept lies in understanding the intricate details of the storytelling process. By dissecting these concepts, we gain a deeper insight into how each element contributes to the narrative and thematic exploration and correlates to ADR. This chapter also explores the incorporation of theory and performance techniques that underpin the conceptual framework, drawing on research findings from Chapter One. This section also emphasizes the crucial role of Re-Educate by offering insights into its implementation and transformative effects on the rehearsal process, particularly in fostering more profound engagement with the play's themes. Through examples drawn from rehearsals and performances, this section explains the impact of these methodologies on performers and other artists involved in the production.

Directorial Concepts for *Blood at the Root*

Within my directorial conceptualization, I utilize various academic analyses and practical frameworks, drawing upon the works of Uta Hagen, David Ball, John Truby, Lajos Egri, Amiri Baraka, and Ntozake Shange as well as all the theoretical frameworks and performance

techniques mentioned in Chapter One. This directorial analysis covers the basis of storytelling, structure, and character for the script *Blood at the Root*. In my process, I read the play for enjoyment, then re-read it to understand what the story is about, and then I read it a third time to meticulously track specific elements such as the passage of time, props, symbolism, motifs, and anything else that strikes me as significant. The reading process of the play never ends because the analysis is not something I consider completed in my pre-production stage. The conceptual analysis is not a static process completed during pre-production but rather a dynamic, evolving document. It continues to grow and adapt throughout the production process while ensuring narrative continuity and alignment with the story's intention and overall point. Keeping this practice safeguards against diverging from the narrative's intended trajectory, preserving the storytelling's coherence and integrity. Because of the ongoing discovery within the process, there are moments when the actors uncover elements that better serve the story's progression. These moments are added to the overall conceptualization of the piece and notated within the analysis document.

Synopsis of the Script

Blood at the Root, an ensemble drama by Dominique Morisseau, premiered in 2014 at Pennsylvania State University. Set against the backdrop of racial inequality, social justice, and the complexities of identity, the play delves into the aftermath of several incidents that transpire following the initial incident involving nooses being hung on a tree on campus. The play explores themes of interpersonal relationships across different socioeconomic backgrounds through the lens of the students who ultimately find themselves at the center of a racial discourse as they grapple with understanding their identities and biases.

Concept Statements

Complex

In the play, the characters find themselves ensnared within the rigid confines of their societal expectations, where the dichotomy between conformity and rebellion serves as a stumbling block for their individual and collective identities – identities which, up until this point, have not been challenged for many of them. As they confront their biases and prejudices, they gain deeper insights into their peers and themselves. As they navigate the world, they grapple with the multifaceted nuances of their choices, where “breaking the rules” becomes an act of defiance and a potent tool for liberation and transformation. Each character's decision to either adhere to the norm or challenge it reflects a deeper interrogation of upbringing, power dynamics, relationships, personal autonomy, and the pursuit of justice through their actions and interactions. Through these decisions, the play considers the complexities of agency and accountability, revealing the profound impact of conformity and rebellion on individual lives. It is a story underpinned by situational ethics, transcending simple conflicts to indict systemic oppression and advocate for

societal change. *Blood at the Root* is a compelling call to action for collective liberation, shedding light on the transformative power of defiance in the face of injustice.

Simple

This play's characters fall into two distinct categories: “Rule breakers” or “Rule followers.” The latter group tends to play it safe, either out of the desire to avoid trouble or due to a lack of awareness regarding the underlying issues. While breaking the rules may initially seem unethical, the complexity of an individual’s perception of morality introduces nuances. Questions arise: Should one face persecution for breaking the rules to pursue freedom, authenticity, knowledge sharing, or foster belonging? The complexity of moral choices intersects with each student's central conflicts. This narrative emphasizes the importance of choices, demonstrating how our decisions define our self-perception of our identities and how others perceive us.

Premise/Throughline

The premise or throughline of the play is that “*breaking the rules leads to change, but stagnation leads to death.*” Along with this, I came up with a dramatic action statement to share the overall goal of the play’s action. The dramatic action statement for this show was “To break the *norm.*”

Quote for Show

“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly.”¹³

This quote beautifully resonates with the essence of this play because it captures the idea that all things stem from one another, where every action, like a chain reaction, has profound

¹³ King, Martin Luther, Jr. 2018. *Letter from Birmingham Jail*. Penguin Modern. London, England: Penguin Classics.

consequences. The recurring use of the phrase, “*It all got roots*” as articulated in the script, summarizes the interconnectedness of our choices and their enduring impact, echoing King's sentiment. As the character Toria questions the point of freedom amidst surrounding injustices, we confront the harsh reality that oppression for one inevitably affects all. Similarly, when the character, Colin, asks, “Wonder what we gone leave,” we are reminded of the perpetual cycle of our actions reaching across generations. The metaphor of “laying new soil” evokes a visceral image of renewal and transformation, symbolizing the potential for a better tomorrow.

Director's Approach to the Production

I wanted this play to be *hella Black*.¹⁴ I was adamant about infusing this play with a rich Black identity. I needed to embrace its unique style and thoroughly explore the choreopoem format. Incorporating dance was essential, especially given the play’s requirement to be inspired by hip-hop. Because I wanted the rhythms and energy of hip-hop to pulsate through the music and movements on stage, stepping, felt like a natural addition. Anything that resonated with Black culture or Louisiana culture found its place in the production, so long as it seamlessly contributed to the story’s flow. I cannot help but mention my love for hiding “Easter Eggs” in my plays. These hidden gems are not for everyone, but for those who discover them, it is a rewarding experience, especially in plays filled with cultural nuances that may not be immediately obvious to all.

¹⁴ “Hella” stems from African American vernacular, meaning “very” or “extremely.” Adding “Black” emphasizes its cultural significance, highlighting its strong connection to Black culture.

Conceptual Analysis of Given Circumstances

Throughout the meetings with the production team, we discussed various themes and motifs in the play. We found words associated with the story: heat, tension, change, roots, double-consciousness, justice, rules, equity, defiance, death, rebirth, chain reaction, domino effect, systems, and the recurring phrase, "*It all got roots.*"

Time

During our production meetings, we collectively agreed that the play possesses a timeless quality, primarily due to the enduring relevance of the characters' struggles. While mentioning a cell phone anchors us somewhat in 2007, the narrative transcends time constraints and manipulates the chronological landscape. This manipulation visually reinforces the deliberate contrast between costume and set design choices. The characters exude vibrancy and youth while the world around them and their struggles remains dull and stagnant, this evokes a period that ranges from 1977 to 2007. Ultimately, the inclusion of modern technology and contemporary language firmly situates them within a specific era.

Place

The play is set in and around Cedar High School's community. Specific locations include the tree: Old Devoted, the bleachers, the school hall at the lockers, and outside Colin's house. In addition, there are moments that take place in an ethereal atmosphere outside the concrete locations of the story.

Dramatic Structure and Style

In my experience, I rarely encountered a production where we hit and maintained a consistent runtime, as this was uncommon in the early stages of rehearsals. This consistency showed our effectiveness in prioritizing pacing early in the process. This focus on pacing was not

an afterthought but a deliberate choice from the start. This intentional approach to pacing aligns with a visual metaphor, mirroring the gradual buildup of momentum influenced by the heat. I often describe the show as akin to an old-fashioned stove-top kettle: as tension mounts, actions, and dialogue intensify, much like a kettle reaching a boil. Sometimes, the tension subsides, resembling the kettle simmering down, while other times, it reaches a climactic point, akin to a kettle whistling and signifying heightened stakes. This ebb and flow pacing beautifully orchestrates the storytelling, guiding the audience on an emotional roller coaster. The balance between the intense and the joyful moments follows this pacing, enhancing the overall narrative impact. Additionally, each scene is titled to coincide with the key message or story in the script, with some titles featuring wordplay puns that feed into the cultural influences and language of the play.

Character Conceptualizations

In the script, only core students are designated as actors. The core students include Raylynn, Asha, De'Andre, Toria, Justin, and Colin. For example, the DA and Principal Miller were listed in the script, but the script suggests they are voice-overs or read off-stage. However, due to the play's ensemble-oriented nature, I chose to use actors for authority figures and form an additional student ensemble instead of dividing the roles among the core students. This choice added a layer to the piece's movement, providing an opportunity to explore character relationships on stage. I cast two actors to play the authority figures, Principal Miller and the DA. Additionally, I included three ensemble students who created names for themselves for personal character development but were referred to as Ensemble Students. No role overshadows another in this type of play; it is an authentic ensemble piece where everyone's role is crucial to the storytelling process.

I utilized Lagos Egri's Character Bone structure when working on character analysis. This method explores how the character's physiological and sociological attributes influence their psychological state – *Physiology + Sociology = Psychology*. In one-on-one sessions with actors, we discussed and built their characters, considering Egri's methods alongside Sensory Character Mapping, which analyzes characters using the five senses. By asking questions like what the character looks, feels, smells, tastes, and sounds like, actors visualize the characters and build a socio-physio-psychological profile to understand them better. As an additional idea to emphasize rhythm and flow within the poetic text, we discussed the characters' "baseline rhythm". The baseline rhythm of a character refers to the beat that lives within them, whether it is the literal rhythm of their heartbeat or a song's beat that embodies them. These baseline rhythms aided in devising the scenes' rhythm, chants, and pacing.

Regarding Toria's casting choice, I decided to portray her as a Black character. This choice is not about diversification but instead aligning her character with the narrative's themes and dynamics. On the one hand, Toria cast as a white woman shows allyship and support, but it also inadvertently reinforces the "white savior" trope, which I found problematic. In reading the script, Toria's race feels ambiguous until her line, "I'm white." The more I read over her ending monologue, the more I did not like white Toria – it literally bothered my spirit. It was my only critique of the play; by making Toria Black, the dynamics between her and Justin elevated the story to new dimensions. Their relationship became a nuanced exploration of shared experiences as outcasts, removing the focus on race and emphasizing their personalities. Their relationship also identified struggles with Black identity, which strengthened Justin's justification of his Black identity not measuring up to the "standard."

Questions

The following are questions that I posed when thinking about the play. What is justice? Who defines it? What are the roots? Is change good, bad, or just neutrally necessary? What is inclusion? What does it mean to be included?

Historical and Cultural Components

Learning all the historical and cultural context not only gives essential insight into what the play entails but also gives a cultural context. It allows us to understand what was going on during this time and gives us insight into the style in which we are telling the story. It not only furthers the character development of the performers, but it also gives them tremendous respect and empathy for the culture. After learning this, someone who may have not understood the importance of hip-hop to Black culture now has a better grasp of that. All these topics discussed and shared at rehearsal are ultimately part of Re-Educate.

The Jena 6 case unfolded in Jena, Louisiana, in 2006 and became a focal point for national discussions on racial tensions and disparities within the criminal justice system. It began with a racially charged incident at Jena High School, where students discovered three nooses hanging from a tree traditionally used by white students. The incident occurred after a Black student inquired to sit under it. Despite the clear racial implications, school officials downplayed the incident, sparking outrage among the school's Black student body. Tensions escalated later that year when a series of altercations occurred between Black and white students, culminating in a fight where a white student was beaten by a group of Black students, later dubbed the "Jena 6."

The legal response to the altercation intensified the controversy, as the six Black students faced severe charges, including attempted second-degree murder. In contrast, the white student received minimal punishment for his role. Many viewed this as a stark example of racial bias

within the criminal justice system, with Black defendants experiencing harsher treatment compared to their white counterparts. The case garnered national attention, sparking protests, rallies, and widespread condemnation of the perceived injustice. Civil rights leaders, activists, and celebrities rallied to support the Jena 6, advocating for fair treatment, and ending racial discrimination in the legal system. Ultimately, the case highlighted the ongoing struggles for racial equality and the importance of addressing systemic racism within society and the justice system.

I wanted the opening scene, Student Body, to feel like an HBCU probate. It should feel like an introduction or coming out to the world announcing, “This is who I am.” Each character had a moment where they were introduced. The relationship between the National Pan-Hellenic Council and Black Greek Letter Organizations, endearingly known as the Divine Nine are also associated with stepping, both of which are deeply rooted in the history and culture of Black Greek life, drawing inspiration from African dance and rhythmic expression traditions. Stepping symbolizes unity, discipline, and cultural pride within these organizations, incorporating symbols, chants, and rituals inspired by African heritage. This connection to Africa enriches the significance of stepping, reflecting a continuation of ancestral traditions and values passed down through generations. As we delve into the cultural significance of stepping within the context of the Divine Nine, it is essential to recognize its broader implications within Black culture and theatre rituals. *Blood at the Root* embodies key elements of Black culture, directly relating to hip-hop music and its ties to African rituals. Hip-hop music, with its rhythmic beats and lyrical storytelling, mirrors African rituals’ rhythmic and poetic expressions, serving as a contemporary form of cultural preservation and resistance.

Moreover, incorporating stepping into Black Theatre rituals represents more than movement and rhythm; it embodies a sense of community, identity, and power. In *Blood at the Root*, the use of stepping becomes a powerful metaphor for the characters' struggles and triumphs, echoing the resilience and solidarity of the Black community in the face of adversity. Just as stepping serves as a form of artistic expression and cultural preservation within the Divine Nine, it also serves as a means of storytelling and empowerment within Black Theatre, connecting audiences to the rich tapestry of African American heritage and experience. Incorporating these elements into *Blood at the Root* not only honors the traditions and values of Black culture but also amplifies the themes of resilience, identity, and community central to the play. Through the fusion of stepping, hip-hop music, and African ritual, the production celebrates Black creativity, strength, and cultural heritage, inviting audiences to engage with the complexities and beauty of the Black experience.

Understanding the cultural significance and history of hip-hop, Black Greek Letter Organizations, stepping, and African ritualistic elements is vital for addressing anti-Blackness and fostering equity. These cultural phenomena offer insights into the diverse experiences and contributions of Black communities, challenging stereotypes, and biases. Hip-hop serves as a platform for social commentary on issues like racism and police brutality. At the same time, sororities and fraternities provide spaces for academic excellence, service to the community, and leadership development despite historical barriers. Stepping symbolizes unity and resilience, amplifying marginalized voices and advocating social change. By promoting understanding and appreciation of these topics, we can contribute to dismantling systems of oppression and building a more inclusive and equitable society for all.

Performing *Blood at the Root* during hip-hop's 50th anniversary felt like fate. As we honor this milestone, we must acknowledge hip-hop's immense impact on global culture. Emerging from the South Bronx in the 1970s, hip-hop has transcended geographical, language, and ethnic boundaries, evolving from a local phenomenon to a global cultural movement. Hip-hop is more than just music; it is a multifaceted culture encompassing dance, music, visual art, fashion, and language. Rooted in the experiences of marginalized communities, particularly African American and Latino communities, hip-hop serves as a reflection of their struggles and triumphs, notably in urban centers like New York City.

At its core, hip-hop is recognized for its distinctive music style—rhythmic beats, spoken-word lyrics, and innovative sampling techniques. From its inception at DJ parties in the Bronx to its present global dominance, hip-hop music has become one of the most influential and commercially successful genres worldwide. Rap music is central to hip-hop culture, serving as a potent medium for storytelling and social commentary. Artists like Grandmaster Flash, Furious Five, and Kendrick Lamar express the realities of urban life, racism, and the pursuit of justice. Alongside rap, DJing, graffiti art, breakdancing, and beatboxing represent pillars of hip-hop, showcasing Black creativity and cultural expression. N.W.A's "Fuck tha Police" stands as a powerful example of hip-hop's social impact, condemning police brutality and racial profiling. Released in 1988, the song's bold language and blatant dissatisfaction with law enforcement ignited conversations and movements against systemic injustices, remaining relevant today in the fight against anti-Blackness and police violence. I felt that the play was closely related to the raw hip-hop style from the late 1980's. I wanted to capture the essence of MCs and lyricists from that time, who would perform their spoken word pieces over vinyl records being spun on a turn table. A blending of past and present – the characters in *Blood at the Root* made bold choices blending

moments of the past and present through their struggles, so the hip-hop culture between the late 1980s and early 1990s felt most appropriate. Hip-hop's significance in the 21st century cannot be overstated. It amplifies marginalized voices, addresses social issues, and fosters community empowerment worldwide. Furthermore, hip-hop influences music, fashion, and entertainment trends, extending its reach into film, television, and politics.

Emphasizing the concept of Re-Educate from ADR in the rehearsal process for *Blood at the Root* underscores the importance of understanding the historical, cultural, and theoretical frameworks behind Black Theatre practice. This intersectionality ensures that the rehearsal process is enriched with knowledge and insight, allowing for a more impactful and transformative theatrical experience for both performers and audiences. I would arrive at rehearsals an hour early and play hip-hop tunes. It allowed me to have time to feel the world of the play, and once the performers arrived, they, too, would feel the energy of the space. Our favorite songs included Grand Master Flash's, "The Message", "Fight the Power", by Public Enemy, and "U.N.I.T.Y." by Queen Latifah. We had conversations about the lyrics and how they related to the play. We also talked about how the songs' themes are still prevalent in our world today. Each song felt reminiscent of the scenes throughout the play, so these songs, along with N.W.A's "Fuck the Police", became our anthems.

Beyond artistic dimensions, understanding these historical and cultural elements serves as a platform for social activism within the Black community, sparking dialogue and mobilizing collective action. In essence, they embody liberation and empowerment, reflecting the spirit of resistance and resilience within Black culture, an ever-evolving phenomenon that continues to unite communities worldwide, providing a voice for the voiceless and fostering a sense of identity and belonging among its participants.

Visual and Aesthetic Elements

Visual Metaphor

In collaboration with the design team, we crafted a visual metaphor that vividly captures the essence of the play, focusing on evoking emotion, spatial awareness, and sensory experience. The visual metaphor for our production of *Blood at the Root* was, “This play is like a steady, relentless march on a long, hot summer’s day.” All visual elements should embody this statement.

Design Elements

In crafting the design elements for the production, meticulous attention was paid to both the set and prop design. The production team had numerous discussions that considered Black culture within America and how those elements could tie into the scenic design. The platforms served as the foundation of the stage layout, enabling dynamic movement, and staging, while hanging panels, modeled after the architecture of the National Lynching Museum, evoked the weight of history and racial violence. The tree concept enveloped the entire theater, symbolizing the canopy under which the audience sat, with nooses ominously falling over them. The use of rope throughout the design served as a haunting reminder of past atrocities, emphasizing our collective responsibility for the future. One example of a culturally considerate prop includes the Chee-Wee’s, which replaced Cheetos as a subtle yet culturally significant detail that nodded to Louisiana culture, specifically New Orleans. Another example is the design for Raylynn’s class president campaign poster. It incorporated American colors, the Black Power fist and featured the Black American Liberation Flag. Integral to the production was the presence of the set designer at rehearsals, aiding in architecture and choreography, ensuring seamless integration with the action onstage. This collaboration with the scenic designer, a white-presenting cisgender

man, played a significant role in this process. When considering entrances and exits, the stepping routines and choreography, working with together became paramount in the development of innovative concepts and ideas. The working relationship among us demonstrated genuine allyship and care for various aspects of Black American culture – I truly appreciated and enjoyed this part of the process.

Much of the music for the show was produced specifically for the production. Different versions of the song, “Strange Fruit” by Billie Holiday, evolved to enhance its thematic resonance. Much of the design was heavily influenced by hip-hop, reflected the play’s movement and pacing, complementing the energy of the stepping performances. The costume design embraced the early 2000’s fashion, reflecting the essence of Black and hip-hop culture, with men wearing baggy jeans, oversized t-shirts, and combat boots which were also affiliated with stepping. The lighting design played a crucial role in setting the mood and atmosphere, using warm hues and lighting cues to accentuate moments of isolation and emphasize emotional depth. The mood/temperature for the show was warm, enhancing the overall atmosphere and inviting audiences into the world of the play. The production resonated with audiences long after the final performance through meticulous design choices and attention to detail, engaging them in a profound exploration of Black culture, history, and resilience.

Audience Experience

Emotional Impact and Intended Response

In plain terms, I wanted people to cry. I wanted to elicit a visceral response and make them uncomfortable. I sought to challenge their preconceptions and personal biases, prompting deep conversations about the show after it was over. The driving force behind the production was a desire to evoke raw emotions. I hoped this deep introspection would linger in their minds long

after the performance ended. This production was about pushing boundaries and sparking conversations that delved into uncomfortable truths about race, identity, and systemic injustice, leaving the audience with stirred thoughts and shifted perspectives. Ultimately, the goal was to entertain and catalyze meaningful dialogue and inspire action towards a more equitable and just society. The power of theatre aims to ignite empathy, foster understanding, and galvanize individuals to confront the realities of the world around them. Art should convey something bold, prompting viewers to reflect on the boldness they witness on stage.

Interactive Elements

At the top of the show, the sound cue, “*Please rise for the National Anthem*” commenced, and the performers commanded the audience to stand, but many were initially confused after hearing the Black National Anthem. Seamlessly integrated into the opening and curtain speech, akin to classroom announcements, it demanded the audience’s participation in this symbolic act of displaying American nationalism. This deliberate choice immediately immersed everyone in the world of the play, setting the stage for an unpredictable and profound experience. This pivotal moment aligns directly with the concept of dismantling the prevailing system. The phrase “Please rise for the National Anthem” carries ingrained expectations in the United States. Nevertheless, we consciously defied this societal norm by opting for the Black National Anthem. This seemingly small yet potent gesture at the play’s outset can be viewed as a form of performative activism, reminiscent of the “take a knee movement” in the NFL. Images from the production, capture this moment as the cast placed their hands over their hearts in normal salute to the anthem, they then raised up the Black Power fist during the remainder of the anthem, (refer to Appendix N, p.160).

Rehearsal Process

Table Work and Script Analysis with Actors

The individual sessions with the actors focused on discussing their characters and gaining a deeper understanding to their character's contribution to the story. Rather than starting with table reads, we spent the first week away from the table, engaging in movement and rhythm-based exercises. This approach aimed to cultivate a sense of comfort and exploration with physicality, which was integral to the essence of the play. The emphasis on movement provided a dynamic layer to the production, infusing it with energy and vitality. Following this immersive exploration, the focus shifted to script readings during the subsequent week at the table. After each scene, I paused to facilitate discussions, offer guidance, and address questions. This iterative process allowed the performers to internalize the script through oral and auditory repetition, this method facilitated a smoother transition to being off book by the following week.

Opting to diverge from the conventional sequence of starting with table reads then blocking, allowed us to prioritize rhythm, movement, physicality, and kinesthetic response from earlier in the process. This prioritization proved to be an essential component of the rehearsal process, aligning closely with the demands of the play, and fostering a deeper connection between the actors, their characters, and the overarching narrative.

Collaboration Among the Performers

As we brainstormed ideas to enhance the storytelling experience, the concept of incorporating a group ritual emerged. The performers actively contributed suggestions, with one particularly memorable idea arising organically during rehearsal – telling “yo mama jokes” on stage. Though not initially scripted, the “yo mama jokes” were referenced throughout the story, providing an opportunity to integrate them into the narrative seamlessly. When suggested, I

embraced it wholeheartedly, recognizing its potential to add depth and authenticity to the performance. Despite initial surprise from the group, I encouraged them to explore the concept further, eager to witness the outcome. The rehearsal session unfolded lively and spontaneously, reminiscent of the atmosphere on the set of the rap battle television show, Wild 'N Out. With the performers gathered in a circle, I facilitated the playful exchange, guiding them to breathe together to foster unity and cohesion before beginning this activity.

We proceeded and the “yo mama jokes” flowed freely and were entirely improvised which elicited genuine laughter and camaraderie among everyone present. This impromptu addition proved to be a perfect fit for the choreopoem format, which often incorporates elements of folklore and tradition. Our discovery and playing within the “yo mama jokes” were directly related to the Re-Educate section of ADR because of the utilization of Black Acting Methods - Ritual Poetic Drama. This addition and use of the method enhanced the storytelling, which aided the performance and provided a connection to the audience that was not available before. Just as hand games and nursery rhymes enhance other choreopoems like, *for colored girls who have considered suicide/when the rainbow is enuf*, the “yo mama jokes” brought a sense of cultural richness and authenticity to our production, resonating with audiences and performers alike.

Rehearsal Techniques and Methods

We drew on various methodologies throughout the rehearsal process to create a rich and transformative experience for performers and audience members. To shape our composition on stage and enhance our visual storytelling, we employed Viewpoints, focusing on exploring the physicality of space and character through kinesthetic response and repetition. This included walking, sitting, and standing in character while creating awareness of their relationships to the architectural elements. We worked on how the architecture of the space and world around them

shaped their movements and gestures, incorporating activities like the *Shabooyah* game to deepen further our connection to rhythm, ritual, and impulse exploration. The most repeated methods used during rehearsal included Black Acting Methods – Ritual Poetic Drama. This practice infused our rehearsals with cultural depth and emotional resonance and offered crossover with our other technique, Trauma-Informed Directing. The Trauma-Informed Directing technique sensitively navigated intense subject matter in a way that pushed for self-advocacy and well-being for all. Every rehearsal began with check-ins, fostering a supportive environment where everyone’s emotional state was acknowledged, and ended with check-outs, providing closure and reflection. Additionally, these practices were essential in ensuring the well-being of our ensemble, aligning with my belief that a director’s foremost duty is to care for their actors. Directors should recognize that an actor’s personal experiences can profoundly influence their artistic work. It is always imperative to hold space for actors as human beings and not treat them as machines who are forcibly willing themselves into characters or moments without consideration of their mental state.

*“It ain’t racist to say faggot.
Well, it is somethin’.
You ain’t spose to say it.”¹⁵*

During our character development meetings, we discussed the comfortability surrounding the word *faggot*. I had no intention of omitting the word; as a derogatory term, I wanted to pay careful attention to it while diving into its importance. I believe that words, especially ones such as these, should never be omitted from a play because more than anything, the playwright’s intent on using specific language is vital to the storytelling; it is not supposed to be comfortable. In the play, the characters use the line frequently during the scene where rumors are spread about

¹⁵ Dominique Morisseau, *Blood at the Root* (Concord Theatricals, 2018), 51.

the fight. Some characters know the word is inappropriate but speak it nonchalantly, void of malice.

By examining the period, I was able to gather the cultural shaping of the word *faggot*, keeping in mind the relevancy of the South, hip-hop, Black culture, and identity. We talked about the cultural aspect of the word as it relates to the play. I drew upon my experiences as a southern Black woman growing up in the early 2000's, where this word felt vastly different from what I know today. In our discussion, we compared the word, *faggot*, to that of compared it to the word *retarded* and *nigga* – considering the context in which these words were used during that time. I consider these to be “in-group” words that are socially acceptable within certain groups but considered offensive or derogatory when used by others – many of us during our discussion had experienced the use of these words in the “in-group” format so many of us could relate to what the play was trying to convey.

Through qualitative and ethnographic research in a high school setting, CJ Pascoe examined how American high school boys used the terms *faggot* and *fag* during the early 2000's. Pascoe's work, culminating in a 2007 book titled *Dude, You're a Fag: Masculinity and Sexuality in High School*, suggested that these boys used the “fag epithet” as a way to assert their masculinity by claiming that another boy is less masculine; this, in their eyes, makes him a *fag*, and its usage suggests that it is less about sexual orientation and more about gender. One-third of the boys in Pascoe's study claimed that they would not call a homosexual peer a *fag*, leading Pascoe to argue that the use of *fag* in this setting as a form of gender policing, in which boys ridicule others who fail at masculinity, heterosexual prowess, or strength. Because boys do not want to be labeled a *fag*, they hurl the insult at another person. Pascoe felt the “fag identity” does not constitute a static identity attached to the boy receiving the insult. Instead, *fag* is a fluid

identity that boys strive to avoid, often by naming another as the *fag*. As Pascoe asserts, “the fag identity” is fluid enough that boys police their behavior out of fear of having the “fag identity” permanently adhered definitive enough so that boys recognize *fag* behavior and strive to avoid it. Pascoe’s work gave analytic data that backed up our own experiences. All her findings were synonymous with many of our experiences and speculations regarding the use of the word and the intentions within the story.

The most unforgettable moment in practicing Trauma-Informed Directing for *Blood at the Root* was regarding the nooses and our conversation around it. I led the discussion, along with input from the scenic designer who was responsible for tying them. It is just a rope until it is not. The act of tying the noose became a profound moment in our process. Seeing it lying on the floor in front of us was haunting and many of us had never seen one in person before. As we shared our stories, some began to cry. Some sat silently. Some contemplating the moments that brought us here. It was the highest amount of soulful catharsis I encountered in our rehearsal process. You could feel the energy in our circle. In the end, we stood and did collective breaths together, held hands, and gave our final release. I initially was not prepared for this conversation. In my rehearsal log, dated October 11, 2023, I discuss my first experience with the nooses and how that affected my preparation for our group discussion (see Appendix H, p.137).

On the first day on our feet, we had an overall discussion about intimacy practice. Furthermore, we performed warmups, practiced asking for consent, and engaged with each other. In addition to these tools, we utilized the stop light system, which is a method that imagines the boundaries of consent in a stoplight format, (see Appendix J, p.145). Other notable techniques I utilized included the sacred circle practices from the Hendricks Method – “Spirituality and the Circle”, and the Hip-Hop Theatre Initiative, both from Black Acting Methods.

“Let the circle go unbroken, for it is the circle that connects us all and keeps the energy flowing so that it sees no end. The circle, which is a fortress in African thought, is a symbol of unity, inclusiveness, centering, and completion.”¹⁶

Additionally, I often utilized circles to create uniform energy within the ensemble. We would begin and end our rehearsals in circles. Sometimes, the circles had energy that may involve movement, clapping, or vocalizing. Other times, they were silent, meditative, or even spiritual. On a particular day, I recall performing a “laying on of hands,” a ritual involving the practice of literally placing hands to transfer sacred or healing energy from one body to another. On this day, we had a strenuous rehearsal. It was a long day, and many people seemed irritated or focused on things that had nothing to do with rehearsal or the play. For our check-out, I felt that we needed something to help cleanse our energy before leaving rehearsal. After receiving consent for this activity, everyone stood in a circle, with eyes closed taking deep breaths as they relaxed into a neutral stance. I went around the circle and placed my hands on each person’s shoulders, I would take a deep breath, and then release good energy into them. This ritualistic approach extended beyond the physical realm and encompassed moments of spiritual reflection and ancestral acknowledgment. Through these practices, we cultivated an environment of trust and creativity, empowering our ensemble to explore the depths of their craft and connect profoundly. The incorporation of ritual resonated and provided a moment of healing that many of us witnessed. J’aiLa Price, the actor who played Raylynn, recounted a profound impact she experienced during the rehearsal process.

“Specifically, within the opening monologue, I had trouble portraying Raylynn’s reflection about her mom. The mention of her mother’s death initially felt out of place to me, and I found myself skimming over it, afraid to confront the emotions it evoked. However, R’Myni encouraged me to delve into this aspect of Raylynn’s character and tap into my own emotions and experiences. Moreover, she could feel my apprehension and squared away time to work through the monologue. I

¹⁶ Tia M. Shaffer, “The Hendricks Method” in *Black Acting Methods: Critical Approaches*, ed. Sharrell D. Lockett and Tia M. Shaffer (New York: Routledge, 2017), 28.

dreaded this moment. Why? Because I knew exactly where she was going to lead me—and I was not sure if I was prepared to go there. Nonetheless, I persisted. R'Myni gently asked how I would feel if I were in Raylynn's situation and had experienced a similar loss. I dreaded dwelling on painful memories that hit too close to home. Sadly, this scenario is all too common, with many experiencing the sudden or tragic loss of a loved one. Although Raylynn does not explicitly mention how her mother died in this section, it is revealed that she was shot on her porch in a drive-by, a detail later revealed by Raylynn's brother, De'Andre."¹⁷

At this moment, we utilized Stanislavsky's "Magic If" as a gateway point, for the performer to access her Bone and Blood memory. Through our continued conversation, we proceeded with care according to her boundaries, and she reached a new level. Through exploring her impulses, thoughts, and the physical sensations she felt, she began to freely embody the character without thinking too much. Despite initially hesitating, she understood that portraying Raylynn's life authentically required her to explore the character more deeply. We scheduled a one-on-one rehearsal so that she would feel more comfortable in her exploration. I encouraged her to release her emotions rather than hold them back, which led to a heartfelt release of tears. She could barely get through the monologue, but I encouraged her to complete the monologue utilizing her breath to release the emotions with each line. Ultimately, I said, "Now that you have addressed the root of hesitation, we can scale it back." Noting that the goal was not to cry every time she performed but to allow her to see that she could still convey that character's emotions truthfully while being aware and present with the affect this moment has on her as the actor. This process helped her embrace a newfound confidence in her abilities while also uncovering a moment of healing for herself or a past ancestor. While the experiences of our work can be therapeutic, it is not therapy, and some things should remain personal. So, whatever she encountered, released, or gained was her business, I was just happy and honored to witness

¹⁷ Price, J'aiLa, "Bedeviled Beauty: My Journey Through White American Theater" (2024). University of New Orleans Theses and Dissertations

such a profound moment. Based on her experience, it can be seen as truth that a healing element took place on a profound level. Her experience shows us that the use of these methodologies can lead to a more significant impact than she would have experienced if she had focused on only utilizing the eurocentric methods alone.

Together, all elements of ADR aided in her breakthrough. She acknowledged an issue in her practice, realizing she was only exposed to “standard” eurocentric methods. By making the conscious choice to seek other methods, she dismantled a system that suppressed her talents and created an opportunity within the rehearsal process to explore freely. Through Re-education and learning more theories, techniques, and methods this to not only enhanced her performance capabilities but provided her a space to feel “safe” enough to exist authentically and the confidence to step outside her comfort zone.

Another apparent healing moment in the process was after enduring issues with the light and sound system, which created chaos during one of our tech rehearsals. The sound designer had to rebuild the entire show twice after the system crashed. And oddly enough, plugging into the sound system would affect our lighting system – two things that should have nothing to do with each other yet were subsequently causing problems. Along with this, the scenic designer expressed intense uneasiness and difficulty in tying and rigging the nooses while on the catwalk. He mentioned that things far away from him kept falling without reason, lights would blow out, and other strange events happened while he was up there which led him to leave the project alone for the day. I recall him joking about how scared he was and stating, “Please let the ancestors know, I’m one of the good ones and that the nooses were only for the play.” I laughed and relished in how his involvement in the production had developed into a strong connection to Black culture, but I then realized that he may be on to something. After discussing

these issues and sharing his experience, I decided that something needed to be done. And that something was a cleansing of the space and speaking to ancestors both African and Indigenous and anyone else who may have been present in the space – this felt necessary. There seemed to be forces working against what we were trying to do and trying to achieve. Subsequently, before rehearsal that night, I began walking the space, praying, speaking words of life, and touching every area of the theatre – a laying on of hands and demonstration of Nommo in action. As a result, from then on, our rehearsals and performances went without issue, and the cast introduced the idea of prayer as part of their pre-show ritual.

Conclusion

Some may dismiss this as mere rhetoric, but to those individuals, I say they have yet to experience the profound impact of Black Theatre. In my view, *Blood at the Root* unlocked profound healing, both for the artists and audience members. Each night after the show, audience members would linger, eager to engage with the performers and share their own experiences. Many departed with tears glistening in their eyes, not from sadness but from a deep sense of acknowledgment, understanding, and empathetic connection.

The play explores the complexities of racial tension and its impact on identity, challenging viewers to confront their sense of self. It serves as a medium through which individuals grapple with where they stand regarding their identity. By fostering these introspective journeys, *Blood at the Root* prompts audiences to confront uncomfortable truths and engage in meaningful dialogue about race, identity, and belonging.

Witnessing the characters navigate these challenges resonated deeply with viewers, sparking moments of reflection and empathy. Audience members did not just shed tears; they experienced a range of emotions, from contemplation to joy, and from joy to catharsis, they

confronted the realities of racial dynamics portrayed onstage. Ultimately, the play's ability to provoke such visceral reactions speaks to its power as a catalyst for healing and understanding. By providing a space for audiences to engage with themes of identity and racial tension, *Blood at the Root* transcended the boundaries of traditional theatre, inviting viewers on a journey of self-discovery and collective introspection.

Chapter 3

Yeah! What Queen Latifah Said.... *U.N.I.T.Y.*

In the intricate staging of *Blood at the Root*, we were guided by my conceptual framework, which is rooted in the essence of Black Theatre's healing potential. At its core lies the concept of ADR: *Acknowledge, Dismantle, Re-Educate*. This methodology served as our compass in navigating the complexities of anti-Blackness and nurturing the healing that grew from this framework.

As we moved into the rehearsal process, personal stories were shared, reflections were pondered, and understanding blossomed. These discussions became the lifeblood of our creative process, infusing our work with authenticity, depth, and resonance. Forging bonds, building trust and a promoting a supportive and collaborative environment emerged, propelling our production. Exploring the elements of hip-hop, Black sororities and fraternities, stepping, and African ritualistic elements, our production became a platform for examining diverse cultural experiences and perspectives. Through these conversations, we humanized each other, breaking down barriers and forging bonds of trust within our cast and crew. Discussing our thoughts on the state of American theatre within our school and surrounding community brought about a stark acknowledgment of a glaring reality: the lack of education surrounding Black Theatre, specifically within our department. During our open season auditions, there was noticeable absence of white students auditioning for *Blood at the Root*. This presented a broader lack of understanding about the inclusive nature of roles within Black Theatre or what Black Theatre "looks like". Some of the white cast members voiced that they did not know they could audition for the play until they received an offer for callbacks. It became evident that misconceptions were apparent, and the hindering broader participation warranted a call to action.

In response, we set out to dismantle these barriers, determined to increase awareness within our theatrical community. After the casting was complete, one of the cast members created a short documentary for the production. This short film highlighted the importance of telling this story, emphasizing the diverse cast, the significance of the Jena 6, and our thoughts on what the show means to us. This film was shown in classes and shared on social media as one of the promotional materials for the production and encouraged students to go see the show.

As our rehearsal discussions progressed, one of the white actors shared with us that he was from Jena, Louisiana – the same small town where the actual Jena 6 events took place. He stated that many people in the town still do not speak about the incident and that, for many, what sparked the fight is still not apparent. The actor stated that his father worked at the high school at the time of the actual incident but could not talk much about what was going on. He went on to share with us that a fire may have been related to the incident but was ruled an accident and just coincidental. He was only a child when the incident took place and could barely remember the events, but his sharing gave us all a deeper insight into what it was like during that time. It led us to a deeper connection and made the performers more empathetic towards the town. It is easy to associate locations with feelings of discontent. However, hearing how the actor grew up there, remembering seeing the protests and sharing his upbringing brought a layer of humanization that I did not expect. Removed were the preconceived notions that many of us may have carried about the people from that town because here was our beloved castmate, who was the exact opposite of those biases. These were all small steps towards dismantling preconceptions surrounding Black Theatre and its purpose in our community as well as how our biases shape us individually and how those biases translate to our work. The idea of dismantling was taken a step

further when we decided to form a series of community and student engagement events that aligned with the themes and structure of *Blood at the Root*.

Central to our mission was the imperative execution of re-education — providing opportunities for learning and growth for our actors and the wider community. Our engagement events provided new ground for acquiring fresh insights and honing new techniques and practices. As aforementioned in Chapter One, change begins at the community level. Actors explored character approaches, drawing from newfound knowledge to enrich their performances by engaging with professional theatre makers from the community. This re-education process extended beyond the stage, fostering self-advocacy, and creating a haven for artistic exploration. Other engagement events catered to the university students included the pre-show poetry event, Verses & Vibes. This event partnered with students from the Creative Writing Workshop, which offered interdisciplinary cross-collaboration among the students in different areas of the arts. We invited, Sha'condria “iCon” Sibley, a well-known Black poet from the community to speak to the students, listen to their poetry and other lyrical pieces, and receive feedback.

The most significant event was the Dream Big Black Theatre Night, which was in partnership with the André Cailloux Center for Performing Arts and Cultural Justice (ACC), a multidisciplinary, community-centered art, cultural, and organic intellectual center dedicated to freedom, flourishing, and the promotion of justice through the arts, community engagement, dialogue, and sustainable arts enterprise development for Black makers. We held a pre-show community discussion with Black Theatre educators on the intersectionality between art and activism. A matinee performance of *Blood at the Root* followed the pre-show discussion. After the show, there was a group toast and reception where we had an opportunity for everyone to talk and engage with one another. These engagements, along with other initiatives like community

partnerships and pre-show discussions, underscored our commitment to fostering dialogue and connection within the community.

Overall, we received overwhelming support from the community alongside our department. After learning we were invited to perform, the department supported all our endeavors, including a commitment to send the show to Texas for the Region 6, Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival, (KCACTF). Along with the department, the administration was also supportive, with attendance from esteemed figures including the college's dean, provost, university president, and notable alums with successful careers in theatre and film – this level of support was unlike anything I had witnessed in previous years. Ultimately, incorporating these elements into our production facilitated a profound journey of discovery and mutual understanding. By exploring culture, identity, and shared experiences, *Blood at the Root* became more than a play — it became a catalyst for meaningful connections, dialogue, and healing, both on and off the stage.

Data and Key Findings

I conducted a survey to provide an array of data to support my key findings. The survey encompassed 95 participants, all of whom attended the *Blood at the Root* production. The demographic breakdown revealed that 62.5% of the audience identified as white, 27.1% as Black, 6.3% as Latino/Hispanic, and 1% as Asian or Asian American. The age distribution ranged from under 18 to 65+, with the majority falling within the 18 to 24 range, followed by the age range 35 to 44.



Figure 4 - Survey Demographics: Race/Ethnicity



Figure 3 - Survey Demographics: Age

When queried about whether the play contributed to a deeper understanding of their own identity or the identities of others, an overwhelming 81% of respondents agreed (Strongly Agree or Agree), corroborating the theory that such works enhance empathy and foster better understanding. Figure 5 displays comments left by participants that underscored this sentiment.

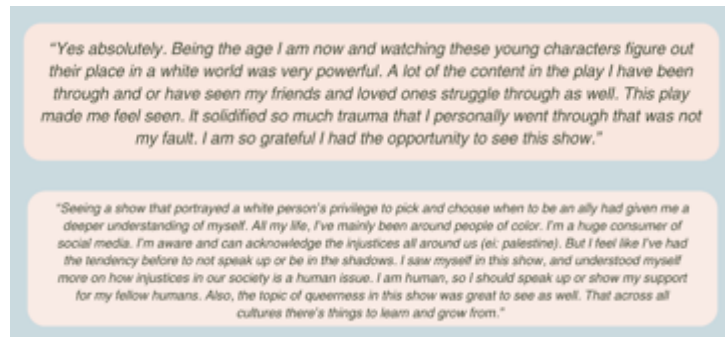


Figure 5 - Audience Testimonials

In response to the effectiveness of social justice theatre, like *Blood at the Root*, in raising awareness about racial issues and promoting dialogue, 52.6% found it highly effective—as shown in Figure 6. This supports the notion that even exposure to such work initiates the first step of ADR, acknowledging the issue at hand.

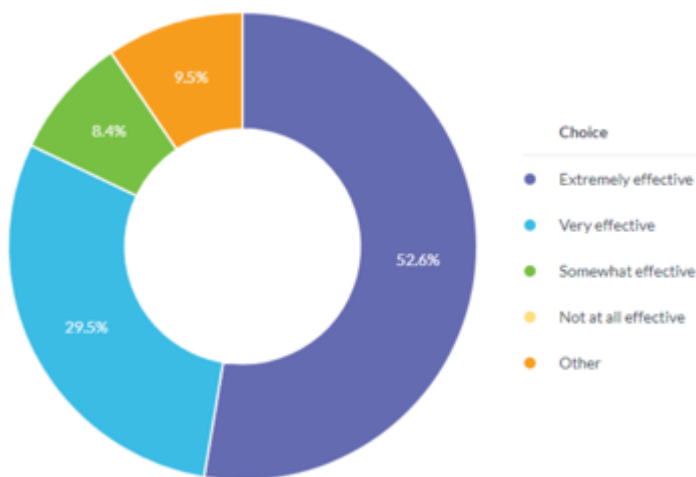


Figure 6 - Social Justice Theatre Awareness Effectiveness

When asked about the effect the production had regarding the drive to actively engage and support social justice initiatives, 19 respondents answered negatively. However, further examination revealed that 11 of the 19 clarified that they were not moved to “do work in social justice” because they were already engaged in social justice work and felt that the production reinforced their commitment to activism.

Participants were asked to describe their experience attending *Blood at the Root*, with the top three responses being Thought-provoking, Educational, and Empowering. These descriptors align with the essence of ADR, as the play stimulated reflection, imparted knowledge, and empowered individuals to challenge oppressive notions and ideas – this data is displayed in Figure 7.

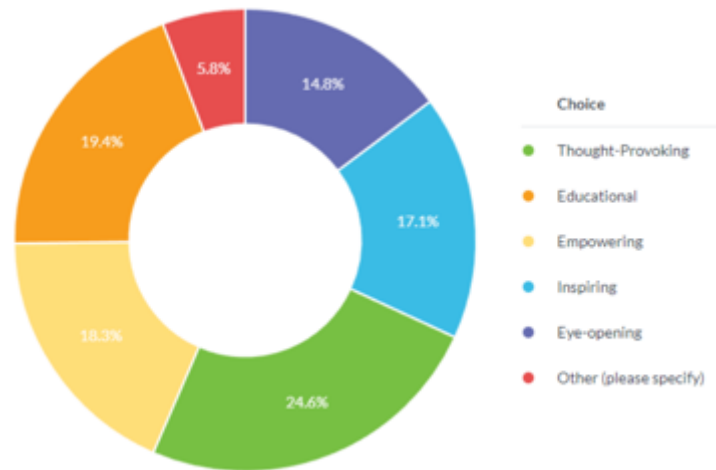


Figure 7 - Survey Question: Audience Experience

The majority (78.9%) agreed that Black Theatre has the potential to contribute to societal change by addressing issues of equity and representation, affirming the transformative power of such work, as demonstrated in Figure 8.

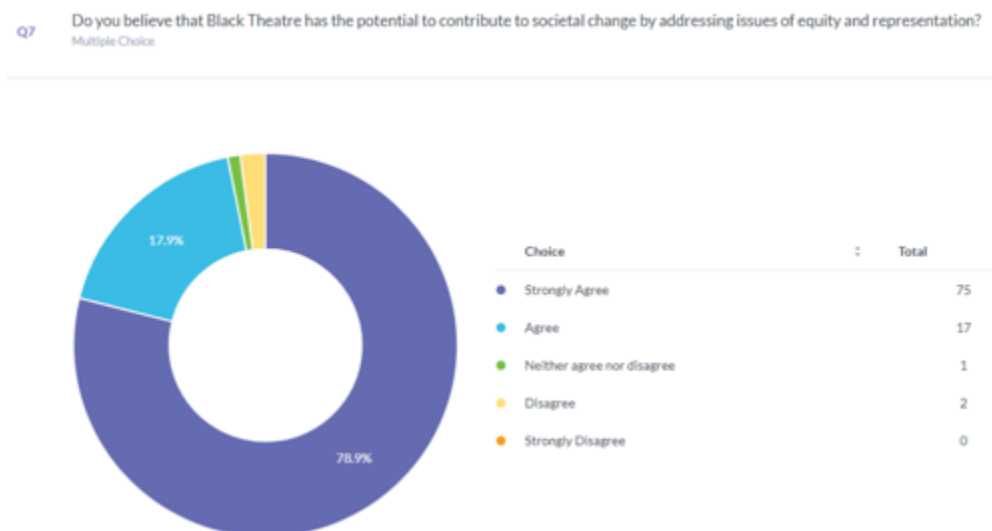


Figure 8 - Survey Question: Black Theatre's Potential for Societal Change

One respondent’s perspective on whether Black Theatre solely tackles issues of race prompted insightful reflection. Their notion of the “normalcy” of white reinforces the need to

change such ideology. The participant's statement acknowledges that if one believes that Black Theatre *only* deals with race, it limits the multifaceted nature, thus, attributing to anti-Black belief systems – their response is depicted in Figure 9.

*Black stories, like any story, can be about any topic or issue.
Answering yes would strongly suggest that white theatre is
"normal" theatre, and that is a concept that must be abolished.
Participant: White, Man, 18-24*

Figure 9 - Survey Participant Quote

In summary, because we know the healing power of Black Theatre combats anti-Blackness, utilizing the *Acknowledge, Dismantle, Re-Educate* framework creates a better environment for cultivating Nommo. Therefore, it is true that by employing this conceptual framework, Black Theatre becomes a catalyst for healing. This collective healing of actors through process and audience through viewing creates a gumbo pot filled with healing. Not only are they healing themselves, but they are actively healing past and future generations of trauma that would have continued to pass on through their lineage. It is through the ADR framework that in applying it to narrative storytelling, we can focus on a specific set of principles and methodologies that cultivate an environment that is optimal for healing – this process to get to the healing, is what creates lasting change.

The healing is notable in the practical application and methods of critical approaches in the performance process. Healing is not only found in the message or moral of the stories being told, but through the methods of the performers, directors, and creatives – all shape this path toward a better future. Therefore, the play does not have to focus solely on ancestors, generational issues, or trauma. It can also celebrate joy, love, and hope — all aspects of the Black experience. We often get wrapped up in the idea of “Black trauma” or “trauma porn” and

call for more “joy” onstage. However, the cathartic releases, emotional evocation, and healing that occur when being part of Black Theatre are joyous experiences, no matter if the story itself is not a joyful one – the joy comes from the journey and experience of the art. Reframing and reflecting on the past does not perpetuate a cycle of oppression for our community; it allows us to understand it better, challenges our biases, and forces us to think critically about our personal choices. The delivery method and execution of the story are what matter most. If all performers devote their souls to the work, then the Nommo will resonate at the forefront. When infusing deep care into the process, the benefits of Black Theatre are life changing.

An important point to note is that I am using ADR to heal anti-Blackness; however, this method could be utilized in any form of social justice theatre specifically catered to marginalized groups, including BIPOC, people with disabilities, and the LGBTQ+ community. In Black theatre, we call the shifting forceful energy Nommo. Some refer to the feeling as energy, divine intervention, or the spirit of God. It does not matter what it is called because it activates within *any* work. It is the evocation of the senses, transcending our souls to another plane. It is the ability to use our words, to wield a world into being.

Art is subjective and based on personal experiences, so there may be outliers or those who do not believe this work to be true. However, for those who have experienced it and felt its effects, it is difficult to express and explain in words. No, seeing or being a part of a work like this may not make someone go out and be the poster child for activism and social justice. It indeed may not immediately change someone’s unjust bias or undo harm from years of encountering anti-Blackness, but the point is that this way of working plants a seed, and that seed will continue to grow over time. It starts conversations and introduces new ideas. While it may reinforce someone’s already open feelings, it still has an evocative effect on them, and this is

what matters. When approached in my conceptual framework, Black Theatre causes a change on the inside, regardless of how small or apparent. The fight for justice is not a sprint but a long marathon involving endurance and the encouragement and support of all trying to reach the same destination. This method does just that. It was apparent in *Blood at the Root*, and it can also work for other productions, no matter the issue, group of people, or size of company. This method can be used for healing at any level. Whether we are attacking more complex issues like systemic and institutionalized racism in education or more small-scale victories like focusing on better communication dynamics within a new local theatre company, this method works, and we can use the art to heal.

Chapter 4

Looking Back and Moving Forward

Reflecting on my process of *Blood at the Root*, I would change nothing. In directing and creating theatre, every element and moment is meant to happen – it is the essence of live performance. Aside from directing, I loved being able to choreograph the dances and practice more with intimacy and cultural sensitivity. The audience reactions each night was rewarding, and the impact of the production surpassed my expectations. I am overjoyed and pleased with the process and the final product. I am beyond grateful to everyone involved in the production, as it was one of the most incredible experiences I have had.

Throughout this process and my time in the program, I have solidified my confidence as a director, choreographer, writer, producer, educator and so on. I am not ashamed of the many hats I wear because now, I wear them proudly upon my head like a crown. I have always been ready to grow, experiment, and hone my skills. I have always been ready to learn and try new things but kept myself boxed in. Nevertheless, I never allowed a lack of resources or funds to hinder my goals. For many, the experience of being Black in a predominantly white institution is not always positive. However, for me, it pushed my abilities to new heights and allowed me to explore art in my own way regarding my cultural heritage. I tailored my experience to my needs, learning to exist unapologetically as a Black woman in a profession that is inherently anti-Black. I was able to amplify the voices of Black students and mentor some, recognizing the importance of representation in our department. Despite the lack of Black faculty, I saw it as an opportunity to set an example for those coming after me. Courage, tenacity, and valor are all things I learned but were not taught by my professors or in a class setting. These were learned through practice, trust, determination, and refusing to settle for less than I deserved.

Another aspect of the process I enjoyed was the opportunity to collaborate with numerous community members. Working with two Black female designers was an invaluable experience. The community engagement events we hosted allowed me to connect with many Black professionals, alums, artists, and community members who offered their support. This sense of community fostered by *Blood at the Root* is rare, and it was truly gratifying.

Throughout the process of *Blood at the Root*, I witnessed a profound reverence for my ancestral heritage. Beyond the pain and genetic predispositions, I realized that these were not the only traits I inherited. I discovered a legacy of resilience, talent, wisdom, and divine guidance from my predecessors. I established an altar in my home and adorned it with known and unknown images and belongings of my ancestors. The process of BATR brought healing to my heart, and it helped my ancestors find comfort, too. The Bone and Blood memory was just as present for me in this process as it was for the performers.

The Nommo force and energy we brought forth cultivated a highly spiritual environment. I prayed to God for healing and transformation to echo across the theater each time we came together. I invited ancestral spirits to witness and engage with the work, and if they were not interested, I asked them to leave in peace. The spiritual connection aligns with the overall progress of the play because there were no major technical issues or unexpected setbacks. With this, I knew the heavens were working in our favor. BATR kept me going when all I wanted to do was give up. It gave me a space for authenticity, self-expression, and cultural exploration. Remarkably, I even experienced physical healing, noticing improvements in my knee post-op that seemed impossible before the rehearsal process began. While words may fall short in capturing the depth of this experience, I am confident that *Blood at the Root* had an otherworldly impact on my soul. I am grateful to God for the gift of Black Theatre and all who

engage, teach, and learn of its power because, without it, I would not be here nor be the artist that I am today.

I firmly believe in valuing the process over the product. The journey's significance outweighs the result, although I strive for excellence in both. One of the most rewarding aspects of the *Blood at the Root* process was witnessing the growth of the students I had worked with for years. From teaching beginning acting classes to collaborating on performances, seeing their development in confidence, ability, and execution filled me with joy. The growth of the Black students was significant to me because of the lack of representation and guidance in our program. Witnessing their growth and commitment to Black Theatre assured me we were moving in the right direction, offering hope for future improvements. A friend once told me, "Wherever you go, excellence follows." And I am finally beginning to believe in that sentiment and myself. I began this program with feelings of inadequacy compared to my white counterparts, as if they were part of a secret club inaccessible to me. However, I now leave this program with no doubt in my capabilities. Dare I say I am one of the best – not out of arrogance, but as an affirmation to myself of my hard work and dedication. I have learned that by embracing my authentic, Southern, Black self and centering my work through the Black lens, I have not been pigeonholed but able to soar. This Black Theatre experience has healed me in ways I never knew I needed. This journey allowed me to meet the ones I was meant to meet and forget the ones who meant no good.

Chapter 5

Resonating Truths: The Essence of Black Theatre

Black Theatre is magic. Black Theatre is powerful. Black Theatre heals. Black Theatre empowers. Black Theatre is evocative. Black Theatre is eye-opening. Black Theatre transforms. Black Theatre is thought-provoking. Black Theatre is fun. Black Theatre is inspiring. Black Theatre is ritual. Black Theatre is ancestral. Black Theatre elevates. Black Theatre celebrates. Black Theatre liberates. Black Theatre is haunting. Black Theatre uplifts. Black Theatre is Black Joy. Black Theatre transcends. Black Theatre is an inheritance. Black Theatre is educational. Black Theatre is raw. Black Theatre nurtures. Black Theatre affirms. Black Theatre is compelling. Black Theatre is moving. Black Theatre resonates. Black Theatre unifies. Black Theatre captivates. Black Theatre awakens. Black Theatre revolutionizes. Black Theatre matters. These are not opinions but facts I know to be true. Acknowledge these truths. Dismantle the falsehoods. And Re-Educate the minds of every generation, in hopes that we leave a better theatrical world for our successors to explore. In the words of the character Asha, "*That's all I got to say about that.*"

Ashé

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Appendix A

Samuel French Publishing Edition

Blood at the Root

by Dominique Morisseau
Muh-ree-se-oh

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|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

CHARACTERS

RAYLYNN
TORIA
ASHA
JUSTIN
COLIN
DE'ANDRE
PRINCIPAL MILLER
DA
STUDENTS

This story is inspired by a series of incidents, media reporting, and social action in Jena, Louisiana in 2007.

I dedicate this work to the resilient young men who make up the Jena 6.

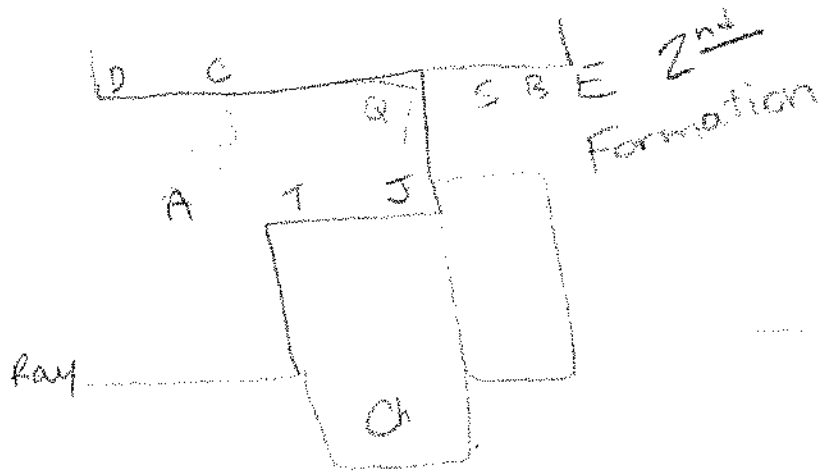
AUTHOR'S NOTES

This play is built on the idea of devised production. What this means is that the work on the page is really only half, and the ensemble is intended, along with the director, to put their own signature on the work in a more defined and pronounced way. The ensemble builds the pictures (i.e. the tree) out of their bodies or creative maneuvering.

The movement that De'Andre does can be dance or other inspired movement. But Hip Hop inspired, always.

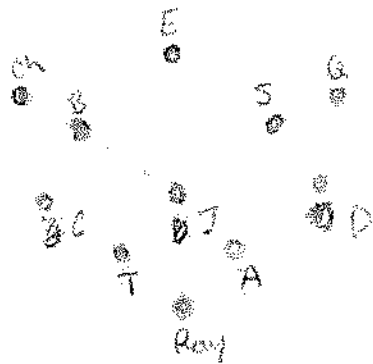
Most importantly, the ensemble of miscellaneous characters (i.e. Students, Principal, DA, Student Body, etc) can be assigned as suggested in the parenthesis (based on smaller productions), or reassigned as a larger and more ensemble cast. The only thing that is pertinent is that the main scenes and monologues assigned to the core students (Raylynn, De'Andre, Colin, Justin, Asha, and Toria) remain intact for the story to work. All places where their names are written in parenthesis can be reassigned as needed.

Also important: The language of this play should drive. There is a rhythm to it that flows and moves as poetry. As much as possible, there should be little breaks between lines or within passages of text. Let it flow.



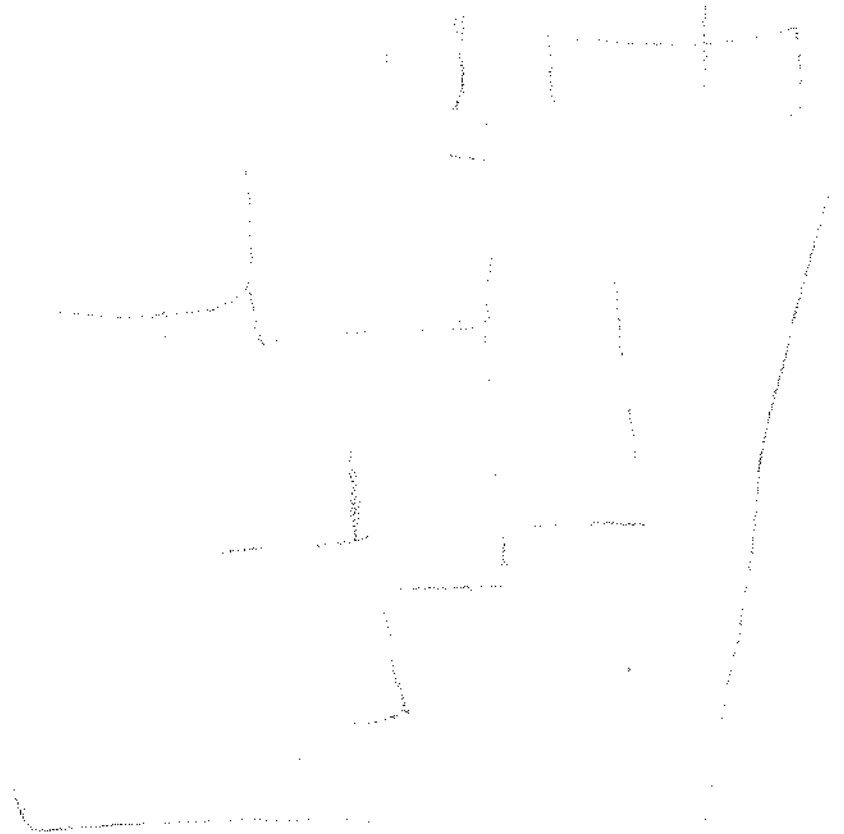
300 T

1st Formation



Ray = A B S D T J A G C

3rd Formation



4th Formation

maybe
height
Accadicut?

step # 1

The Student Body

(An arrangement of multi-character voices. Performed as a continuous piece of text, but staged as separate characters. The following lines can be distributed as suggested, or re-assigned to various ensemble members of the cast.)

STUDENT (RAYLYNN).

It's a hot day in October

x 2

STUDENT (TORIA).

Hot hot

STUDENT (ASHA).

Real hot

STUDENT (JUSTIN).

Melt butter on the street - hot

— rhythm change

STUDENT (COLIN).

Walkin' over coals with bare feet hot

STUDENT (DE'ANDRE).

Heads noddin' to a hype beat hot

STUDENT (RAYLYNN).

It's just hot

STUDENT — Toria

Hot hot

STUDENT (FRANK).

"We ain't got no race problems here"

— rhythm change

ALL STUDENTS.

NOT

Add ensemble

STUDENT (ASHA).

"This ain't 'bout what you thank" -

ALL STUDENTS.

NOT

STUDENT (ASHA).

Asha

"This was all just a prank" -

STUDENT (RAYLYNN).

All students

NOT

STUDENT (JUSTIN).

It's just hot

STUDENT (RAYLYNN).

Hot hot

*STUDENT (TORIA).

Anger rising in your throat hot

STUDENT (ASHA).

Emma

Belly feelin' full of smoke hot

STUDENT (COLIN).

So frustrated you could choke hot

STUDENT (DE'ANDRE).

It's just hot

ALL STUDENTS.

Hot hot

STUDENT (FRANK).

Frank

Air so still there ain't no breeze

STUDENT (ASHA).

Seth

Unmowed grass up to your knees

STUDENT (ASHA).

Emma

Books and papers and eighty degrees

ALL STUDENTS.

All white students

Only Whites sit at this tree

*STUDENT (COLIN).

Whole town stuck in 1960

STUDENT (RAYLYNN).

Ain't the way it ought to be

STUDENT (FRANK).

Principal

But that's the way it is

STUDENT (~~ASHA~~). De'Andre
 Ain't the way it ought to be
 STUDENT (~~ASHA~~). DA.
 But that's the way it is
 STUDENT (DE'ANDRE).
 Until something's gotta give
 STUDENT (~~COLIN~~). Emma/Jessica
 'Til then we just stay hot
 STUDENT (COLIN).
 Too hot
 ALL STUDENTS.
 Hot hot
 STUDENT (DE'ANDRE). Seth/Noah
 Have Not
 ALL STUDENTS.
 Hot hot
 STUDENT (RAYLYNN). Emma/Jessica
 Want not
 ALL STUDENTS.
 Hot Hot
 STUDENT (JUSTIN).
 Live not
 ALL STUDENTS. _____
 Hot Hot
 STUDENT (ASHA).
 It's just hot
 STUDENT (COLIN). _____
 So, damn hot
 STUDENT (RAYLYNN).
 Feelin' like summer when we in the fall _____
 STUDENT (DE'ANDRE). De'Andre
 Air conditionin' at the mall
 STUDENT (RAYLYNN).
 Hot

Rhythms
Jchange

STUDENT (ASHA).
 Hot
 ALL STUDENTS.
 Hot day in October...
 (Lights shift.)

(Bell)

* Triple claps w/
 eye "no music"
 to get y'all off
 stage

Raylynn's Reflection

(Lights up on RAYLYNN.)

RAYLYNN. You know what day today is? – Today a hot as hell day at school. Today the day my ten-page paper in Miss Lawson's class is due and I over-wrote and have eleven. My brother say I'm the only person he know do MO' homework than I'm given. Today I don't care what's on the lunch menu cuz I probly ain't eatin' it no way. Today different. Today got a weight to it. Today makes three years since my mama passed. Today I woke up to the sound of my daddy cryin', even though he pretended like he wunn't. Today my brother walked outta the house befo' breakfast was finished talkin' 'bout he wunn't hungry. Today I ate extra flapjacks just so I wouldn't waste no food cuz Mama used to hate that. Today gonna mean somethin' different, y'heard. Today can't be like no other day. Today gotta count for somethin'.

(Beat.)

You got to live life on the edge. That's what Mama always say. Used to. Break a rule or ten so you remember ain't nothin' more powerful than your own will. People with no will apathetic. That's what she say. Apathy. Ain't nothin' worse than it. Gotta have passion. Even if it's fo' sellin' drugs. At least it's activity. You can always take that energy and turn it into somethin' productive. But just sittin' back and suckin' up air and not participatin' in the world around you – ain't nothin' mo' selfish than that. I'm gon' participate. Got to.

(Beat.)

Today is hotter than the devil's ass. Today is the first day of Autumn Equinox. Today the trees is all full of color. Today a day fo' change. Today I'm gon break a rule. Or ten. To stamp out apathy.

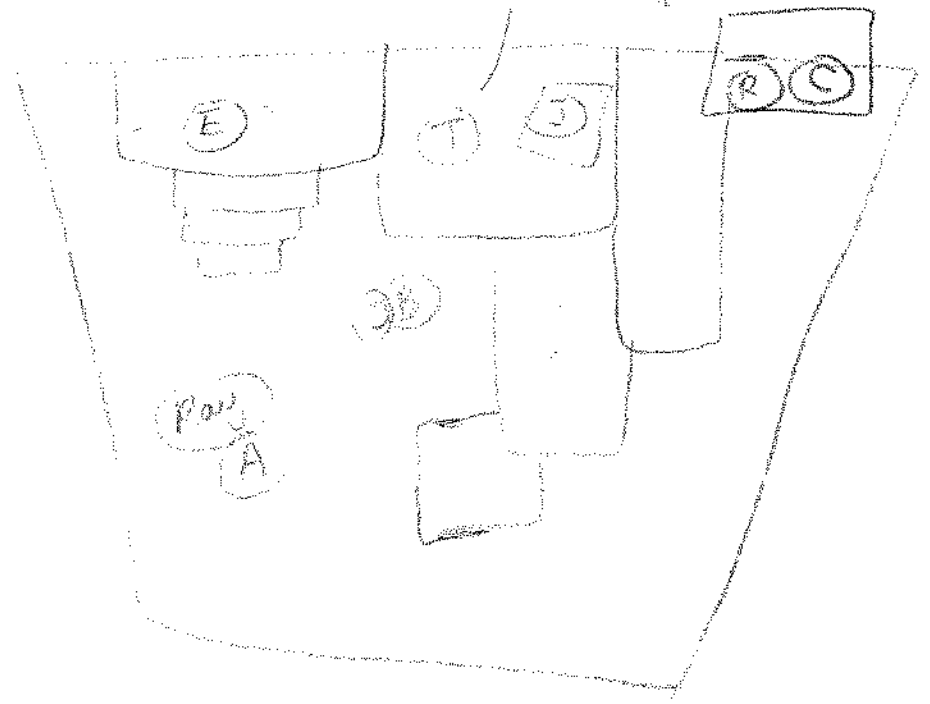
(Beat.)

Today I'm announcing my decision to run for class president. Rule break number one.

(Shift.)

4 x 4 platform

Find money
to enter
↓ do business



D Day

(RAYLYNN and ASHA in front of the school on the lawn.)

(A white girl sits under the tree and reads a book.) *Emma*

RAYLYNN. Hot as hell. Need some shade.

ASHA. You oughta stick to it.

RAYLYNN. Ain't got no support.

ASHA. Forget about support. Gotta gain support. Just go out for it Ray.

RAYLYNN. Ain't never been one befo'.

ASHA. Class president? Been one every year since the school opened!

RAYLYNN. Never one look like me.

ASHA. Whassitmatter -- look like you! Be one like you now. Who care 'bout what it ain't never been. Whassitmatter?

RAYLYNN. Maybe don't matter. Maybe do. Be a uphill battle to win this race. (*Shift.*) Why folk even say that anyway? Uphill. Instead of what -- a downhill battle?

ASHA. It's a stupid saying. Whoever made it up was probably dumber than Alice Miller in fifth period Econ.

RAYLYNN. You see how she was lookin' at me when I said I might run?

ASHA. Alice Miller?

RAYLYNN. Looked at me sideways and all sorts a crooked.

ASHA. Alice Miller is dumber than rocks.

RAYLYNN. Like I smelled un-showered or rotten-egg-like or somethin'.

ASHA. Like unwashed drawers or somethin'?

RAYLYNN. Asha, I'm serious.

ASHA. Or like Jesse's breath after eatin' pork rinds.

RAYLYNN. I mean really serious.

ASHA. His breath be smellin' bad after them rinds though -- don't it?

RAYLYNN. It do.

ASHA. Like Lawd boy! What kinda hot sauce do you put on them thangs? Smell like shitfire and hell comin' outta his mouth!

RAYLYNN. He still got the support of the whole football team. That's how he's even in the race. And they gonna be hard to win over. Got some kinda code of brotherhood or somethin' 'tween 'em. Even for the stupidest thang. They stick by each other like flies to horseshit. And it don't get horseshittier than Jesse, ya heard me.

ASHA. Well I'm datin' E-Money now so maybe I can get 'im to sway 'em to your side.

RAYLYNN. You datin' E? Since when?

ASHA. Since the other day when he told me I got a nice ass for a White girl.

RAYLYNN. He say that to you?

ASHA. In front of half the team.

RAYLYNN. And you ain't smack him across his face? I woulda smacked him across his face.

ASHA. I did. And then I handed him my cell number.

RAYLYNN. What you do that for?

ASHA. I like a man with honesty.

RAYLYNN. That ain't honesty. That's disrespect.

ASHA. I thank disrespect is thankin' it and not sayin' nothin'. If you thank I got a nice ass, just say so. Get all the particulars outta the way. That's what I like.

RAYLYNN. You like it cuz you crazy.

ASHA. I like it cuz it's true. I got a great ass.

(DE'ANDRE runs on, catching a football being tossed to him.)

DE'ANDRE. (*Yelling offstage.*) Shut up maine! That's why yo' mama smell like cornchips and toe jam!

(*He comes sloppily over to RAYLYNN and ASHA and puts his arm around RAYLYNN playfully.*)

Whaddup big sis.

RAYLYNN. Boy get offa me. You smell like testosterone and dollar-sto' cologne.

DE'ANDRE. All the shawties love my cologne.

RAYLYNN. All the shawties in yo' head.

DE'ANDRE. Gimme some chips.

RAYLYNN. Ain't got no chips.

DE'ANDRE. You got somethin'. I know you ain't eat all them Cheetos you had earlier.

(RAYLYNN digs in her bag and pulls out a bag of Cheetos. She throws it at DE'ANDRE.)

(ASHA pulls out a nail file and begins busying herself - preoccupied.)

RAYLYNN. Here fool. Go'on get outta my face.

DE'ANDRE. Whaddup woadie?

ASHA. Whaddup D.

RAYLYNN. De'Andre why you botherin' us? Ain't you got practice right now?

DE'ANDRE. Naw. Practice cancelled for today.

ASHA. Cancelled for what? E ain't tell me it was cancelled.

DE'ANDRE. Ain't go into details. Sign on the locker room do' [door] just say it cancelled. But it must be somethin' kinda serious. We got a game next week and Coach been vexed tryin' to get us in shape. He don't neva just be cancellin'.

RAYLYNN. Well where you headin' now?

DE'ANDRE. Goin' over Derrick house fo' a bit. That's where e'erbody gon' chill.

RAYLYNN. What about later? Wit' Daddy. 'Spose to go'on down to the site -

DE'ANDRE. Ain't talkin' 'bout none of that right now.

RAYLYNN. You ain't gonna go?

DE'ANDRE. Ain't talkin' 'bout none of that right now. That what ya'll wanna do, ya'll go 'head on. But I ain't goin' to no graveyard.

RAYLYNN. But what about Daddy -

DE'ANDRE. *(Ignoring RAYLYNN.)* Ay dere' Asha, E said to tell you he gon' be at Derrick's.

ASHA. What he tell you to tell me that for? He can't speak for himself

DE'ANDRE. I 'ono.

ASHA. Tell him I don't be takin' no second-hand messages. He know how to text me.

DE'ANDRE. Whatever. Just tellin' what I know.

RAYLYNN. What I'm gon' tell Daddy? What you want me to say 'bout why you not comin' wit' us...even though you knowin' what it mean to 'im?

DE'ANDRE. Say whatever you want. You an' him can hold onto them bad memories 'til they make you crazy. I can't do it no mo'.

RAYLYNN. Ain't all bad memories.

DE'ANDRE. Maybe not to you...

(DE'ANDRE turns to walk away.)

Tell Daddy I be home lata. Catch you when I catch you.

(DE'ANDRE tosses his ball up into the air, catches it, and disappears.)

(RAYLYNN looks after her brother for a moment.)

(RAYLYNN turns her gaze on the tree. ASHA pulls out a compact and is now preoccupied with refreshing her makeup.)

ASHA. *(Mumbling to herself.)* Sending me stupid messages. What am I? Some groupie?

RAYLYNN. You know what day today is?

ASHA. What you mean?

(Beat.)

RAYLYNN. Nevermind.

(RAYLYNN keeps her gaze on the tree. And the students sitting underneath.)

ASHA. You know what you oughta do?

RAYLYNN. Sun is killin' me right now.

ASHA. Start a list of slogans. You be real good at it with all them lofty ways you be thankin'.

RAYLYNN. I hate slogans.

ASHA. Every candidate got slogans.

RAYLYNN. 'Cept me. Slogans ain't for me. Sound like bullshit and lies. That's all.

ASHA. Ain't got to be lies. You make it sound like poetry.

RAYLYNN. Poetry can sound pretty and still be a lie. No slogans.

ASHA. You just got to see it. Can't have no campaign without slogans. I'm gon' come up with somethin' and show it to you on a poster.

RAYLYNN. Ain't sho 'bout no poster –

ASHA. – Just trust me.

(RAYLYNN turns her attention toward the tree again.)

RAYLYNN. You notice how it always been the same kinda people sittin' under that tree? Neva nobody different?

ASHA. I ain't neva really paid attention.

RAYLYNN. Ain't never seen nobody like me sittin' under that tree. Ain't never been nobody like me run for class president. You ever look up one day and realize you been doin' the same thing for so long, you ain't even sure why? Like you just followin' rules and ain't never stop to question – why it's a rule in the first place?

ASHA. I'ono. Maybe.

RAYLYNN. Today feel like a different kinda day. Don't it?

ASHA. Different how?

RAYLYNN. New rules-kinda different.

ASHA. What you talkin'?

RAYLYNN. I'm gon' get me some shade.

ASHA. What for? Don't go over there. Ain't nothin' but a bunch of snobs and cliques sit under that tree.

RAYLYNN. And today...me too.

(RAYLYNN walks slowly but decisively over to the tree. ASHA watches with terror.)

(The shade of the tree washes over RAYLYNN. All students and onlookers are illuminated in a moment of stillness. Shock. Disgust.)

Rule break number two.

(Sounds of a schoolbell ringing.)

who is that addressed?

The Cutting Room

(Lights up on TORIA and JUSTIN in a classroom. There are press materials all around in prep for the school paper.)

TORIA. That's a good article. That's a good fuckin' article. Why everytime I submit somethin' do you have to shit on it Justin?

JUSTIN. It's too long.

TONIA. Long and good.

JUSTIN. Doesn't matter how good it is. It's too long.

TORIA. Then tell me where to edit it. I can take constructive criticism.

JUSTIN. No you can't.

TORIA. Don't tell me I can't. I'm tellin' you I can!

JUSTIN. You can't. You suck at criticism.

TORIA. Says who?

JUSTIN. Says Melissa Bordeaux, our most recent story editor to quit. Says JoAnn Seaver before that. Says Michael Hendrix and Barry Stevens and Collen Smith. —

TORIA. This is a crock a shit.

JUSTIN. And you cuss too much.

TORIA. Like fuck I do!

JUSTIN. Had to use so many symbols to bleep out your language in that last article, it looked like the whole thing was written in alien code.

TORIA. It was about freedom of speech. I was cussing to make a point.

JUSTIN. Well your point almost got our whole edition shut down and nearly got us all put on probation. I promised Principle Miller I was going to do a better job at monitoring proper content for this paper and I'm sticking to my word.

TORIA. Justin, I'm tryin' to be a journalist. In real life. Do you get that?

JUSTIN. I don't see what this has to —

TORIA. In real life! Not in some pretend lil' high school basement where the most interesting thang in print is whether or not we're having fake horsemeat on the lunch menu or who in God's name among the popular and stuck-up is gonna win Prom King and Queen. I am not interested in whether or not the auditorium gets a fresh coat of paint before December or whether or not the football team wins a single game this year. I am not interested in these pathetic little trifles that make up our sad existence as sheltered brats this side of the Mason Dixon line. I am interested in the true art of journalism. I want to tell the stories everybody else at this school and in this town is too pussy to cover —

JUSTIN. Jesus Toria —

TORIA. Like how many girls at this school have covered up their abortions because their parents are too primitive to allow a sex-ed course that isn't taught by eighty-year-old Mrs. Wellsley who wouldn't know how to model puttin' on a condom if she had a ten-foot penis statue right in front of her —

JUSTIN. God Toria!!

TORIA. Or how about the number of boys on the football team who'd rather be dating each other than all the girls they swap semen with —

JUSTIN. Toria seriously!

TORIA. — but because we're so anti-homo they take it out on every chick at Cedar High and that's why the number of relationship violence is like — sky high right now —

JUSTIN. You don't have the stats to prove that.

TORIA. I could get them.

JUSTIN. But you don't have 'em —

TORIA. Or like how about the fact that none of the black students on campus hardly ever hang out with any of the white students on campus or vice versa because ^{they're} ~~we're~~ all a bunch of racist pricks —

JUSTIN. Toria, enough!

TORIA. You know I'm tellin' the truth.

JUSTIN. It's a student paper. A STUDENT PAPER. We're not trying to change the world or disrupt capitalism or bring down the government. We're just giving people something interesting to read while they're waiting on the bus or have a free period or somethin'.

TORIA. What's our readership Justin?

JUSTIN. I'm not doin' this now. I've got to finish getting this layout done.

TORIA. Is it still ten people? Or did we drop to five this month?

JUSTIN. You know I'm working on a new layout to increase our popularity.

TORIA. *(Mocking him.)* OH! Gee! A new layout! That's what's gonna save our dyin' paper! While every other delusional student at this school is networkin' on Facebook or bloggin' about what colleges they wanna go to, you're workin' on some new colors for the layout. You're changin' the font from Times New Roman to Comic Sans and that's really gonna make everybody lose their shit and run to pick up a fuckin' paper!

JUSTIN. I don't have time for this Toria.

TORIA. Just print my fuckin' article.

JUSTIN. It's about where to get good birth control. Do you seriously think I can print that?

TORIA. It's not just about that — it's about protecting yourself and having a healthy teen sex life. Did you even read it carefully? Or did you get so excited at the word "birth control" that you skeeted on yourself before you could finish?

JUSTIN. You know what Toria? I'm the editor now. I'm the editor and the copier and the publisher and everythang else this dyin' paper needs, and I'm also the one student who hasn't stopped talkin' to you for basically everythang because you're so obviously annoyin'. So write another damn article or else walk cuz I ain't got the time to argue with you no more about it.

(JUSTIN turns away from TORIA and continues working on his layout.)

(A defeated TORIA is silent for a moment.)

TORIA. *(Meekly.)* It's our senior year.

JUSTIN. I know.

TORIA. I want to cover somethin' amazin'. Just once. Just to leave my handprint here, y'know? You've got to understand what that means. Aren't you sick of just bein' invisible at this place?

JUSTIN. Who say I'm invisible?

TORIA. Oh Justin, please. You're more invisible than me. And I'm damn near a ghost.

(Shift.)

I don't want this year to be like every other one, y'know? Where folks like us get lost forever into this abyss of nobodies because we're the only ones who know we're alive. Still waitin' on this place to give back, y'know? These past three years I ain't done nothin' but give and give to this hellhole, and ain't hardly reaped nothin'. But I decided this year... I can. Finally find a purpose for what I am at this school. I'm an investigator. And I can't leave this year without fully definin' what I am. This is the year I can etch myself into stone. Be a journalist. That's what I want Justin. Don't you?

JUSTIN. Maybe.

TORIA. Then let me have a shot to break the rules a lil' bit. Write somethin' excitin'.

JUSTIN. Can't do birth control. Got to answer to too many people. They'll shut it down.

TORIA. Goddamn Justin.

JUSTIN. But if you can find another topic 'fore I go to print in three days, I promise to give it a fair read.

TORIA. So you admit you stopped at "birth control"?

JUSTIN. Three days Toria. Go get your ballsy story and keep it under two thousand words. And it better fit in the new layout.

TORIA. You ain't sayin' nothin' but a word.

(Lights shift.)

invisible not
invincible

The First Vote

(In the school hallway, COLIN and RAYLYNN are next to each other at their lockers.)

RAYLYNN. You on the football team?

(COLIN looks around himself. Realizing she's talking to him, he responds cautiously.)

COLIN. Yeah.

RAYLYNN. Senior this year?

(Again, and with a little surprise, he responds cautiously.)

COLIN. Yeah. So.

RAYLYNN. Transfer student, right?

COLIN. Yeah. So.

RAYLYNN. Okay. Cool.

(COLIN looks at RAYLYNN stoically. They both go back to their locker business.)

It's like three of ya'll this year. Transfer students.

COLIN. I know.

RAYLYNN. Cool.

(Beat.)

My brother play on the team too. Runnin' back. De'Andre.

COLIN. He a junior.

RAYLYNN. That him.

COLIN. He's good.

RAYLYNN. Guess so.

COLIN. Big ego.

RAYLYNN. That him. What about you?

COLIN. Quarterback.

RAYLYNN. That one of the good ones, right?

COLIN. You don't know the game?

the
big
game

RAYLYNN. Not much. Just enough to scream touchdown when they kick the ball through the H lookin' thang. *

COLIN. Naw that ain't a...nevermind.

RAYLYNN. Football ain't my kinda thang. Just show up for D. Sometimes. When he ain't gettin' on my nerves.

COLIN. ...

(Smiles.)

RAYLYNN. Class was kinda crazy today, right?

COLIN. Yeah.

RAYLYNN. Miss Hooper and them pop quizzes.

COLIN. She give 'em a lot?

RAYLYNN. Only when she in a bad mood. Like if she had a bad date the night befò o' somethin'. But you can sometimes tell when she 'bout to go out that night. She come to school wearin' them skinny jeans that she can't hardly fit into. You see her dressin' that way, you know you betta study up on yo' notes lata on. Almost all a her dates be bad. Can't catch a man if she put silk panties on a fishin' line. Don't nobody wanna put up with alla her personality. Sound of her voice make me wanna cut my ears off most of the time.

COLIN. It real high-pitched and squeaky.

RAYLYNN. I rather get run over by a truck than listen to her talk all night.

COLIN. Mack truck.

RAYLYNN. Exactly.

(They laugh faintly for a moment.)

(Beat.)

You ain't like... You don't seem like no football player.

COLIN. What you meanin' by that?

RAYLYNN. Ain't meanin' nothin' bad. Just way we talkin' right now. Can't get most of 'em to say two words to me, 'less they askin' 'bout D. But you just got...ease or somethin'.

(Pause.)

COLIN. You the first person that done really...

RAYLYNN. What's that?

COLIN. Nevermind.

(Another pause.)

RAYLYNN. I was wonderin'...

COLIN. Yeah?

RAYLYNN. If you was plannin' on votin' on class president. Like, if you had made up yo' mind yet?

COLIN. Ain't really thought 'bout it. Got too much other stuff on the brain.

RAYLYNN. Oh.

(Pause.)

Well if you get to thinkin' 'bout it...maybe you vote for me. I'm runnin'.

COLIN. Is you?

RAYLYNN. I am.

COLIN. How come?

RAYLYNN. It's just time.

(Pause.)

COLIN. Yeah - maybe...

(ASHA enters the hallway. Approaches RAYLYNN urgently.)

ASHA. Where you been at? Been lookin' for you for like ten minutes.

RAYLYNN. Been right here.

ASHA. You ain't heard??

RAYLYNN. Heard 'bout what?

ASHA. Lawd, girl... Shit done hit the fan. After you went and sat under that snob tree yesterday, they say two other ones done it too.

RAYLYNN. Other ones like who?

ASHA. You know what I'm sayin'. Ones like us.

RAYLYNN. Like us?

ASHA. Black, fool!

RAYLYNN. Asha - yo' ass ain't hardly -

ASHA. And now shit done hit the fan.

RAYLYNN. What kinda shit?

ASHA. You got to come...you got to come see...

(ASHA begins pulling RAYLYNN off. She tries to pull away.)

(RAYLYNN snatches free for one sec. Looks back at COLIN.)

RAYLYNN. I'm Raylynn. Or you can call me Ray. That's who to vote fo'.

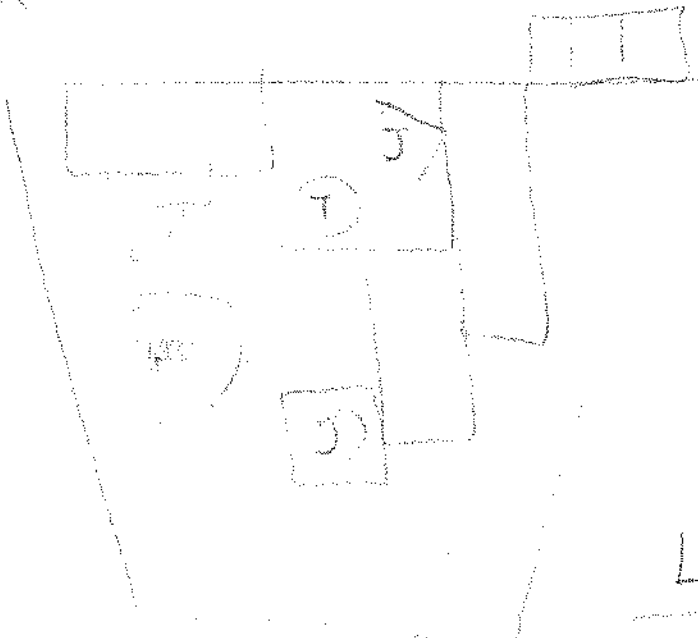
COLIN. I'm Colin. See you...

(ASHA pulls RAYLYNN off.)

(COLIN looks after them for a second.)

(Shift.)

say the lines to the right then turn walk



Line 5 + 5 split

★ Qui is a student! ★ Chad is a student

Willie Lynch

(A suite.)

(Music.)

(Movement.)

(The staging/embodiment of three nooses being tied to a tree begins to happen as the following dialogue occurs.)

Dance #2
A re-arrangement
of some sort

JUSTIN. So it went somethin' like this. School assembly the other day. New transfer student. Didn't know the ropes. Asked some kinda question. 'Bout that tree. That huge oak tree sit in the front of our school yard. Call it "Ol' Devoted" cuz of how long she been planted there and never hacked or diseased. Got years of carvings and marks on it. Most folk 'round here know to just walk past it and leave it be. Know how things is at this school. These people eat with these people. Those people eat with those. These folk hang out with these folk. Those folk hang out with those. Ain't nobody got no problems with it. Ain't worth questionin'. What's the use? It ain't hurtin' nobody. Folk like who they like. Wanna be near who they wanna be near. And just so happen that folk like to be around other folk they got snuff in common with. That's just what it be. Now everybody know that the tree out front - "Ol' Devoted" just be a hang-out spot for some of them cliques. But one of them new transfer students come down from North Carolina. Ain't know what it's like down here in Louisiana. Ask this question in front of the whole school. Ask -

STUDENT (DE'ANDRE). Can only White people sit under that tree out front? — B

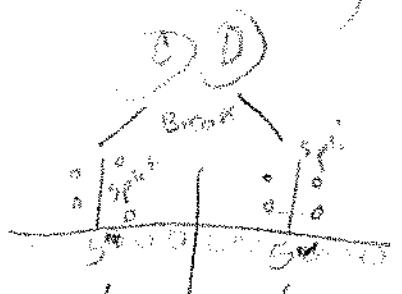
STUDENT (TORIA). He was tryin' to start trouble. — S

★ STUDENT (ASHA). They always tryin' to start trouble. — E

★ STUDENT (COLIN). Didn't sound like trouble to me. —

STUDENT (RAYLYNN). Was a fair question to ask —

Break (tree) top
Follow the transfer back into the tree



JUSTIN. And then the student got taken out of the assembly. Got reprimanded by half the faculty for bein' disruptive. But later that day, this one senior got somethin' in her head about Ol' Devoted. Say that senior -

RAYLYNN. They call me Ray. *Leave tree*

JUSTIN. - announced she's running for class president. Say she just felt fed up yesterday or maybe like some kinda martyr. Who knows? Say she went over to where that tree was and sat down underneath it. Call it gettin' some shade. Then say after while, two other students done went over...maybe followin' her lead. Three black students sittin' under a tree that everybody else know be a hangout for these cliques.

TORIA. White cliques.

JUSTIN. And now today...whole school is in an uproar. Come out to the yard at lunchtime, and that's when everybody see. Three nooses hangin' on the branches of that great oak tree.

RAYLYNN. Three nooses.

GOLIN. Three nooses.

ASHA. That's what everybody see.

JUSTIN. Three nooses hangin' on the branches of that great oak tree.

(The music increases.)

(The symbol of the tree is illuminated.)

(The symbol of the nooses rocking back and forth.)

(RAYLYNN is illuminated among the crowd. She stares at the tree. At the nooses.)

(The sound of laughter.)

STUDENT VOICES (ASHA/TORIA). It was just a prank

STUDENT VOICES (GOLIN). What's the big deal?

RAYLYNN. *(In disbelief.)* Nooses. Hangin'. Like vines...

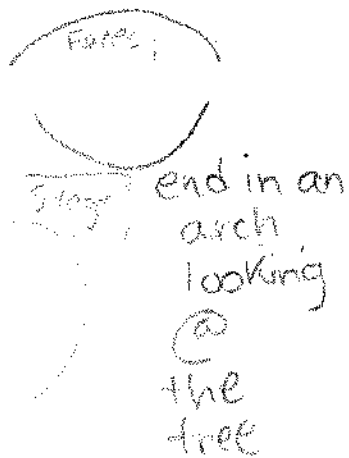
o JUSTIN. And it went just like that. That's what the story is.

- Take out the tree

** Ray be last to leave once Justin in his seat*

Turn & go to office

(T) follows



T returns to safety

(The image of the nooses on the tree remains, but less dominant. The lights are softened.)

(Lights illuminate TORIA, who now sits before JUSTIN and has joined his realistic world.)

TORIA. And you're gonna let me write it?

JUSTIN. With just the facts. Yes.

TORIA. What facts? Are there really just facts to this? Or lots of shades of gray here, Justin?

JUSTIN. Toria, you wanted to do an interesting story that we can print in the paper. I'm giving you an interesting story.

TORIA. So I'll talk to some folks. Get their side of the scoop. Find out why somebody would do somethin' so racist -

JUSTIN. Not racist, Toria. You're puttin' too much opinion on it. They're just callin' it a prank.

TORIA. A prank?

JUSTIN. That's what Principle Miller is callin' it -

TORIA. It's nooses, Justin.

JUSTIN. It's rope hangin' from a tree, Toria. Rodeo rope.

TORIA. We ain't got no rodeo teams here, Justin!

JUSTIN. Toria, look. I'm not gonna argue with you. I'm doin' what I promised. I'm givin' you a story to cover.

TORIA. 'Cept you don't want me to really cover it.

JUSTIN. I just want you to do what you s'posed to do as any good journalist would. Be objective. Don't get carried away with your feelins. Just state the facts.

TORIA. Feelins is what makes good writin', Justin. The rest ain't nothin' but empty words on paper.

(Shift.)

Don't you got no feelin' 'bout alla this yaseif?

JUSTIN. What's that 'spose ta mean?

TORIA. Seein' them ropes danglin' from that tree like...

(Beat.)

If I was you it'd make me feel some kinda way. I know that much.

JUSTIN. You got somethin' you tryin' to say to me Toria?

TORIA. I'm just askin'.

JUSTIN. Well don't ask. In fact, I'm right and tired of alla your questionin'. You question everything I damn say. And 'less you forget, I'm in charge. I'm the one to do the questionin'. So take the story or back off. But don't ask me another goddamn thing, Toria. I swear.

(Pause. TORIA and JUSTIN glare at each other.)

TORIA. Yessir, boss.

JUSTIN. That's right. That's exactly right. And don't fuckin' forget it.

(Shift.)

The Pot Callin' The Kettle

(Lights up on ASHA.)

ASHA. People don't know this 'bout me but I used to have a lotta anger. You might not think it by lookin' at me, but I could really throw down. When I was nine, my mama and daddy got a divorce. Was fightin' and fightin' all the time and couldn't never get on the same page. So they split. I went to stay with Mama in Florida for awhile 'fore she moved here to Louisiana. But when I was 'bout ten, I started gettin' in all this trouble at school. Fights and everything. Just mad all the time and didn't know why. So my mama sent me over to live with Daddy in Georgia for a coupla years. He had himself a new wife and everythang. Livin' good in Holanta with a new house and all that. Wife was a black woman. Her name Sharon and she was cool as hell. I liked her out the gate, and that's sayin' a whole lot cuz I ain't like nobody out the gate who be datin' my daddy. But she was somethin' special. Treated me like a daughter. Didn't try to replace my mama or nothin' like that, or even act like she could. I think that's what I liked about her. She was just real easy with me. Ain't had her own kids, but had a bunch of nieces and nephews and she told 'em to call me cousin. So they did. Used to hang with 'em whenever it be a family get together. They say "whaddup cuz" like that, and I remember feelin' for the first time like I belonged somewhere. Like finally I ain't need to fight no more cuz I was in company that felt like home. And I stopped being so angry all the time. Angry at Mama and Daddy. Angry at myself, even. Angry at the world.

(Beat.)

After while, Mama called fo' me to come move with her here. I was like twelve. But I wun't the same no mo'. Ain't feel as comfortable back here. Not 'til I started hangin' out again with...

(Beat.)

They used to call me "black by association." Alla my friends and play cousins in Hodlanta. But here they just call me "fake" or "wannabe" or "actin' black." But you know what I thank? If actin' black mean bein' like Sharon... Mean findin' family and love in places you wunn't expectin'. If it mean not bein' angry unless you gott good reason... Then maybe we should all be "actin' black" mo' often. That's all I got to say 'bout that.

(Shift.)

(Music.)

(Movement.)

(Lights illuminate RAYLYNN and ASHA.)

RAYLYNN. It happened the next day. After seein' those three nooses hangin' like...vines. Somethin' had to be done. Somethin' just had to be.

ASHA. So D come around. He say -

(Lights up on DE'ANDRE. The world becomes naturalistic.)

DE'ANDRE. Ya'll see that shit?? How they just hung them shits on them branches like...like what was that? A threat or somethin'?

ASHA. A prank - Principle Miller callin' it.

DE'ANDRE. Thas bullshit. Wouldn't be no prank if shoes was reversed.

RAYLYNN. You mean if roles was reversed. How shoes gon' be reversed?!

DE'ANDRE. Whatever. You know what I'm meanin'.

RAYLYNN. Be walkin' 'round backwards.

DE'ANDRE. What they gonna do 'bout it? Thas what I wanna know.

ASHA. One of them Jesus freaks in my fourth period class. Bet that's who hung 'em. They was lookin' at me funny when Ray sat under that tree.

RAYLYNN. Or if the shoe was on the other foot. Maybe if you said that.

DE'ANDRE. Who cares what I said!

ASHA. Or maybe it was that hash gang that be sittin' up under there gettin' higher than a bluebird most of the time and don't never get in trouble for puffin' on school grounds - talkin' 'bout it's medicinal. Medicinal my ass.

RAYLYNN. Principle ain't say who it was. Just say they gonna deal with it private and the students be punished.

ASHA. Heard whoever they is gettin' detention.

DE'ANDRE. That's it? Detention? What kinda punishment is that?!

RAYLYNN. Give detention for misbehavin' in class. Missin' homework assignments. Not for no noose.

DE'ANDRE. Not for no threats.

ASHA. Detention with Mr. Snodder and all that fartin' he be doin' be more like prison. Gas chamber.

RAYLYNN. Still. It like a slap on the wrist. Ain't really justice. Ain't really fair.

DE'ANDRE. What we gon' do about it, hunh? Talk about it while we straight gettin' disrespected! We gon' just take it, hunh?!

RAYLYNN. Ain't gon' just take it.

ASHA. What you meanin'?

RAYLYNN. I thank it time to revisit that tree.

DE'ANDRE. Thas what I'm talkin' 'bout.

ASHA. Revisit it...for what?

RAYLYNN. For defiance.

ASHA. Defiance?

DE'ANDRE. Start a rally!

RAYLYNN. A demonstration.

ASHA. For who? For what? Why we gotta do anythang else? Already sat under it and made yo' point. Now just gotta let them fools get in trouble by theyselves.

Movement
Dance
& Sing

To
also have

Just want to
be in the
house
James?
POP MUSIC
REVISIT?

REVISIT
of the
tree

10:10
10:10
10:10

Asha
want
get this



Go up
branches
to tree & leave
Asha be

End of
scene

RAYLYNN. Ain't about trouble. It's about principle. 'Bout who belong where, 'Bout who got the freedom to be somewhere and who don't. I ain't tryin' to back down from no noose hangin' -

DE'ANDRE. Racist ass nooses hangin' -

ASHA. Maybe it wunn't racist.

(DE'ANDRE and RAYLYNN look at ASHA incredulously.)

DE'ANDRE. How it's not gon' be racist? What else it gon' be?

ASHA. Be just...stupid.

DE'ANDRE. Aight then. It's stupid AND racist. They usually go hand in hand, ain't it?

RAYLYNN. Wasn't right.

ASHA. I know it wunn't right, but it was what it was. Stupid fa sho...but that don't mean we got to get involved with it. What you got to go causin' more issue 'bout it for?

RAYLYNN. Causin' more issue?

ASHA. I 'ont mean it like that.

RAYLYNN. You thank it's somethin' wrong with what I done?

ASHA. Naw. I ain't said that. I just thank maybe...

RAYLYNN. Maybe what?

ASHA. Maybe we ain't got to get all wired up 'bout the whole thang. It just a tree.

DE'ANDRE. Awww shit.

RAYLYNN. Ain't just a tree to me.

ASHA. I'm just sayin'...

RAYLYNN. I don't know what you sayin'.

ASHA. ...

...

...

DE'ANDRE. Ay look - it's time to make ourselves seen and heard, y'know? We gon' do somethin'?

RAYLYNN. I'm goin' - you comin'?

ASHA. I can't afford to get in no trouble. Promised my mama I wunn't gon' have no issues this semester.

RAYLYNN. Fine then.

ASHA. That don't mean I ain't... I'm still ya girl.

RAYLYNN. Yeah. Sho. Of course.

ASHA. We still good, right?

RAYLYNN. ...

...

...

Sho.

...

...

...

Let's go D.

(RAYLYNN and DE'ANDRE head for the tree. Music increases.)

(Shift.)

Flick Of My Pen

scare*

(COLIN is isolated.)

COLIN. It was like some shit out of a Civil Rights documentary. Like the kind they be showin' in class. And most of the folks be fallin' half asleep. Seen this one kid in third period start droolin' on the desk when we was watchin' this one - Eyes on the Prize it called. Real interestin' to me, but guessin' not to most everybody else. I interested cuz it's nice to know what done happened before I showed up somewhere. Nice to know how things used to be and that things as they is now come from somethin'. It all got roots. Way somebody choose not to sit next to somebody in the lunchroom - got roots. Way somebody got problems with the flag somebody else wear on they t-shirt - got roots. Way some people talk the way they talk, or hang out with who they hang out with, or love who they love, or hate who they hate - all got roots. It feel halfway comfortin' knowin' it ain't just start with us. That it been this way. That somebody's been plantin' these awful feelins in the soil somewhere. Long before we came along and started pulling up crops. We been digestin' this same stuff, grown in this same soil, and ain't even know it. So I like seein' stuff like that...Eyes on the Prize... documentaries on the Civil Rights Movement. When that happened today at school...when those students went and stood under that great oak tree...Ol' Devoted they call it... Look like some kinda protest. Look like somethin' like from another time. From a Civil Rights Time. And it got me thinkin'...what kinda crop is the folks after us gonna dig up? Is it still gonna be from this same ol' soil? Or is we ever gonna plant somethin' new...

(Shift.)

(A moving tableaux of a protest being formed. STUDENTS wear black hoodies covering their

In Camo

Freeze
Frame
Tableau

1 1 1 1

4 tableaux



Someone hands Sam his Camo hoodie + hat

Step 1
Dance #3
Must make
somebody
be in
front

bowed heads, or something that might suggest these are all black students, though it is filled with the entire ensemble. Lighting should assist as well.)

(Beatboxing. Drumming. Sounds of urban teen life fills the space.)

(The ENSEMBLE becomes different players in the following sequence.)

(STUDENTS surrounding the tree.)

(PRINCIPAL MILLER and the DA face the group with bullhorns.)

(Alternative: Their lines can also be pre-recorded or spoken offstage over a mic so they remain an un-seen and powerful presence.)

(A vocalized Hip Hop/Spoken-word-inspired soundscape should inform how the following lines move.)

STUDENT CHORUS.

Weeee WILL not... We WILL NOT be moved!
Weeee WILL not... We WILL NOT be moved!

PRINCIPAL MILLER.

Students of Cedar High

STUDENT CHORUS.

Weeee WILL not... We WILL NOT be moved!

DA.

If you don't stop these protests—

STUDENT CHORUS.

Weeee WILL not... We WILL NOT be moved!

PRINCIPAL MILLER.

As your principal I'm warning you -

DA.

If you don't stop these protests -

STUDENT CHORUS.

Weeee WILL not... We WILL NOT be moved!

*Qui + Chad
Back to
principal + DA

PRINCIPAL MILLER

I have the local District Attorney here -

DA.

If you don't stop these protests -

STUDENT CHORUS.

Weeee WILL not... We WILL NOT be moved!

PRINCIPAL MILLER.

Please disassemble this gathering immediately

DA.

Gang activity

STUDENT CHORUS.

Weeee WILL not... We WILL NOT be moved!

PRINCIPAL MILLER.

Or the authorities will be forced to take action against you

DA.

You ain't got the right

STUDENT.

We will NOT be moved

DA.

I can erase you from sight

STUDENT CHORUS.

We will NOT be moved

DA.

You must not know my power

STUDENT CHORUS.

We will NOT be moved

DA.

Been standin' here for hours

STUDENT CHORUS.

We got our rights

DA.

I can take away your life

STUDENT CHORUS.

We got our rights

DA.

I can take away your life

STUDENT CHORUS.

We will NOT be moved

DA.

With the flick of my pen

STUDENT CHORUS.

We will NOT be moved

DA.

Want me to say it again?

STUDENT CHORUS.

We have a right to stand.

DA.

If you don't stop these protests

STUDENT CHORUS.

We have a right to learn

DA.

If you don't stop these protests

STUDENT CHORUS.

We have the right to live

DA.

If you don't stop these protests

STUDENT CHORUS.

We have the right to live.

DA.

I can take away your life with the flick of my pen

PRINCIPAL MILLER.

Students at Cedar High, listen real good

DA.

If you don't stop these protests, I can take away your life with the Flick. Of. My. Pen.

change

Rayburn Aye yo everybody

(The DA lifts his pen and notepad and glares at the STUDENTS.)

(The STUDENTS fall silent.)

PRINCIPAL MILLER. Please disassemble from the tree immediately before disciplinary action is taken.

(Shift.)

+ Add 3 collective breaths then disassemble

+ what do you think of clock ticks during this scene?

+ Everyone Remove protests clothes

Pass clothes to someone else

Asha
Principal
Toria
De
Ray
Justin

90

Remae @ end of After math

The Aftermath

TORIA. Yesterday at Cedar High, Black students gathered in front of Ol' Devoted during lunchtime in protest of the three nooses being hung from its branches a day prior. The group was quickly disassembled when Principal Miller, the DA and local authorities arrived to break up the protest. Their concern:

Address
and to be
the reporting

PRINCIPAL MILLER. We don't want no gang activity here on school grounds.

TORIA. But the students had different things to say about that accusation:

DEANDRE. Ain't nobody in no gangs.

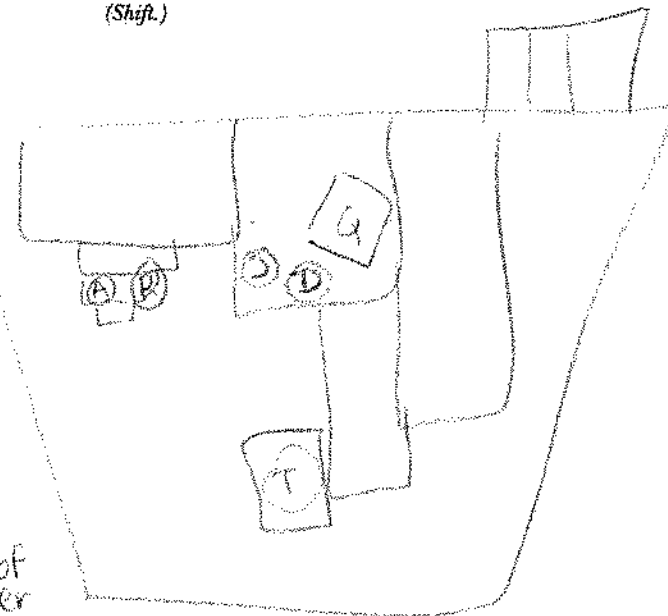
RAYLYNN. Why would they call us a gang? They call the students that put those nooses up a gang too?

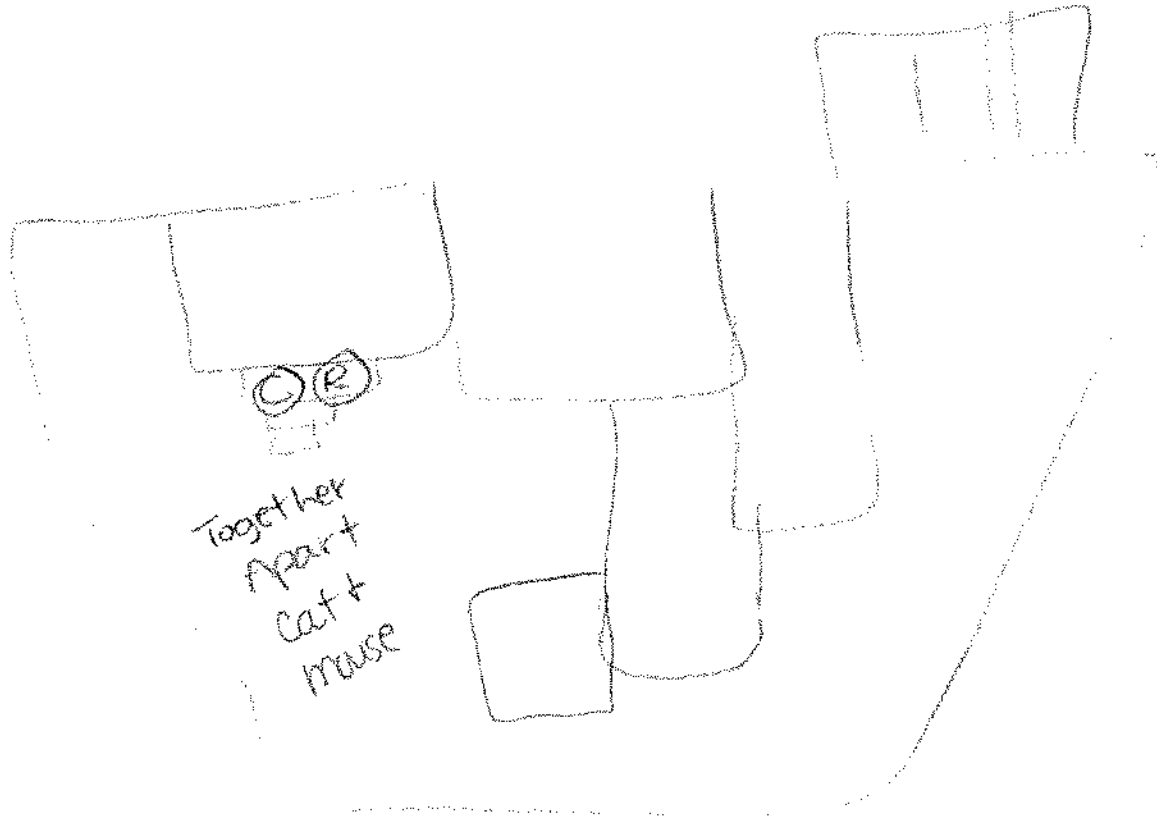
JUSTIN. Personally, I don't think a protest was necessary. What's it really change?

ASHA. Something can be stupid or disrespectful without it bein' about race.

TORIA. Lately it seems like there's been growing unrest happening at Cedar High, and things may fall more apart before they come together.

(Shift.)





Colin is the mouse - Always try to keep the distance
Ray is the cat - Always try to close the distance

Sacred Secrets

(COLIN and RAYLYNN in the back of the schoolyard
– bleachers. Mid-convo.)

COLIN. So I was standin' front of that Piggly Wiggly on Jefferson askin' for change to catch the bus back home cuz by this point, school was almost over. Was cuttin' class all day but knew I had to get home or I'd have hell to pay. Had spent my last dime at the Big Boy tryin' to get me some lunch, so I start beggin' folks for whatever they had. Quarters. Dimes. Even pennies. And then when this fella with this raspy voice say to me, "How much y' need, dere?" And I look up, starin' straight into the face of Philip Frazier –

RAYLYNN. Of Rebirth Brass Band?!

COLIN. The original founder.

RAYLYNN. You're a damn lie.

COLIN. Swear it.

RAYLYNN. I'da peed myself.

COLIN. Almost did.

RAYLYNN. What you say to 'im?

COLIN. At first I ain't said nothin'. Soon as I saw it was him, I just went dumb. Couldn't remember my own name for a second.

RAYLYNN. Then what happened?

COLIN. Then he get impatient wit me, like "I say what you need dere?" So I say – real stupid-like – "Um...can I have a quarter for the bus sir?"

RAYLYNN. (Laughing.) You shut up! You ain't still ask him for a quarter!

COLIN. Couldn't think of nothin' else to say.

RAYLYNN. I'da told him how he the most amazin' tuba player in the whole south, I'da told him ain't no band better n' Rebirth. I'da told him he's a god.

COLIN. You'da asked him for a quarter to catch the city bus 'fore yo' mama find out you been skippin' school all day!

(They laugh.)

RAYLYNN. So that why you come here? Got kicked outta yo' old school for skippin' too much?

COLIN. Somethin' like that.

RAYLYNN. Why you skip? Ain't you had no good classes? Or you just some kinda rebel?

COLIN. At my ol' school, shit just wunn't really good for me.

RAYLYNN. What's that mean?

COLIN. Just mean what it mean.

(Beat.)

RAYLYNN. Well I guess that's enough studyin' for one afternoon.

COLIN. You a good tutor.

RAYLYNN. Ain't nothin' to it.

COLIN. Real patient and cool. Don't make me feel stupid for 'bein' behind a lil' bit. Hard to change schools in the middle of a semester.

RAYLYNN. I figure it must be. You need help again, just ask. I come meet you this period. It's better than makin' copies for Mrs. EJ all hour long.

COLIN. Thanks.

(Pause.)

RAYLYNN. You believe all that happened yesterday?

COLIN. 'Bout that tree.

RAYLYNN. Policemen come up and tell us to get outta there like we was criminals or somethin'.

COLIN. I saw it. Was like ten of ya'll. Look like somethin' outta Civil Rights or somethin'.

RAYLYNN. Felt like it too. Only thang missin' was the dogs chasin' us.

COLIN. Seem unnecessary, you ask me. They ain't need to do all that. Just let folk be where they wanna be. Do what they wanna do. Ain't got to be all that police and DA and none o' that.

RAYLYNN. You come to this school at a crazy time. Or maybe you right on time. I ain't sho yet.

(Pause.)

COLIN. You got lots of fight in you. I can tell.

RAYLYNN. Fight in me?

COLIN. Like for belief or something. That seem like a good thing.

RAYLYNN. Guessin' I get that from my mama. Daddy say she used to find injustice in everythang. Write a letter to the supermarket if they ain't have fresh vegetables. Write a letter to the transportation authority if the buses was runnin' late. Write a letter to the mayor if a road had too many potholes in it.

COLIN. Sound like she stay busy.

RAYLYNN. Used to. She gone now.

COLIN. Oh. Sorry.

(Quick pause.)

RAYLYNN. It's alright.

(RAYLYNN and COLIN are silent. Neither is moving.)

COLIN. You... um...

RAYLYNN. Yeah?

COLIN. I like you.

RAYLYNN. *(Surprise.)* ...

Oh.

...

COLIN. Sorry. I ain't mean to -

RAYLYNN. Naw...it's okay.

(Pause.)

COLIN. I just meant, um...

RAYLYNN. I mean I think you... I just ain't never... I ain't been with no boys that look like... I mean my friend Asha, she white and her boyfriends be whatever kinda race she feel like bein' that day. But me, I just ain't never... I mean maybe?? But I just ain't never thought about datin' nobody like you before -

COLIN. No, um...

RAYLYNN. Oh you ain't mean -??

COLIN. I, uh -

(Awkward pause.)

RAYLYNN. Oh God I'm so... I mean, Jesus, I oughta... I could just... I should go.

COLIN. Ray, I ain't mean -

RAYLYNN. Naw, it's - I just need to...

COLIN. It ain't you.

RAYLYNN. I feel stupid..

COLIN. You ain't stupid.

RAYLYNN. I shoulda know'n you wasn't meanin'... I mean why would you...

COLIN. It ain't that. It's just...

RAYLYNN. Just as a friend, right?

COLIN. Well yeah.

RAYLYNN. Great. Got it. Gotta go.

COLIN. Ray, wait.

RAYLYNN. What.

COLIN. I - it ain't you.

RAYLYNN. You keep sayin' that.

COLIN. Cuz I mean it.

RAYLYNN. Well whassit mean?

COLIN. Means I'm -

RAYLYNN. You - what?

COLIN. ...

...

...

Should be very close by here

I think cat + mouse starts here

RAYLYNN. *(In slow realization.)* You...mean you...don't like... I mean ain't attracted to -

COLIN. Don't wanna talk 'bout this no mo'.

RAYLYNN. ...

...

Shit.

COLIN. ...

...

RAYLYNN. I ain't know you wuz that way.

COLIN. That way? What way is that?

RAYLYNN. You know like... I mean... 'Not tryin' to offend you or -

COLIN. Psshhh - I gotta get goin'.

RAYLYNN. Colin -

COLIN. I said I gotta get goin'.

RAYLYNN. Okay.

(Pause. RAYLYNN and COLIN fill in the awkward silence with nothing.)

(Finally COLIN grabs his bookbag and starts to walk off. He stops.)

COLIN. I decided I was gon' vote for class president. Was plannin' to cast my vote for you. Just 'case you was wonderin'.

(RAYLYNN - confused and uncomfortable.)

(Shift.)

look to make 4x4 then look

Slippin' Thru

(JUSTIN is isolated.)

soliloquy

JUSTIN. Things at Cedar High can be real divided. Lots of lines get drawn and everybody wanna know what side you standin' on. Now me? I get by like I always done. Be studious. Be focused. Be attentive. That's never done me much for popularity. Doesn't give me the most friends. Keeps me...well... I don't like Toria callin' it invisible. I mean what does she...who does she...she doesn't know me. Nobody knows me, that's the point. But at this stage in the game, I'm not askin' for that anymore. Sure, it might've bothered me when I was a kid. What kid likes to be the outcast? Sure, it might've made me sad or like some story from a after school special. But that's not the case anymore. I figured out that none of that matters anymore. Folks like me... there's no space where we really fit, y'know? No side we really make sense on. I've always just existed in the cracks. So when they come askin' me where I stand, what do I say? Whose side am I supposed to take? Black kids protestin'. White kids prankin'. What side am I supposed to be on when don't none of them ever... when ain't none of 'em really...when I just seem to belong to myself. And that's it. That's the side I'm on. But here at Cedar High, everybody want you on a side. Wanna know where your loyalties lie. And what I got to say about it? Who's been loyal to me? Find me one person that can answer that question, and I'll tell you what side I'm on. 'Til then, it's all about bein' objective. That's the only way I know to survive. In the cracks...

(TORIA enters JUSTIN's world.)

TORIA. Justin you heard about it? *Enter office*

JUSTIN. Heard 'bout what?

TORIA. Fight broke out in the cafeteria. Some members of the football team got into a altercation!

JUSTIN. What kinda altercation?

(organic)

Start @ 4x4 make way to desk by the end (sitting)

TORIA. Where you been at? Down here buryin' your nose in articles while major dysfunction is happenin' all over this school!

JUSTIN. More dysfunction?

TORIA. There's a story in this! Come on, we've got to jump on it!

(Lights shift.)

Both exit

Lowng thoughts that are random & thrown out there. Try them!

★ Added "yo mama jokes" to group session ~Walter

★ Reriset of fire "The Yellow name"

Frank Bryant

Emma

Emma

Frank

Asha

Seth

Telephone Game

Movement #4

(The ENSEMBLE on stage sporadically. Adding their account into the pot as chaos ensues around them.)

★ STUDENT (RAYLYNN). I was just sittin' in the lunchroom mindin' my business.

STUDENT (COLIN). I was eatin' with my friends and somebody yelled "fight fight" just like that. — Emma

STUDENT (JUSTIN). I saw 'em. It was like six Black students. I saw 'em.

STUDENT (ASHA). It was like twenty of 'em. Seth

STUDENT (COLIN). A hundred.

★ STUDENT (RAYLYNN). It was six.

STUDENT (DEWBRE). They was jumpin' on this white boy. — Principal

★ STUDENT (TORIA). That ain't what I saw. I saw a white boy and a black boy get into a argument. Then the white boy hit the black one. Thas what I saw.

STUDENT (ASHA). I saw the black boy hit the white boy first.

★ STUDENT (JUSTIN). I ain't see nothin'. I was just mindin' my business. — Mimi

STUDENT (COLIN). They play for the same team. That's what I heard.

STUDENT (TORIA). Two football players got into that argument.

STUDENT (RAYLYNN). Somebody said somethin' about somebody's mama, I think.

STUDENT (TORIA). Somebody called somebody a fag, I think.

STUDENT (JUSTIN). Somebody used a racial slur.

STUDENT (RAYLYNN). I thank they was all just tellin' "yo' mama" jokes. Thas what we do sometimes. White boy musta took it personal. It ain't personal.

STUDENT (ASHA). I thank the black boy got mad at the white boy cuz he ain't got a mama no mo'. Can't tell a "yo' mama" joke to somebody with no mama.

STUDENT (COLIN). I heard the black boy was the one startin' the "yo' mama" jokes in the first place. How you gonna tell "yo' mama" jokes if you don't want somebody sayin' one back to you.

STUDENT (TORIA). I heard it ain't had nothin' to do with no jokes. I heard it was somethin' that happened during practice.

STUDENT (DE'ANDRE). I heard they got into a fight during practice the other day. Bryant/Frank

STUDENT (JUSTIN). I heard the coach found out one of the boys on that team is a faggot. Seth/Noah

STUDENT (TORIA). You ain't supposed to call 'em that. It's racist. Asha

*STUDENT (RAYLYNN). It ain't racist to say faggot.

STUDENT (DE'ANDRE). Well it's somethin'. You ain't 'spose to say it.

STUDENT (JUSTIN). I heard Coach shut down practice the other day to deal with the... Bryant/Frank

*STUDENT (RAYLYNN). Homosexual.

STUDENT (ASHA). You ain't supposed to say that either.

*STUDENT (COLIN). You ain't supposed to say homosexual??

*STUDENT (TORIA). It still sound' offensive.

*STUDENT (DE'ANDRE). Everythang is offensive now?!

STUDENT (DE'ANDRE). Then the black boy -

STUDENT (ASHA). You ain't 'spose to say that neither.

STUDENT (RAYLYNN). What you 'spose to call 'em?

STUDENT (COLIN). African Black.

*STUDENT (JUSTIN). African American.

*STUDENT (DE'ANDRE). Just call me black.

STUDENT (TORIA). Then the black boy ended up bumping into the white boy.

STUDENT (DE'ANDRE). Can you still say white?

STUDENT (COLIN). What the hell else you gonna say?

*STUDENT (ASHA). Just American??

ALL STUDENTS. We all American!

*STUDENT (COLIN). Well why everybody else get to be called somethin' FROM somewhere and all we get is a color?!

*STUDENT (DE'ANDRE). Ain't nobody made ya'll a color. Ya'll made ya'llselves a color. And everybody else one too. Don't be tryin' to change the rules now.

*STUDENT (COLIN). What rules? I ain't make no rules.

*STUDENT (DE'ANDRE). I'm just sayin'. Yo' great-grandparents did.

STUDENT (TORIA). The white boy and the black boy and the faggot. Bryant/Frank

*STUDENT (JUSTIN). Sound like a bad joke.

STUDENT (RAYLYNN). Don't you dare say faggot again. I'm gon' smack the next person say faggot.

STUDENT (ASHA). And it wunn't three people. Just the white boy and the black boy.

STUDENT (TORIA). Ended up bein' a whole bunch of black boys.

*STUDENT (RAYLYNN). They joined in.

STUDENT (JUSTIN). What they join in for? They was all startin' trouble.

*STUDENT (DE'ANDRE). Thas just the code of brotherhood. You see one of yo' peeps throwin' down, you got to join in.

STUDENT (COLIN). Well they joined in I guess. All joined in and ended up jumpin' that white boy.

STUDENT (ASHA). I heard they was all plannin' to jump that boy from the beginnin'.

STUDENT (DE'ANDRE). Why would they do that?

STUDENT (RAYLYNN). Thugs.

STUDENT (JUSTIN). What makes 'em thugs?

STUDENT (TORIA). Thuggish behavior. Justin + Toria

STUDENT (ASHA). Like jumpin' folks!

*STUDENT (TORIA). What if somebody jumped the black boys too? What if it was just payback?

*STUDENT (ASHA). What if it wasn't? What if it was just random hate?

Bryant — STUDENT (~~RAYLYNN~~). Naw, I heard one of them black boys was jumped last week at a party by some white boys.
 STUDENT (COLIN). Maybe this was payback.
 STUDENT (RAYLYNN). Still don't make it right.
 ★STUDENTS (JUSTIN & TORIA). Ain't none of it right.
 ★STUDENT (ASHA). Whatever happened to the white boys that jumped that black boy at that party last week?

Raylynn — STUDENT (~~TORIA~~). Nothin'.
 STUDENT (DE'ANDRE). They get in trouble?
 STUDENT (JUSTIN). Nope. Nothin'.

Toria — STUDENT (~~RAYLYNN~~). Well it wunn't on school grounds. This was on school grounds. *Move*

Emma — STUDENT (~~COLIN~~). Whas gon' happen to these boys today?
Seth — STUDENT (~~TORIA~~). They're in a shitload of trouble.
Asha — STUDENT (~~JUSTIN~~). Major shitload of trouble.
 STUDENT (COLIN). Heard that white boy got sent to the hospital.

De'Andre — STUDENT (~~JUSTIN~~). Say he got beat up pretty bad.
 STUDENT (TORIA). This got somethin' to do with those nooses hangin' from that tree?

Principal — STUDENT (DE'ANDRE). This got somethin' to do with that protest that happened the other day?
 STUDENT (COLIN). Or is it all just random?
 ★STUDENT (JUSTIN). Is it all just random??
 STUDENT (TORIA). What's gouna happen to those boys now?
 ★STUDENT (RAYLYNN). The white boy in the hospital. And them black boys...

Tonia — STUDENT (~~JUSTIN~~). The six of 'em.
Seth — STUDENT (ASHA). Twenty.
Emma — STUDENT (~~COLIN~~). A hundred.
 ★STUDENT (RAYLYNN). It was only six.
 STUDENT (ASHA). Heard they done got arrested. *Move*
 STUDENT (TORIA). I know one of them boys.
 STUDENT (JUSTIN). I know one of 'em too.

Justin
 ★STUDENT (~~TORIA~~). Say the white boy... He's new to this school... transfer student. His name's Colin, I think.
 (*Flash. COLIN breaks out of the ENSEMBLE and freezes into a pool of light.*)

★STUDENT (~~JUSTIN~~). Other one I know. That's Raylynn's brother, De'Andre.
 (*Flash. DE'ANDRE breaks out of the ENSEMBLE and freezes into a pool of light.*)

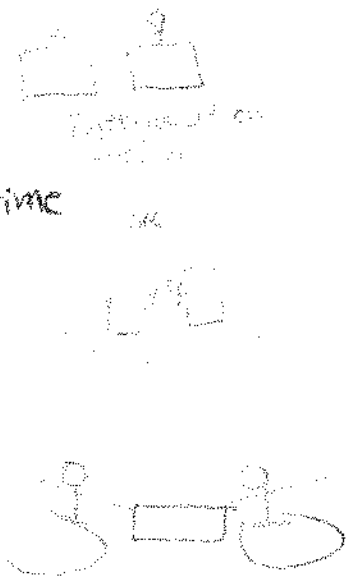
★STUDENT (ASHA). And both of 'em are in a shitload now. A real shitload.
 (*Shift.*)

Speaking in other groups

Interrogation

(COLIN and DE'ANDRE are isolated in separate pools of light.)

- ★ COLIN. I was just mindin' my business. Like I always do. Like I do everyday. Don't got time to be worryin' 'bout nobody else.
- ★ DE'ANDRE. I gots a plan. Gonna get drafted and get outta here. Go pro.
- COLIN. Buy my mama a new place for herself.
- DE'ANDRE. Move my family to a new 'hood.
- ★ COLIN. Same dream us all got.
- ★ DE'ANDRE. So you probly ain't thankin' I'm 'bout nothin' neither. Same dream.
- ★ COLIN. Same plan. Same slim chance.
- ★ DE'ANDRE. Probly ain't thankin' I got good odds.
- ★ COLIN. But you check my stats - tell me I ain't brung my A game to every play I made this year.
- ★ DE'ANDRE. Tell me I ain't somethin' ripe to get picked.
- ★ COLIN. So why would I wanna go-messin' that up, hunh?
- ★ DE'ANDRE. You thank I'm part of some gang or somethin'?
- ★ COLIN. You need ta check my stats cuz you ain't got it right.
- ★ DE'ANDRE. You got me wrong if you thank I do anything to kill my chances at havin' somethin' better. And I ain't got no problems with no folks of no kinda...
- ★ COLIN. I ain't got no feelins on race or...
- DE'ANDRE & COLIN. This ain't got nothin' to do with that.
- COLIN. Not for me no way.
- DE'ANDRE. I hit somebody - sho.
- COLIN & DE'ANDRE. But that was in self defense.
- DE'ANDRE. Why would I wanna mess all this up, hunh? You tell me why would I wanna... I got plans.
- COLIN. For my mama. Roof of our house 'bout to cave in. You know that? My mama sittin' there like she watchin' it in slow motion and ain't got no money or no job to

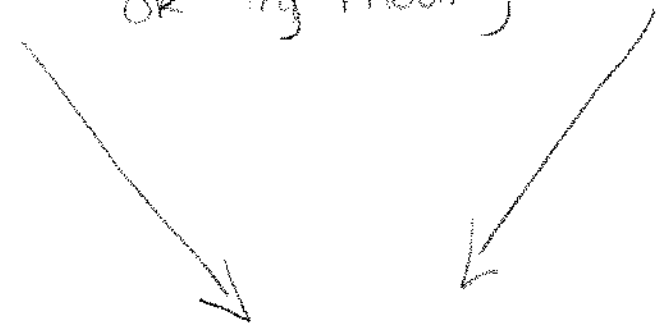


Break

- do nothin' 'bout it: It gonna cave in on her and she can't stop it.
- DE'ANDRE. Lost my mama. Years ago. Got shot right on our front porch. Driveby. And now my daddy sit on that porch 'til he rot. You know that? He sit there like the whole porch gonna collapse on 'im and he can't stop it.
- COLIN. But I can. Go pro. Buy my mama a new house. Get drafted straight outta here.
- DE'ANDRE. Move my family outta this 'hood so we ain't got to think on this no mo'. Won't even have to go to no college. I got on a fast track to somethin' better. So why would I --?? Wouldn't mess this up, y'heard? Not for no...
- COLIN. Not for nobody, ya heard?
- DE'ANDRE. Like I say...
- COLIN. They came after me. I ain't started nothin'.
- DE'ANDRE. I was provoked. I ain't started nothin'.
- COLIN & DE'ANDRE. And that's the truth.

(Shift.)

OR try moving



This Just In...

(TORIA is typing on a laptop, composing a news article. The tone of her piece is very "objective," as she continues to correct and re-correct her own point of view.)

(Simultaneously, DE'ANDRE dances or enacts a movement piece/tableaux symbolizing his arrest.)

TORIA. Today at Cedar High

Six young male students

Black male students

Were arrested for assaulting

Allegedly assaulting

I gotta be clear

Allegedly assaulting

A young white male student.

After an altercation broke out on school grounds

And now the campus is in an uproar

The campus is divided

And six boys' lives

Six students' lives

Six young men's lives

Are left hanging in the balance

Six young men

Some of them on the football team with promising college careers

Have been arrested and are awaiting the charges.

This could be a huge tear in the community of this whole campus.

And the lives of six young Black male students hang desperately in the balance, as we wait -

And wait...

And wait...

And wait...

And wait...

(Solo) Movement #5

T
A desk

Pride

D on 4x4

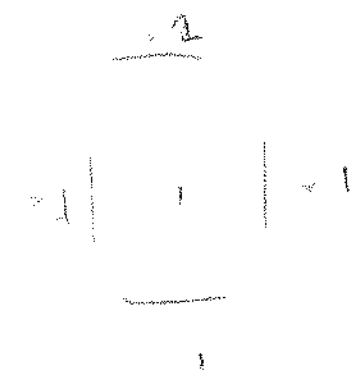
For the results...

(She presses "enter," submitting her article to the school newspaper.)

(With pride.) Send.

(DE'ANDRE's piece ends with him being ushered away in handcuffs.)

(Shift.) *Chad takes him away



6 young men

- Walt
- Jai
- T
- Da
- Emma
- Quivonne

Sayin' What Need To Be Said

(RAYLYNN is at the lockers. ASHA approaches her.)

ASHA. Ain't heard from you in a coupla days.

RAYLYNN. Been busy.

ASHA. Heard about D.

RAYLYNN. Everybody 'cross the whole school heard about D.

ASHA. They done arrested him?

RAYLYNN. Got him sittin' in jail. Like some criminal.

ASHA. Jail?? Goddamn.

RAYLYNN. Been suspended indefinitely, Miller say.

ASHA. What about the other guys?

RAYLYNN. All six of 'em. Suspended and in jail.

ASHA. Colin get suspended too?

RAYLYNN. No. But ain't seen 'im. Ain't been to school since it happened.

ASHA. I just can't believe it. None of this.

RAYLYNN. Can't you?

ASHA. Just can't believe how thangs done turned around here in the last few days.

RAYLYNN. Turned around? (*Hmph.*) Prefer thangs like they used to be, hunh?

ASHA. I ain't said that. I just mean...

RAYLYNN. What you mean?

ASHA. Shit Ray, why you got so much attitude at me?

RAYLYNN. Cuz I'm mad.

ASHA. Mad at me?

RAYLYNN. At everythang. Maybe the whole damn south.

ASHA. Mad cuz I ain't come stand under that tree with ya'll?

RAYLYNN. You can do what you wanna do.

ASHA. I ain't know what to do 'bout that. I ain't know how to feel.

RAYLYNN. So you do nothin'. Just suckin' up air. Apathetic.

ASHA. I ain't apathetic. Don't call me that.

RAYLYNN. What is you?

ASHA. I 'ono. I just ain't feel like...for some reason...it ain't feel like I belonged out there.

RAYLYNN. Belonged out where?

ASHA. With everybody. All the black students.

RAYLYNN. You always been with us befo'. Lookin' and pretendin' like you us. But just when we go to stick our neck out on the line, all of a sudden you don't feel like you belong?

ASHA. That how you seein' it??

RAYLYNN. How else I'm 'sposed to see it?

ASHA. I 'ono. Truth is, I ain't never felt so White 'til all this start goin' on.

RAYLYNN. You is White.

ASHA. I know, but I ain't never felt like it. Most of the time I'm around ya'll I just feel like...one of the same. But soon as it started bein' a thang... I dunno. Soon as it started bein' like a statement or whatever -

RAYLYNN. Must be good for you.

ASHA. What's that mean?

RAYLYNN. To be able to put it on and take it off whenever you want. Not me. I don't get to choose. I got this fo' life.

ASHA. Why it gotta be such a thang all of a sudden? Why it got to mean everythang you do be about that? Everytime somebody get in trouble nah. Everytime somebody get in a fight nah. Everytime somebody do somethin' stupid...now it always got to have somethin' to do with...bein' Black?

RAYLYNN. You askin' me that?

ASHA. I'm askin' anybody who got the answer.

RAYLYNN. I don't know the answer, I don't know why it be a thang all the time. I just know I ain't make it that way. I'm just reactin'. I ain't put those nooses on that tree.

(organic)
©
Bleachers

ASHA. What if it wunn't 'bout race? Just what if?

RAYLYNN. What if somebody spit in yo' face and tell you it wunn't disrespect? That make the spit feel better to you? That make it any less spit?

ASHA. Naw, but --

RAYLYNN. Spit is spit. It's disrespect. It's violence. Just cuz you call hate a joke don't make it one. "Specially when ain't nobody laughin'.

ASHA. Shit! You so impatient.

RAYLYNN. Impatient with who?

ASHA. Everybody that don't see stuff fast as you. That don't make us yo' enemy.

RAYLYNN. Ain't said it did.

ASHA. Ain't gotta say it.

(Pause. RAYLYNN is quiet. Not sure how she feels about this statement.)

(ASHA backs away. There is a moment of stillness between them.)

(Move silence. They search for words. Nothing.)

(Finally, a new subject.)

It's hot then a bitch today, ain't it?

RAYLYNN. Yep. Ain't feelin' nothin' like October. Feelin' like July.

ASHA. The whole world gonna explode into a ball of fire cuz we all overheated and can't do nothin' but fight each other.

RAYLYNN. That's pretty morbid, Asha.

ASHA. I know it. Datin' E done made me morbid. He got a sick sense of romance. Spend the whole evenin' with him watchin' that horrible documentary *Faces of Death*. Who in the hell wanna spend a date night watchin' a million different ways of people blowin' up and dyin'? I think I'm gon' have to expire this unbalanced relationship.

(RAYLYNN cracks a smile at ASHA. Suddenly ASHA rushes to her bag.)

Oh shit! I almost forgot...your campaign poster.

RAYLYNN. I told you I ain't want no --

(ASHA pulls out a poster, rolled up in her bag. It is beautifully colored and well thought out. On it -- RAYLYNN's name and a slogan that reads:)

("Raylynn Harris For Class President...Because It's Just Time.")

(RAYLYNN is taken aback. She revels in the poster.)

RAYLYNN. It's...

ASHA. I know you don't like slogans // but I heard you sayin' this befo --

RAYLYNN. Amazin'!

(ASHA stops -- finally registering that RAYLYNN enjoys the poster.)

(They stare at it in silence.)

ASHA. I 'shoul do hope D don't get in no more trouble, Ray. He ain't no kinda bad and I hope they seein' that.

(RAYLYNN quickly remembers something.)

RAYLYNN. Shit -- I almost forgot. I gotta go.

ASHA. Where you goin'? I come with you.

RAYLYNN. No I... I got to take care of somethin' for my brother...on my own.

(Shift.)

Press – Ure

(Lights up on the school press room. JUSTIN works on the finishing touches of the layout. TORIA enters.)

TORIA. You got it?

JUSTIN. Got what?

TORIA. The article I sent you? I know I emailed it at the last minute, but there was just so much to cover.

JUSTIN. Was supposed to write three different articles. Short articles. Under 2000 words. What you sent? A novel.

TORIA. I started to do that...keep the issues separate. But then I figured with all what's been goin' on, maybe they ain't so separate. Students in detention for hangin' nooses on a tree. Six Black students in trouble for jumpin' one White student on the football team – with possible homophobic undertones. A Black student runnin' for class president for the first time in the history of this school –

JUSTIN. Well goodie for you for doin' your homework Toria. Now explain to me how all that's supposed to fit into my layout.

TORIA. Justin screw your layout! Did you read my article? This is the type of journalism that could single handedly save our press!

JUSTIN. Single handedly?

TORIA. I'm just sayin' –

JUSTIN. Your article ain't makin' it. I've taken submissions from the two sophomores and one junior who wanted to contribute. They followed the guidelines.

TORIA. You did what?

JUSTIN. I've filled the slot.

TORIA. You – you're bluffin'.

JUSTIN. Am not. There go the test run right there. Soon as I get this border lined up, I'm goin' to final print.

(TORIA snatches up the test run papers and reads urgently. She flips through the articles.)

TORIA. You've gotta be fuckin' kidding me.

JUSTIN. I'm not kidding.

TORIA. Underclassmen? You're going to fill the senior press with articles from underclassmen?

JUSTIN. You've left me no choice.

TORIA. These articles are bullshit. This one is a report on the different types of afterschool activities. Do you know that?

JUSTIN. I know that.

TORIA. I mean, and this one...a debate on whether or not we should keep vending machines in the basement or move 'em to the second floor. Are you serious?!

JUSTIN. It's a good debate.

TORIA. It's bullshit and you know it. It doesn't deal with anything real that's been going on at this school.

JUSTIN. No. It doesn't provide another platform for drama. That's what you're really mad at.

TORIA. Drama?!

JUSTIN. That's right.

TORIA. You're out of your fuckin' mind, you know that?

JUSTIN. Don't swear at me, Toria. You're pushin' it.

TORIA. I'm pushing it?! Justin what in the hell?! I mean even for you this is ridiculous. You know my article was good. I did what you said to do. I was objective. I pointed out the holes on all sides. I thought about the Black students and everythang they musta been feelin' this whole week like it happened to me –

JUSTIN. It didn't. It didn't happen to you.

TORIA. It's my job to imagine if it did. The way those students got arrested for that fight. Tried as adults. Don't that make you just a little bit... I mean as one of 'em –

JUSTIN. One of who exactly, Toria?

(organic office)

TORIA. A Black guy Justin. Jesus -- why are we tiptoein' around sayin' it all the damn time? I'm ~~White~~. You don't see me havin' no problems with sayin' it.

JUSTIN. You're also obnoxious.

TORIA. Might be, but 'least I ain't 'shamed.

(Beat. JUSTIN turns to look at TORIA directly. His eyes pierce her.)

JUSTIN. What -- what'd you just say to me?

TORIA. You heard me. And I ain't apologizin'.

JUSTIN. You think you know what I am? You think you know me?

TORIA. I know enough.

JUSTIN. You don't know a damn thing about me. Call me ashamed. 'Shamed of what? Bein' Black? That's all you got?

TORIA. Why else you stay quiet with all this racial stuff goin' on?

JUSTIN. Maybe I don't have no strong opinion about it this way or that. You ever think about that?

TORIA. That's bullshit. My granddaddy say opinions and assholes -- everybody's got both.

JUSTIN. I ain't your granddaddy.

TORIA. You hide from every possible thang that actually deals with somethin' real. Everytime I bring up some kinda injustice, you dodge the conversation. Tell me to be objective 'bout every damn thang! How can you go through life bein' so removed all the time?!

JUSTIN. You said you wanna be a journalist in real life? What you think they do? Their whole operation is about not lettin' stuff get to 'em. Not takin' life so personal. Just seein' a thing as a thing and not gettin' yourself tied up into it.

TORIA. A good writer can see themselves in everyone.

JUSTIN. I can see people who look like me doin' stuff I'd never think to do...actin' in ways that ain't natural to me...but cuz we got the same skin I'm supposed to see

myself in that? Most folk at this school don't know or care whether I'm alive or dead, but I'm supposed to see myself in them??

TORIA. Some shit is just upsettin' no matter who you are.

JUSTIN. Who are you to tell anybody else what to care about?

TORIA. I'm just me. You ain't the first person to be invisible. You thank I don't know what it's like to be on the periphery all the time? You thank any of these girls here invitin' me to they parties or any of these boys 'round here askin' me for a date? But that don't make me thank less of 'em. Makes me sorry for 'em.

JUSTIN. You know what I been called by them? The people I'm supposed to see myself in?

TORIA. How am I supposed to --

JUSTIN. Oreo. Ice cream sandwich. Black on the outside -- white on the inside. Sell-out. Nerd. Loser. White boy.

TORIA. Justin, I don't need to --

JUSTIN. Lame. Wack. Corny. Weak nigga -- cuz I don't like to fight.

TORIA. Justin', okay. I get it --

JUSTIN. Punk. Soft. Gay nigga -- also cuz I don't like to fight.

TORIA. Alright Justin, you made your point --

JUSTIN. Corny nigga. Any kinda "nigga" you can think of except "my nigga." Never "that's my nigga." Never anything welcomin'. Just the stuff that keeps me separate. Every year. Same shit. Same names. Same insults. Cuz I don't match...cuz I don't fit the thing in your head or their head or somebody's head of what I'm SUPPOSED to be. Well you know what you can do with your SUPPOSED to's? Go fuck yourself with 'em! Cuz I don't care how you wanna see yourself. But don't tell me how to go through life. If I didn't go this way...if I didn't remove myself from all the hate and pain and anger that's thrown at me every damn day -- I might lose my shit and knock everybody's head off! You

Nothing

get it? So 'til you're livin' like me, don't fuckin' tell me how to survive!

(Beat.)

(TORIA is dumbfounded. JUSTIN is startled by his own liberation. He tries to regroup himself. Finds something to keep himself busy.)

(A long moment of silence.)

(Then:)

I gave the story to you. Told you to state the facts. Why you always got to color it with somethin' else?

TORIA. I 'ono, Justin. Seem to me like that's where the truth is...in the color.

(TORIA leaves.)

(JUSTIN, alone and contemplative.)

(Shift.)

Try SL platform

Try the Ramp

Try the 4x4

Cop A Plea

(RAYLYNN and COLIN in the front yard of COLIN's home. They are alone. It is near dusk.)

RAYLYNN. Hope I ain't botherin' you none.

COLIN. Yeah, well...

RAYLYNN. Your mama look like I was interruptin' yo' dinnertime or somethin'.

COLIN. She'll get over it.

(Pause.)

RAYLYNN. I like the way she keep her flowers. Real neat.

COLIN. It's alright.

(Beat.)

RAYLYNN. My brother... What you gonna do about him?

COLIN. You seriously askin' me?

RAYLYNN. I'm askin' you.

COLIN. What you thank I oughta do?

RAYLYNN. Talk to the DA. Get 'im to drop the charges.

COLIN. You can't be serious.

RAYLYNN. Why can't I?

COLIN. I get him to drop 'em and then what?

RAYLYNN. Let even be even.

COLIN. It simple as that to you?

RAYLYNN. Ain't said it was simple. Nothin' 'bout this whole thang is simple. Just even. Fair.

COLIN. You know what he done?

RAYLYNN. Ya'll got in a fight.

COLIN. They jumped me.

RAYLYNN. Not D.

COLIN. Yes. D.

RAYLYNN. He say he was provoked. By you.

COLIN. That what he said?

RAYLYNN. You ain't call him nothin'?

divided

(COLIN is quiet.)

Outta his name like that. Somethin' racial that I 'ont even wanna repeat. You don't think that was provokin'?

COLIN. He tell you what he called me?

RAYLYNN. He say he ain't call you that.

COLIN. You know what that feel like?

RAYLYNN. He say he ain't say that.

COLIN. He laughed at it, didn't he?

RAYLYNN. Laughin' ain't the same as callin'.

COLIN. That word...ain't nothin' funny 'bout it. Hate that word.

RAYLYNN. The team just bein' stupid. Makin' dumb jokes.

COLIN. Just like them nooses was a joke?

RAYLYNN. That ain't...

...

...

That ain't the same.

COLIN. 'Course it ain't.

RAYLYNN. And what you call him wunn't no better.

COLIN. 'Cept I hear 'em callin' it to theyselves all the time.

RAYLYNN. Still ain't yo' right to repeat it.

COLIN. I was mad. Offended.

RAYLYNN. Don't make it better. Everytime somebody hurt all they wanna do is hurt back. It don't make nothin' better.

(Pause.)

COLIN. You know why I left my last school?

RAYLYNN. Coz they ain't likin' yo' lifestyle?

COLIN. Cuz couldn't nobody make sense of me. See if I was a...a faggot...I ought to be lookin' like some kinda sissy or bein' soft-like. They know what to do with that. Make sense to 'em. But bein' on the football team...playin' just as hard as the other fellas...harder even...that don't add up in they math. That make 'em real

nervous. If somebody seem normal like me can be this way, then it only be a real thin line 'tween them and me. And don't nobody like that. Not nobody.

RAYLYNN. I ain't treated you that way.

COLIN. I ain't know you was -- that way...ain't that what you say?

RAYLYNN. I ain't mean nothin' bad by that.

COLIN. Nah? What you mean, somethin' good?

RAYLYNN. Nah but like...what -- you want me to say sorry?

COLIN. I 'ont want you to say nothin'. Don't do me no favors.

RAYLYNN. (A confession.) Well I 'ont agree with it. K? Just tellin' the truth.

COLIN. Agree with what? What's for you to agree with? Ain't none of this about you! Who care if you agree? What that got to do with nothin'?

RAYLYNN. That ain't somethin' make sense to me. You want me to 'pologize for how I was brought up? I ain't never had to be around that befo'.

COLIN. What if I told you I ain't never had to be around people like you befo'? What if I told you that my mama say all kindsa things 'bout yo' brother that I ain't gonna repeat. What if I don't agree with who you are neither?

RAYLYNN. That don't make no sense.

COLIN. No, it don't.

(Beat.)

RAYLYNN. (A plea.) He's my brother.

COLIN. I know who he is.

RAYLYNN. We lost our mama. Three years ago. Said they was tellin' "yo'mama" jokes all through practice. Thank that ain't fuel him none? You know how that affect him?

COLIN. What do I care what fuel him? He done what he done. You see this gash right here? (Points to his eye.) This don't care 'bout no fuel. You know what they done to my ribs? Want me to show you the bruises?

RAYLYNN. No.

COLIN. Tell me 'bout no fuel. We all got somethin' that fuel our anger. That don't make it alright.

RAYLYNN. I ain't said it make it alright! But we ain't just talkin' revenge. They gon' try him as a adult. You know that? You know what that mean? Say that DA callin' it attempted murder. You know that?

COLIN. What that got to do with me?

RAYLYNN. You hearin' what I'm sayin'?! – We ain't just talkin' you gettin' some kinda payback. We ain't talkin' hurtin' yo' pride or your feelins or even a coupla bruises.

COLIN. Couple?

RAYLYNN. This the dirty south. Fights happen all the time. My brother been jumped 'bout *three* times in his life. One time he was only thirteen and had suffered a concussion. You thank the older boys what jumped him gon' to jail? They ain't done nothin' but go on 'bout they lives and grow up eventually. Ain't no DA talkin' to us and makin' no big case out of it.

COLIN. How's that my fault?

RAYLYNN. Ain't sayin' it's yo' fault. Ain't sayin' it's alright what happen to you. I ain't sayin' my brother wunn't wrong for fightin' you even though you called him outta his name. But what you doin'...this ain't no temporary punishment. You press these charges and you messin' with his life, y'heard me? With the life of my whole family. You really thank that's justice?

COLIN. I don't thank none of this is justice!!

RAYLYNN. What you been through ain't nothin' new. You thank you above a ass whippin'? We all get ass whippins! The rest of us just got to deal. That be life!

COLIN. Get out. I don't want you here no mo'.

RAYLYNN. Wh--?? I...wait – wait a minute –

(COLIN stares at RAYLYNN. His eyes are raging.)

COLIN. Nah. Ain't no wait a minute. Time for you to go.

RAYLYNN. You ain't even hearin' reason.

COLIN. I done heard enough a yo' reason.

RAYLYNN. Colin –

COLIN. I say leave.

RAYLYNN. Shit, I...

...
...

(RAY looks at COLIN needfully. Did she go too far? She slowly begins to leave.)

(Stops.)

(Tears in her throat.) You know...even though you the way you is...even though I don't all the way get it... I wouldn't wanna see nothin' bad happen to you. Wouldn't wanna take away yo' freedom or yo' life. Cuz ain't no comin' back from that.

(Shift.)

Survival Code

(Music.)

(DE'ANDRE is illuminated. He is in jail. He starts to make a Hip Hop beat with his fist. Other prisoners hear and join in on the beat, one by one. The ensemble becomes a chorus of fists beating out a rhythm on the floor, walls, whatever.)

DE'ANDRE. Behind the lines - behind bars / ain't remember the rules ①
Mama gave me lessons / early on I been schooled ②
Behind the lines / behind bars / ain't remember the rules ③
Mama gave me lessons / early on I been schooled ④
Black face / male body / always a threat
- It's the rules it's the rules ain't remember the rules - A11
Hands high / out of pockets / keep anger in check
It's the rules it's the rules ain't remember the rules - A11
Don't look in the eye
No saggin' at night
Keep hands out of pockets
Hold 'em in plain sight
Nod to the officer, never get smart
Hold back the defiance / keep the rage in ya heart
Don't matter you right
Don't matter you true
Black face / male body / ain't gon' listen to you - A11
Don't matter you hurtin'
Don't matter ya pain
Black face / male body / you always to blame - A11
It's the rules it's the rule ain't remember the rules
Everybody gonna fight but only you do the time
It's the rules it's the rules ain't remember the rules - A11
Black face / male body is always the crime
Mama gave me lessons / Early on I been schooled

Moreman
Dance
Step
Hi G

They don't care about the rules

Circle

* Qui back to "student" / prisoner"

Shit hell goddamn I done fo'got the rules
Mama gave me lessons / Early on I been schooled
Why the hell / how the hell did I fo'get the rules
It's the rules //
It's the rules //
Ain't remember ain't remember ain't remember the rules
It's the rules //
It's the rules //
It's the
It's the
It's the
Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh

- Cower in pain
- Embody the (sway)
- Ancestors
- Leave

(Movement or Dance symbolizes him trying to break free from his prison cell, as the prison walls close in on him.)

(In a separate pool of light, TORIA is illuminated.)

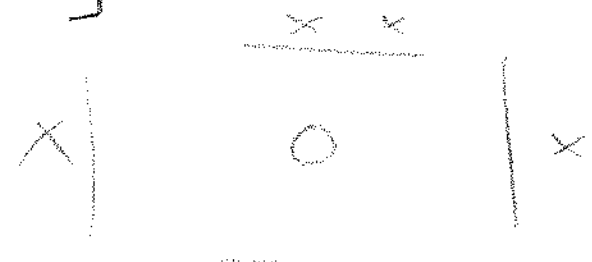
TORIA. My granddaddy - he say we come from a long line of abolitionists. Told me he used to shuttle folks back and forth in the Civil Rights times when they was doin' that bus boycott. Say before that, my great-great-grandmamma and great-great-granddaddy used to moves slaves to the north. Say we come from people that believe freedom don't happen by itself. Ain't just for one group. Can't be free if everybody else around you is chained. If we don't know how to connect to a struggle besides our own, we're all screwed. That's what my family believed. Say everybody always got a part to play in whatever world they livin' in at the time. Every generation. And what you do with your part will determine whether it added value or destruction.

4x4

connected to the pool

(Beat.)

It's 'spose to be our turn now. (Pause.) Wonder what we gonna add??



(Liberation.)

(Lights reveal RAYLYNN.)

(She holds up a sign that says:)

("Drop the Charges Against D.") Asha + Raylynn

(ASHA joins RAYLYNN's side. She carries another sign that reads:)

("Free the Cedar 6.") Justin / Frank

(The other ensemble members begin to circle with signs:)

("Suspension Over Prison.") Toria + Jessica + Noah

(As they chant over and over under a Hip Hop-inspired beat:)

ALL STUDENTS. Free the Cedar Six!

Free the Cedar Six!

(Ongoing.)

(The rally circle moves quicker and more intensely as DE'ANDRE struggles more intensely in his movement/dance to get free.)

(Then suddenly, COLIN enters and watches the rally. The circle stops abruptly. Will there be a fight?)

(DE'ANDRE continues to move with aggression to get free.)

(COLIN approaches RAYLYNN and looks at her sign. A moment of silent negotiation between them.)

(She hands COLIN a sign, but he doesn't join. He doesn't fight. He just looks at the sign, and the rally, in an elongated moment of consideration.)

(The circle begins to resume in marching action as COLIN remains outside of it, contemplative.)

(Suddenly, DE'ANDRE breaks out of the handcuffs! They can be physical or imagined. But he is definitely free.)

Cow

Movement
Dance
Step
#17

(He embraces the freedom through movement and space. A celebration!)

(Lights isolate RAYLYNN.)

RAYLYNN. Today is a new day. Like everyday, I guess. Today still hot as hell. Seem like this heat wave ain't never gonna break. Gonna have to adjust to it, maybe. Today De'Andre ate breakfast with us. Out on bail. Back at home. We hope it stay that way. Today my daddy wrote a letter to the Governor of Louisiana on behalf of the Cedar Six. My mama would be proud.

(Beat.)

Today is a debate at school for the student body. I got my bullet points ready. Today is not about waitin' on change. Today about breakin' rules. More rules everyday. 'Til ain't nothin' left to break. 'Til ain't nothin' left to fight for. 'Til the work is done. Today I ain't the same as I was yesterday. Yesterday gone. Today is here. Tomorrow is coming.

- To audience

4x4

down
back
to be
hope in
to be
legality and
to be
in a
rage
Almost
of
time. "

(RAYLYNN looks upward...out into a new horizon.)

(She smiles.)

(Lights illuminate a tree in the distance.)

(Slowly, three nooses are illuminated in silhouette. Hanging from the tree. Joined by three more. Then hundreds.)

(RAYLYNN looks back at the tree, as the ghostly memory of the nooses remains, reminding us of what can never be forgotten.)

(She turns back out to the horizon.)

• hope - Twist + Faith

• The Way It Is / Charges - Type

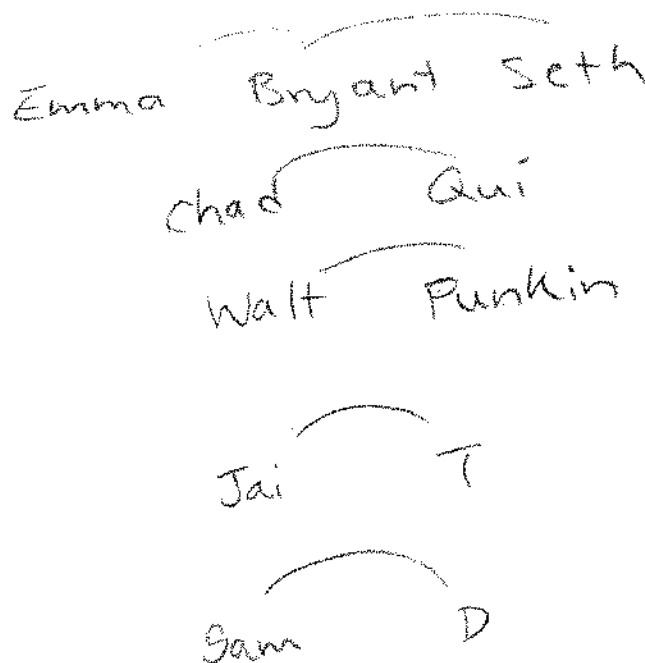
★ • Alright - Kendrick Lamar

RAYLYNN. Yep. Tomorrow.

(Lights fade on RAYLYNN. On the ENSEMBLE. On the noses.)

End of Play

Tryna figure
out how
to do a
Soul train
line for
Curtain



* All could
Run out
and start it!

One-on-One Sessions Character Development Notes

- **Character:** Asha (Core Student)
- **Actor:** Torie “T” LaCaze
- **Race:** White
- **Classification:** Senior
- **Name pronunciation:** (Ah-shuh, possibly Aye-shuh by some people)

- **Random thoughts about the character or show?**
She reminds me of one of those: Hot Cheeto girls or someone who just blindly borrows culture

- **What do you think this play is about?**
This show is about double standards in race and seeing everyone’s processes. Knows it’s wrong to appropriate but does it anyway. Assumption of white privilege – shows how someone can take and take and be okay with not giving back to it.

- **What do you think your character’s role in this play is?**
She represents friendship! Asha thinks her friendship with Raylynn is very important. In the moment with the tree she didn’t stick up for her friends and that hurt her.
Monologue/Family. Her background and upbringing. Asha is not inherently racist in the sense of hatred and malice but her behavior is accepted by her peers and for the time period. Not quite sure if Asha realizes the big picture. Character is different from self (actor).

- **Are you a rule breaker or a rule follower? Explain. Does your character remain stagnant, flip-flop or go through an arch from one way to the other?**
Asha is both a Rule breaker and a Rule follower. She flip-flops between them depending on what best suits her in the moment.

- **What do you think will be the biggest challenge you’ll face with playing this character/being in this play?**
The biggest challenge will be how to play this character and not come off disrespectful and stereotypical.

- **What are your feelings towards the word “faggot”? How has this word affected you personally or been a part of your experience? Explain your comfort levels with using this term.**

- **Visualize your character: What do they look, smell, feel, sound, taste like?**
In thinking of what the character Asha looks like, I think it may be helpful to think about what Sharon looks like. Sharon is Asha’s Black stepmom from whom she models after. Sharon feels cool as hell. She has NEW. New car, new house, money. She wears colors like red and royal blue. Her nails done, hair done, everything did. She never leaves the house without makeup. She gets her hair done all the time and always has a new style, but she mostly wears a silk press or micro braids. She wears cute mom jeans and nice blouses or graphic tees. When she is around the house she wears these gorgeous silk moo-moos. She smells so good like vanilla or something semi-sweet. Her skin feels smooth warm and soft. Her voice is like silk, butter melting on a hot day; soothing to the ears. She tastes like fruit with a dash of tajin. Like a mango with a little bit of a kick to it. *What things does Asha pull from her imagery of Sharon that she idolizes after and uses for herself? What parts of Sharon are present in Asha?*

- **What is your character’s natural base rhythm?**

- **What is Asha’s astrological sign?** I’m thinking Aries or Gemini. The free spirit and childlikeness of an Aries but the duality and double minded-ness of the Gemini.

- **Reflection/HW/Thoughts/Notes**
I want you to find more moments to empathize with Asha, while her choices may seem ludicrous to a contemporary society she makes these choices for a reason. Think of how many of the characters are looking for a sense of belonging.

- **Character:** Ensemble Student; using the made up name Jessica
- **Actor:** Emma Cox
- **Race:** White
- **Classification:** Junior
- **Name pronunciation:** (Jeh-sick-uh)

- **Random thoughts about the character or show?**
I really like the script and think it's very relevant to today.

- **What do you think this play is about?**
This is a story about racism in school systems and how white people do things to Black people and no one bats an eye. It's also about finding your place – deciding where they're standing and whose side they are on in the situation.

- **What do you think your character's role in this play is?**
The purpose of adding the ensemble students instead of just utilizing the 6 main students creates an extension of the world and helps to show better what's going on.

- **Are you a rule breaker or a rule follower? Explain. Does your character remain stagnant, flip-flop or go through an arch from one way to the other?**
Starts as a Rule follower then becomes a Rule Breaker by the end of the story. We are approaching this character with an arch; she begins as a rule follower then becomes a rule breaker by the end of the show. She is in denial about racism. What is the moment where the change happens for her? Who are you by the time we get to the Free Cedar 6 Rally?

- **What do you think will be the biggest challenge you'll face with playing this character/being in this play?**
Working through own privileges and confront them and how to move forward.

- **What are your feelings towards the word "faggot"? How has this word affected you personally or been a part of your experience? Explain your comfort levels with using this term.**

- **Visualize your character: What do they look, smell, feel, sound, taste like?**
This character looks like the stereotypical popular girl , she's well put together, she wears soft colors. She follows school dress code religiously. She smells like flowers, pleasant and soft. She tastes like my mom's lemon drop cake. Sounds like Luna and Hermione; delicate. She feels like a soft blanket.

- **What is your character's natural base rhythm?**
Steady, staccato rhythm. She' has a steady cheer leader beat. Standard 8 count.

- **What is your character's astrological sign?**
Capricorn, very intelligent and logical. Slow to react based on emotions. Needs to see everything from all angles before deciding to do something.

- **Reflection/HW/Thoughts/Notes**
Start thinking about what lines you want to take from the ensemble sections and how they influence your character.

- **Character:** Ensemble Student; using the made up name Frank
- **Actor:** Bryant Berry
- **Race:** Black
- **Classification:** Freshman
- **Name pronunciation:** (Fray-nk)

- **Random thoughts about the character or show?**
Nervous, 1st time performing in a show ever.

- **What do you think this play is about?**
This is a story about 6 students; tells a different instead of the typical false accusation but instead is excessively charged.

- **What do you think your character's role in this play is?**
The purpose of the ensemble students is to increase the enhancing of the environment.

- **Are you a rule breaker or a rule follower? Explain. Does your character remain stagnant, flip-flop or go through an arch from one way to the other?**
He is a rule follower; wants to be more outgoing but doesn't. His view of the world is sort of "what's the point in fighting?" He wants to join in with the Black students but doesn't seem to see a "benefitting" end result so he often decides to remain stagnant.

- **What do you think will be the biggest challenge you'll face with playing this character/being in this play?**
The biggest challenge Bryant is facing is with trying to show his take on the character along with this being his first time performing.

- **What are your feelings towards the word "faggot"? How has this word affected you personally or been a part of your experience? Explain your comfort levels with using this term.**
No problem saying "faggot"

- **Visualize your character: What do they look, smell, feel, sound, taste like?**
Looks decently dressed, not expensive or designer brands. Comes to school to learn and go home. He smells like freshly cut grass. He sounds tired but isn't. He feels like he wants to be included more; a sense of longing. He tastes like brown sugar and cinnamon oatmeal.

- **What is your character's natural base rhythm?**
His base rhythm is the morse code for SOS; 3 long taps, 3 short.

- **What is your character's astrological sign?**
He seems like an earth or air sign. Possibly a Taurus, Capricorn or Libra.

- **Reflection/HW/Thoughts/Notes**
Start thinking about what lines you want to take from the ensemble sections and how they influence your character.

- **Character:** Principal Miller
- **Actor:** Tithalia Lockett
- **Race:** Black
- **Classification:** Principal/Adult
- **Name pronunciation:** (Prin-si-pull, Mill-Err)

- **Random thoughts about the character or show?**
Really loves this show and is excited to be a part of it. Provoking thought: “Why him? (Colin) he just got here. Why jump on him and not the other old people that’s been there already adding to the tension and oppression.

- **What do you think this play is about?**
This play is about two sides of the same story and what it means in deciding which “struggle” is worse. Rhyme scheme. It’s about the viewpoints of everyone, there’s no right way to feel about something. It’s also a story about listening. Provoking thoughts: Black or Gay? Which side?

- **What do you think your character’s role in this play is?**
The role of the principal – She seems to be stuck in a cycle of having to make choice – trying to do the best you can and hope for the best.

- **Are you a rule breaker or a rule follower? Explain. Does your character remain stagnant, flip-flop or go through an arch from one way to the other?**
Principal Miller is a rule follower/ but when not on the school grounds she breaks them and joins in the fight for justice.

- **What do you think will be the biggest challenge you’ll face with playing this character/being in this play?**
The biggest challenge for the actor appears to be being able to convey the depth of the character in just a few lines.

- **What are your feelings towards the word “faggot”? How has this word affected you personally or been a part of your experience? Explain your comfort levels with using this term.**

- **Visualize your character: What do they look, smell, feel, sound, taste like?**
She looks colorful, vibrant, lively. She smells like something sweet like lavender or vanilla. She sounds like a good mom and feels like a warm hug. She tastes like something sweet but with a kick to it.

- **What is your character’s natural base rhythm?**
- Her base rhythm is steady like a heartbeat; legato but it can increase in a tense or stressful situation.

- **What is your character’s astrological sign?**
She gives Cancer energy. Emotionally involved but can’t display it all the time. Cares deeply for others at the expense of self at times.

- **Reflection/HW/Thoughts/Notes**
Work on conveying those layered emotions in the lines by determining the subtext behind each plea for the students to stop. What is she really saying underneath the text?

- **Character:** De'Andre (Core Student)
- **Actor:** DonQuan Bogen
- **Race:** Black
- **Classification:** Junior
- **Name pronunciation:** (Dee-Ahn-Dray)
- **Random thoughts about the character or show?**
 "I really like this script and how everything intertwines. Yeah, we're all different, but at the end of the day we all have our own struggles."
- **What do you think this play is about?**
 This play is about when you allow your fear, emotion, and blame to take over. It's also about starting over.
- **What do you think your character's role in this play is?**
 De'Andre represents the boys from the Jena 6. The story is about him but doesn't follow him. It involves the events of his life, but we don't see or experience them all on stage, nor does he have a strong physical presence in the story. He has this sense of pride that he can't easily let go of; ultimately the same as Colin.
- **Are you a rule breaker or a rule follower? Explain. Does your character remain stagnant, flip-flop, or go through an arch from one way to the other?**
 De'Andre is definitely a rule breaker. He follows his own principles for what he believes in. If his principles are challenged, he bulldozes over it. He doesn't think and often goes in headfirst into anything and runs away from hurt.
- **What do you think will be the biggest challenge you'll face with playing this character/being in this play?**
 The biggest challenge for this actor will be speaking with his body with just as much intention, intensity, and passion as his words.
- **What are your feelings towards the word "faggot"? How has this word affected you personally or been a part of your experience? Explain your comfort levels with using this term.**
 "I have no problems saying the word."
- **Visualize your character: What do they look, smell, feel, sound, taste like?**
 He looks like the typical teen boy. He wears a chain. He's a chill dude. Possibly wears his football jersey around school. Is sister says he smells like "testosterone and dollar store cologne" but he smells good to me. A cheap cologne like BOD. He sounds like the movie Friday. He's the type of guy that will go help the candy lady bring in her groceries in hopes of getting some treats for his good deeds. He feels like melting frozen peanut butter. He tastes like a chocolate protein bar and chocolate muscle milk.
- **What is your character's natural base rhythm?**
 It's a mix of staccato and legato. It's of course a hip-hop style beat. Think "Jesus Walks" by Kanye West
 Ba Ba Ba Baaahm,
 Ba Ba Ba Baaahm

What is your character's astrological sign? I feel like he's a Leo with a Taurus rising.

De'Andre's Rules

"It's the rules, it's the rules."

How does De'Andre break each rule as the play progresses? Does he do these with specific lines/actions?

1. Keep your emotions in check.
2. "Don't start no shit, won't be no shit."
3. Don't look the officer in the eye
4. Keep hands in plain sight while dealing with authority
5. Keep your head down (protest at the tree)

6. "Closed mouths don't get fed." – Speak up for what you want/believe in.

- **Character:** Colin (Core Student)
- **Actor:** Samuel (Sam) Cooley
- **Race:** White
- **Classification:** Senior
- **Name pronunciation:** (Cah-lynn)

- **Random thoughts about the character or show?**
"I grew up in Jena, LA. My dad was a football coach. It's so interesting to revisit this story in this way because I recall hearing various versions of what "really happened"."

- **What do you think this play is about?**
This play is sums up the saying, "hate begets hate". All sides feel like they did nothing wrong.

- **What do you think your character's role in this play is?**
Why is Colin here? Caught in the crossfire. He believes in Civil Rights and ends up paying for the crim of all the hate. Colin doesn't know "the rules". He comes from another city and here the rules are different. *If Colin is gay, what attracts him to Raylynn?* The idea of mutual respect and admiration he has for Raylynn. She is "attractive" to him because of her presence, energy and boldness. The way she is unapologetic is admirable to Colin. *Let's talk about the relationship between Colin and De'Andre as teammates.* The relationship between a QB and RB is a very important one. In football, the RB acts as the QB last line of defense to protect him on the field. (Think about what this means for De'Andre to laugh at what the other boys say about Colin instead of standing up for him. He and Raylynn have been hanging out so we can assume the Colin and De'Andre have also grown closer on and off the field)

- **Are you a rule breaker or a rule follower? Explain. Does your character remain stagnant, flip-flop or go through an arch from one way to the other?**
Colin is both a rule breaker and a rule follower. Colin breaks his first rule because he feels betrayed by someone he thought was a friend.

- **What do you think will be the biggest challenge you'll face with playing this character/being in this play?**
The biggest challenge will be the movement and choreography; never done anything like this before. Still new to the world of plays. Will be the third play he's ever done.

- **What are your feelings towards the word "faggot"? How has this word affected you personally or been a part of your experience? Explain your comfort levels with using this term.**
"I'd rather not say it but will if I have to." In Colin's monologue he uses the word "faggot" it is written in smaller text and is italicized. This hints the importance of the word and the weight it has on Colin when he says it out loud. For Colin, this word holds shame and anger, confusion. It is reinforced by his lack of sense of belonging.

- **Visualize your character: What do they look, smell, feel, sound, taste like?**
He is tall, with curly hair. He's a quarterback so he should be popular automatically, but he is kind of low key. He takes really good care of himself. He shaves his legs for football but also because he likes how it makes him look. He wears glasses but they look cool and edgy, possibly round style that could also suggest some level of vulnerability. He is proud of his body. He looks good and he knows it; confident. He smokes pot sometimes but not considered a pot head. He smells good like twilight woods cologne. He sounds like he is from North Carolina. He is soft spoken unless he is excited or upset about something then he becomes very animated. He feels like a snapping turtle; his outward persona is a put on but many don't get to see the true Colin – Raylynn may be the only character who does and Colin comes in as a close second. He tastes fresh, clean, crisp, minty and refreshing but sometimes salty.

- **What is your character's natural base rhythm?**
It's a meticulous rhythm and staccato and legato. Think of The Chain by Fleet Macwood.
Doo Doo Doo Doo, Dooooo, Doo Doo Doo Doo

- **What is your character's astrological sign?**
He seems like a Capricorn or Taurus; definitely an Earth sign.

- **Reflection/HW/Thoughts/Notes**
Think about what physical attributes you can try that will help bring Colin to life.

- **Character:** Toria (Core Student)
- **Actor:** Emani White (Punkin)
- **Race:** Black (Originally written as White)
- **Classification:** Senior
- **Name pronunciation:** (Tore-ree-uh)

- **Random thoughts about the character or show?**
Enjoyed the auditions, callbacks and table read. Loves the play and the characters.

- **What do you think this play is about?**
This play is relevant to today. Racism prejudice, stereotypes, and how it's not Black vs. White. There is a contrast in this story between the characters. Most people think the play is Black vs. White but it's much deeper than that. They don't just side everyone together because of their race because in the real world it's also like that; people are multifaceted.

- **What do you think your character's role in this play is?**
Her funny moments come from a place of seriousness. She's so funny because she means everything she says and is so serious. She serves as comic relief for the intensity and heaviness in the play. She breaks the tension. She is driven, always having some sort of outburst, and is doing too much. She is tone deaf to people's perspectives because she thinks that her way is the right way. She is filled with a sense of pride and has a big ego. (She gives Harriet vibes. She will leave you if you not ready to go.) Stands firm in equality and activism and is very passionate. She does what works for her.

- **Are you a rule breaker or a rule follower? Explain. Does your character remain stagnant, flip-flop or go through an arch from one way to the other?**
She is both a rule break and a rule follower, it just depends on the situation and what she views as "right".

- **What do you think will be the biggest challenge you'll face with playing this character/being in this play?**
The biggest challenge the actor must overcome is understanding the power dynamics between Justin and Toria. It will probably come over time, but knowing when to be "big" vs "small" in his presence will definitely add depth and dimension to the scenes between the two of them.

- **What are your feelings towards the word "faggot"? How has this word affected you personally or been a part of your experience? Explain your comfort levels with using this term.**
No problem saying it. (lol, "Mama, they gone kick me out the program")

- **Visualize your character: What do they look, smell, feel, sound, taste like?**
"I feel more in character when I have parts of the wardrobe. Maybe getting some small things early on will help." She wears glasses! She is very put together and cute. She's giving "homegirl" but smart. Maybe wears high knee socks but rocks some sneakers with it. Catholic school-girl but hood. She chews gum! She keeps a pencil in her shirt pocket and is always carrying some sort of notebook or notepad to write stuff down. She wears makeup and lip gloss. She moves swiftly, is antsy, bustling (New Yorker vibes) She smells like sweat pea and violet or Japanese cherry blossom from bath and body works (she keeps it in her bag!) She feels like she is yearning for something, she is soft, she feels herself and is confident. She tastes like double bubble, bubble gum.

- **What is your character's natural base rhythm?**
Hmph! – che che che che (she sounds like and "if at you" then bounce with it.)

- **What is your character's astrological sign?**
I think Toria is a Leo. She gives all about me energy, maybe also could be a Virgo.

- **Reflection/HW/Thoughts/Notes**
We will focus on thinking of this character as being originally Black to ensure her authenticity stays intact with the story. Keep this in mind.

- **Character:** Raylynn (Core Student)
- **Actor:** J'aiLa Price
- **Race:** Black
- **Classification:** Senior
- **Name pronunciation:** (Raye-lin)

- **Random thoughts about the character or show?**
Initial thoughts – “After the first read, I journaled. I am so excited, vulnerable and ready for “Being” and not “acting”. I relate to the text so much and love the text.” She admires the character and is excited!

- **What do you think this play is about?**
“There are many underlying things this play is about. The main part is that it makes you think about life. It makes you assess things for the future generation – soil, roots, What will WE leave for the next generation?” The ending of this play doesn't get resolved, BUT it ends on an optimistic note because it ends with hope. *(Myini thought rant I will utilize later but thought it was worth sharing: It reminds me of the short film on Netflix, Two Distant Strangers. In reality, a world where racism continues to exist and flourish can seem to be hopeless, and aid in a pessimistic view upon our fate in the world. However, the constant denominator that got our ancestors through 400 years of slavery, Jim crow, Civil rights, prison incarceration – hope and faith. The hope for change and the faith in the next generation to keep up the fight. **Insert Bible scripture about hope, “Now faith is the substance for things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” So to answer the question, What will WE leave for the next generation? I want to leave them hope and faith to continue on.)*

- **What do you think your character's role in this play is?**
Raylynn is a pretty complex character. As the oldest sibling there is this notion that “you can't mess up” You have to be a good example for the younger siblings and because her mom is gone, she is now the “mother figure” of the family and is responsible for taking care of them. She wears a layer of guilt for what happens to De'Andre because she sees it all as her fault, “if she never sat under that tree, none of this would have happened.” In thinking about the differences between Colin and De'Andre, Ray gets Colin's point but she still believes he's going too far because the system unfortunately is unfair so unfair choices must be made. (In this scene, let Asha's words ring in your head, “Some people just don't get it as fast as you.” *What is Ray's purpose?* She's a facilitator. She incites the incidents. She holds the blame, but doesn't want it.

- **Are you a rule breaker or a rule follower? Explain. Does your character remain stagnant, flip-flop or go through an arch from one way to the other?**
We know she is a rule breaker. “The character is not like me.” There are soooo many rules. *What are the rules? What made the character get to the point of breaking the rules, her inciting incident?* Today makes three years that her mom died. “I thought it was illegal to look at a police officer. Some of the rules Black kids are taught: Don't draw attention to yourself. Stay hidden. Don't touch anything.”
Ray's Rules
 1. Stay out of trouble
 2. Take care of your brother
 3. Be a good girl
 4. Break assimilation

- **What do you think will be the biggest challenge you'll face with playing this character/being in this play?**
The biggest challenge is going to be "keeping it fluid". Keeping the emotions true and not being afraid to let the audience see "me" be vulnerable on stage.
- **What are your feelings towards the word "faggot"? How has this word affected you personally or been a part of your experience? Explain your comfort levels with using this term.**
"I didn't know the space and didn't know if it was the right time to say faggot or not with the people in the room during the reading. But I don't have a problem saying it. I'm an actor."
- **Visualize your character: What do they look, smell, feel, sound, taste like?**
Ray always wears her hair up or in braids, never down. She probably wears cornrows to the back with weave with some cute zig zag design in it. She has a gotta stay ready attitude. Tough and rough but doesn't quite look it given her stature and demeanor, but she will "knock a nigga out" if need be. She wears big jeans, like the 90's mom style baggy ones. She also wears big shirts and clothes that aren't constricting or tight. She doesn't like feeling constricted (interesting you say this. Something Jacob and I have discussed is making her world feel claustrophobic) She is a pretty girl but a tom boy. She wears converse closed toe shoes always. And wears hoops and stud earrings. She smells very good and when she sweats, she still smells good. She smells clean, fresh. "Pre-gay Colin she "girls it up a bit more around him". Her voice is grounded, and she has a different flow. She feels like that older cousin from the south that's real cool and chill but wise – the one that you smoked your first blunt with. She feels like a Black independent woman. Her skin is like Jill Scott and Erykah Badu. She tastes like Peach Tea!
- **What is your character's natural base rhythm?**
Steady and staccato. Ba da da da dah dah dahhh da dah
- **What is your character's astrological sign?**
- **Reflection/HW/Thoughts/Notes**
Remember to hyper focus on the textual elements of the language; read it all exactly as it is written. This will aide in your delivery of the character's authenticity to get those southern, rough vibes you're going for.

- **Character:** Justin (Core Student)
- **Actor:** Walter Dixson IV
- **Race:** Black
- **Classification:** Senior
- **Name pronunciation:** (Just-In)

- **Random thoughts about the character or show?**
 “I’m really excited! I love Black theatre and being directed by a Black woman.” There are some similarities between the actor and character with shared life experiences. “I’m anxious to see the reactions to everything, given this play is being performed at a PWI.”

- **What do you think this play is about?**
 The play gives detective vibes. Elements of mystery ink and being rebellious. Specifically, from Justin and Toria it feels like there is a need to “solve the case” or “unmask” the truth. It’s apparently giving Filmore vibes too, lol.

- **What do you think your character’s role in this play is?**
I think Toria’s race change has a profound effect on your character, let’s discuss that.
 Justin is the “lone-wolf” archetype. Just like many of the the characters who are struggling to find their sense of belonging he is also, but this acts as a sort of identity for Justin. Because he doesn’t “fit either side” his identity becomes “the outcast”. He describes himself of living in the cracks. He represents the idea that to be Black looks a certain way. Tori and Justin essentially become the same type of character however, where Toria chooses to “not give a fuck” Justin does (even though he says he doesn’t). The argument of what Black looks like becomes more solid because the debate is between two Black people who are on opposing ends of “what it means to identify as Black” and wear their version of Black with pride.

- **Are you a rule breaker or a rule follower? Explain. Does your character remain stagnant, flip-flop or go through an arch from one way to the other?**
 “I’m not sure yet.” (I think he is a rule follower that lets his moments of rule breaking “leak through the cracks.”) *What does that look like in action as you play this character?*

- **What do you think will be the biggest challenge you’ll face with playing this character/being in this play?**
 Doing shows back-to-back! Coming from Dead Name right into BATR is going to be challenging. It’s been a while since he has done performances back-to-back like that.

- **What are your feelings towards the word “faggot”? How has this word affected you personally or been a part of your experience? Explain your comfort levels with using this term.**
 No issues saying it.

- **Visualize your character: What do they look, smell, feel, sound, taste like?**
 Justin has a flattop. He has black lips from smoking. He’s a “nerd” but not the “typical nerd”. “Cool nerd.” He wears a green hoodie with a white undershirt, and he sags his pants just ever so slightly. No earrings. He smells and looks very clean. No scars or tattoos on his body. He’s clean shaven. He smells like Dolce and Gabbana. His skin is super moisturized and soft. He grew up in the hood but he’s intelligent and super smart. *I think it would be interesting to play with the extremes of code switching for this character. In moments, when he is excited, upset or speaking in a soliloquy what does that “hood accent” sound like versus his standard American? Let’s play with this.*

- **What is your character’s natural base rhythm?**
 Duh duh duh duhh duhh duhh – steady mixed.

- **What is your character’s astrological sign?**
 Capricorn, definitely Capricorn. (You’re one. I don’t have to explain why, lol)

- **Reflection/HW/Thoughts/Notes**
 Justin is a very prominent character. Let’s keep exploring who he is in each scene and what actions he displays to key the audience into his personality.

- **Character:** The DA
- **Actor:** Chad Roberts
- **Race:** White
- **Classification:** District Attorney in Cedar, LA
- **Name pronunciation:** (Thuh-Dee-Aye)

- **Random thoughts about the character or show?**
Hearing it was great! "I think you made some great casting choices." "My favorite theatre experience thus far was Family Line with Goat in the Road." (Is a theatre major!) "I found Justin's character arch most surprising!" "My most favorite character is probably between Justin and Colin. And my least favorite is De'Andre and the DA" *But you're the DA! Lol you can't not like him Chad!*

- **What do you think this play is about?**
This play has a lot more perspective in how each character handles the situation – how "bad things" have an impact on the person's life. This is all explored through the students' perspectives which makes it relatable. [Power dynamics is a very important element in this play too.] The power that stands between the DA and students. The main theme is about "perspective" but also immaturity. "People have their reasons WHY they are evil, but I think the DA is the only true "villain" present in this story. He's the only one that clearly stands between the students and threatens to end them. "Safety is another key element in this story – the students' sense of safety being challenged because they are unable to be fully "free" to be themselves truly. (The oppression present in this story is crazy lol.)

- **What do you think your character's role in this play is?**
"The DA is obviously racist as hell!" But unfortunately, he's a product of the legal system. He believes he has to uphold the status quo; maintain order. "I want to portray him having clear power over the students. How can we do this with his presence before he even delivers his lines, what physical choices can we play with to assert his dominance. Think of him as a lion or wild elephant as he moves about the space. These animals are dominant in their respective ways, they command the spaces they enter, and many cower in their presence.

- **Are you a rule breaker or a rule follower? Explain. Does your character remain stagnant, flip-flop or go through an arch from one way to the other?**

- **What do you think will be the biggest challenge you'll face with playing this character/being in this play?**
"I think it's going to be being able to hit that fine line of being understandable yet true to the characters goal with the lines they have. (*Power and Panic! Understand WHY you're the villain and the authenticity and truth of the character will shine through.*)

- **What are your feelings towards the word "faggot"? How has this word affected you personally or been a part of your experience? Explain your comfort levels with using this term.**
"I think the use of the word is used to reinforce the theme or "what something should look like". This idea that masculinity looks a certain way. This word chastises what being a man looks like for Colin. "As an actor, your character is saying it, not you." It reminds me of Leonardo DiCaprio during Django.

- **Visualize your character: What do they look, smell, feel, sound, taste like?**
The DA is in business attire, suit and tie. Maybe some police riot gear added like a vest or helmet or something. His hair is slicked back. He smells semi-nice, wearing cologne. His appearance is kept up very well. He has a bougie flex, (maybe he wears like a Rolex or something?) He has a soft southern accent that is accentuated the more he gets excited. He feels like a business meeting. He moves with the New Yorker mindset, direct, cold, sharp, quick paced.

- **What is your character's natural base rhythm?**
An unstable quarter note! Seems fine, but something is off. Bah Bah Bah *Bah-dah* Bah Bah Bah *Bah-dah*Stacatto. He tastes like something salty, maybe also like chewing tobacco? He has a refined pallet and drinks red wine.

- **What is your character's astrological sign?**
He's a Pieces, trust me. Lol

- **Reflection/HW/Thoughts/Notes**
Find a way to "like" your character. While he may be a villain, I believe we all can empathize with them in some way or find some type of connection. We talked a lot about the DA having some underlying issues with control of power – how can you empathize with someone who is so hellbent on having power that without it they'd spiral; in a way you could almost feel sorry for them.

- **Character:** Ensemble Student (Using the made-up name Melissa)
- **Actor:** Ava Volante
- **Race:** White
- **Classification:** Freshman
- **Name pronunciation:** (Muh-liss-uh)
-
- **Random thoughts about the character or show?**
“I really love the show.”
- **What do you think this play is about?**
“I think it’s about acknowledging what happens and how we should be moving forward from the roots! These rules are rooted in these oppressive systems and it explores how we are trying to figure out how to move forward as a society.” There is also this idea about unspoken rules. De’Andre’s breaking of them are conveyed through action and through his movement.” (Yeah, these are some of the most powerful moments in the piece.”
- **What do you think your character’s role in this play is?**
The added ensemble students allow the audience to see another pint of view outside the core students and core events. (*Just like in real life, what would it be like to hear everyone’s perspectives and not just the one’s “written in history.”*) My character and the others like mine add more perspectives to give a myriad of experiences that fuel us to move forward.
- **Are you a rule breaker or a rule follower? Explain. Does your character remain stagnant, flip-flop or go through an arch from one way to the other?**
She goes from being a rule follower to a rule breaker and has an arch. It happens after the first protest at the trees. (*Once we start blocking and choreographing, let’s pinpoint that exact moment, something shifts in your character.*)
- **What do you think will be the biggest challenge you’ll face with playing this character/being in this play?**
“I think the schedule, maintaining a balance between school, work and the play.”
- **What are your feelings towards the word “faggot”? How has this word affected you personally or been a part of your experience? Explain your comfort levels with using this term.**
“I’m not comfortable saying it.” But fine with being on stage and hearing it. Shared experience with me, thanks for sharing 😊
- **Visualize your character: What do they look, smell, feel, sound, taste like?**
She’s a cheer leader! She looks prim and proper. She’s the stereotypical cheerleader with the high ponytail that swings when she walks. She’s a Swifty (Taylor Swift fan) She smells like Taylor Swift perfume. She sounds like a valley girl, but softer, southern – Southern Belle! She feels like walking into bath and body works – smells good but the scents are so overwhelming that they give you a headache. She tastes like a combination of copper, metal, lip balm – something artificial; like licking too much of your lip balm.
- **What is your character’s natural base rhythm?**
Very steady beat with a call- and response style element added (cheer)
- **What is your character’s astrological sign?**
I think she’s a Sagittarius.
- **Reflection/HW/Thoughts/Notes**
Start thinking about what lines you want to take from the ensemble sections and how they influence your character.

- **Character:** Ensemble Student; using the made-up name Noah
- **Actor:** Seth Mouton
- **Race:** Black
- **Classification:** Sophomore
- **Name pronunciation:** (No-uh)

- **Random thoughts about the character or show?**
We talked about the conflicts with finding out about auditions so late and how we can better that for the students' next time. "I thought the script was great!" "I relate to Justin's character." "I didn't know Colin was gay!" *Seth how did you miss that! Lol go back and read the play. (This moment was hilarious)* Can we make sure to include something about the use of slurs, so people are aware and not triggered by the language?

- **What do you think this play is about?**
"I think this play is about figuring out where you stand. Where your loyalties lie."

- **What do you think your character's role in this play is?**
They add another layer of perspective to the core students and support the progression of the story.

- **Are you a rule breaker or a rule follower? Explain. Does your character remain stagnant, flip-flop or go through an arch from one way to the other?**
"I think my character is a rule follower and remains that way the entire time."

- **What do you think will be the biggest challenge you'll face with playing this character/being in this play?**
"The biggest challenge for me is finding the opposite of Seth, since this character is devised and created by me based on the text and finding time to learn lines and hear the slurs."

- **What are your feelings towards the word "faggot"? How has this word affected you personally or been a part of your experience? Explain your comfort levels with using this term.**
"Hearing and speaking the word (faggot) can be a trigger for me, especially when said directly to me or someone else (which isn't the case in this show), but I want to find the time to slowly progress to hearing it over time." *(Just remember, you don't have to be on stage during this time and you can always take a break in rehearsal and excuse yourself during that scene.)* I feel more comfortable knowing that "nigga" is being said by a Black character."

- **Visualize your character: What do they look, smell, feel, sound, taste like?**
He wears glasses, has a stern appearance. Shaved face. Khakis and boots instead of sneakers. Maybe wearing a purple collard polo style shirt with a sweater. Not sure what his hair looks like. He smells like cologne. His voice is low and assertive. He feels like an arctic breeze. He tastes like your tongue on a frozen pole outside. He doesn't come off as an approachable person and is introverted.

- **What is your character's natural base rhythm?**
Slow but staccato. Like Click, click, click – like slow steps walking down a hall.

- **What is your character's astrological sign?**
He's a Scorpio.

- **Reflection/HW/Thoughts/Notes**
Let's make sure that whatever we are creating for this character aligns with devising and creating him based on what the text gives us. Start thinking about what lines you want to take from the ensemble sections and how they influence your character.

- **Character:** Ensemble Student; using the made-up name Inami
- **Actor:** Quivonne Carr
- **Race:** Black
- **Classification:** Freshman
- **Name pronunciation:** (Ih-Nah-Mee)

- **Random thoughts about the character or show?**
Initial thoughts – “I felt like I could have better prepared for auditions.” *(Like I told you, I thought you did an excellent job and I enjoyed your spoken word piece. Let’s work on confidence in our performance. You’re good, be sure in that!)* “I work at the PJ’s down the street!” (Theatre major!) “I personally relate to Justin’s character.”

- **What do you think this play is about?**
It’s about the Jena 6 but not and it reminds me of other civil rights events. It’s also about identity.

- **What do you think your character’s role in this play is?**
The addition of the ensemble characters ass a sense of atmosphere. It makes it more authentic and feel like there are more points of views to extend and expand on.

- **Are you a rule breaker or a rule follower? Explain. Does your character remain stagnant, flip-flop or go through an arch from one way to the other?**
She’s a rule breaker from beginning to end. *(She gives boss ass bitch vibes)*

- **What do you think will be the biggest challenge you’ll face with playing this character/being in this play?**
“Juggling this with life.” *(I hear that, chile)*

- **What are your feelings towards the word “faggot”? How has this word affected you personally or been a part of your experience? Explain your comfort levels with using this term.**
“I feel uncomfortable saying it, like the word in my mouth. BUT – I’m okay with hearing it and I am leaning towards saying because I want to push myself as an actor towards growth out of my comfort zone.” *(Like I said in the meeting, if you change your mind let me know! You can change your mind at any time)*

- **Visualize your character: What do they look, smell, feel, sound, taste like?**
She wears neutral colors like browns and beige. She is classy. Wears hoop earrings. Her hair is in bantu knots or braids with beads on the end. She was voted most likely to succeed in the freshman class. She is the epitome of “Black Lives Matter Girl”. She smells like she bakes or likes good food. She sounds busy, like Times Square. She feels soft but firm, like a cool sunny day with a strong wind with a touch of overcast. She tastes like a hot fudge Sunday with cotton candy ice cream, gummy bears, almonds and M&Ms *(Sweet as hell and chaotic as fuck, lol I love it)*

- **What is your character’s natural base rhythm?**
Steady pace – bass beat; like the boss is coming.
Boom boom boom boom boom boom boom bad-duhn boom boom

- **What is your character’s astrological sign?**
She is a Gemini!

- **Reflection/HW/Thoughts/Notes**
- Start thinking about what lines you want to take from the ensemble sections and how they influence your character.

Symbolism

This play has so much symbolism and moments that are symbolic, make fun of, or pay homage to archetypes, stereotypes, historical events, struggles within the Black communities, and well-known Southern American cultural references.

Example

Colin, the Quarterback, and Deandre, the Running Back

The relationship between the two football players and their positions. Quarterback (QB) = Colin and Running Back (RB) = DeAndre. Which led us to a conversation about what it means to have someone's back. The RB is supposed to be the QB first line of defense and should always protect him. We discussed how in the moment when Colin was being made fun of by the other players, DeAndre didn't protect him – instead he laughed.

Scene Title Interpretation Samples

The Student Body

This introduces the student body to everyone and the concept that it's a hot day in October. Literally and figuratively. Establishing the relationship between the weather heat and the heat caused by tension throughout the play.

D Day

Historically, D-Day was the Allied invasion of Nazi-occupied Western Europe. I believe this coincides with Raylynn's and the two other students invading Old Devoted.

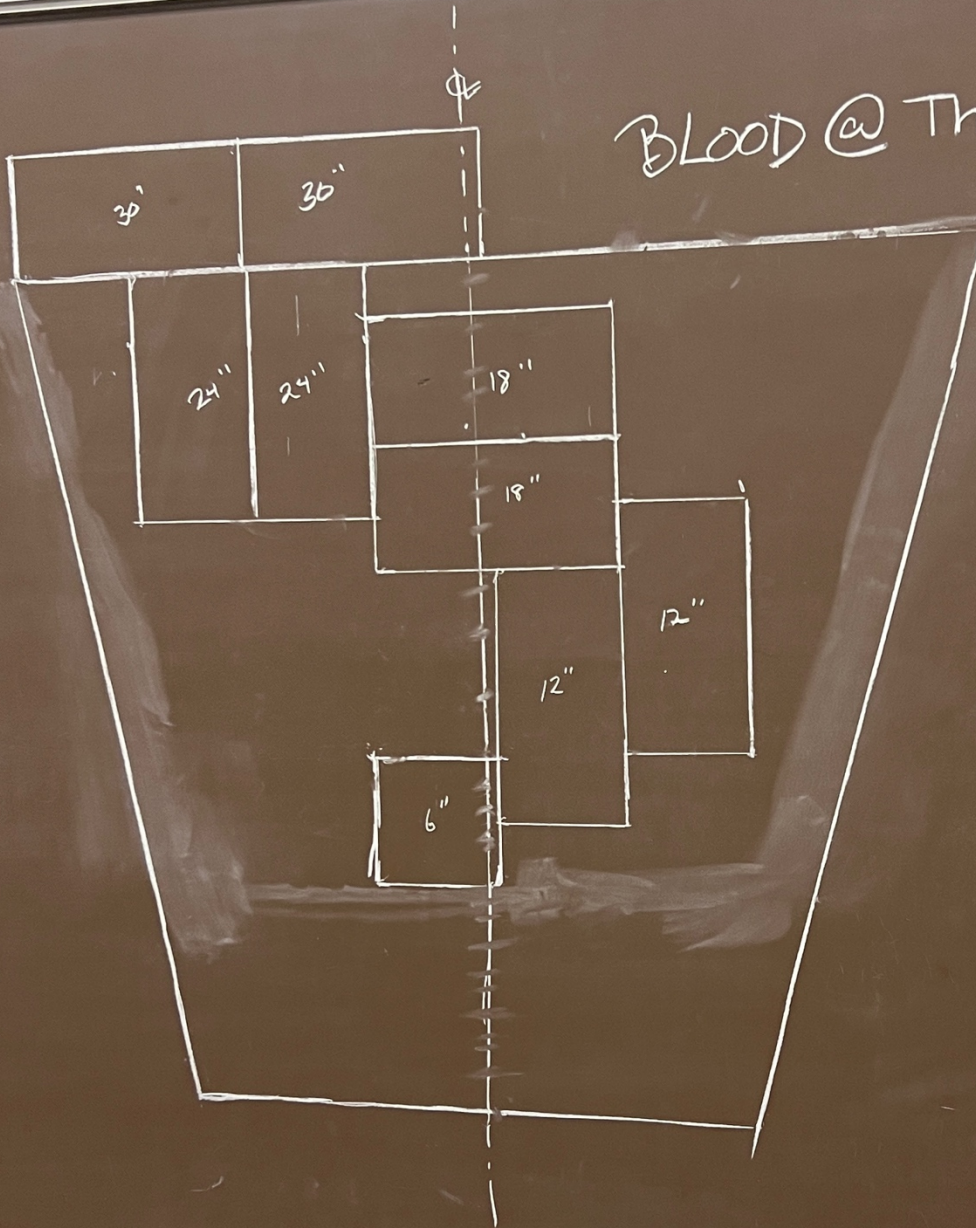
This Just In...

I personally get a kick out of the numerous puns and symbolism in this section. This Just In is usually associated with news or press releases. But it also relates to the character Justin because he is the male journalist.

Willie Lynch

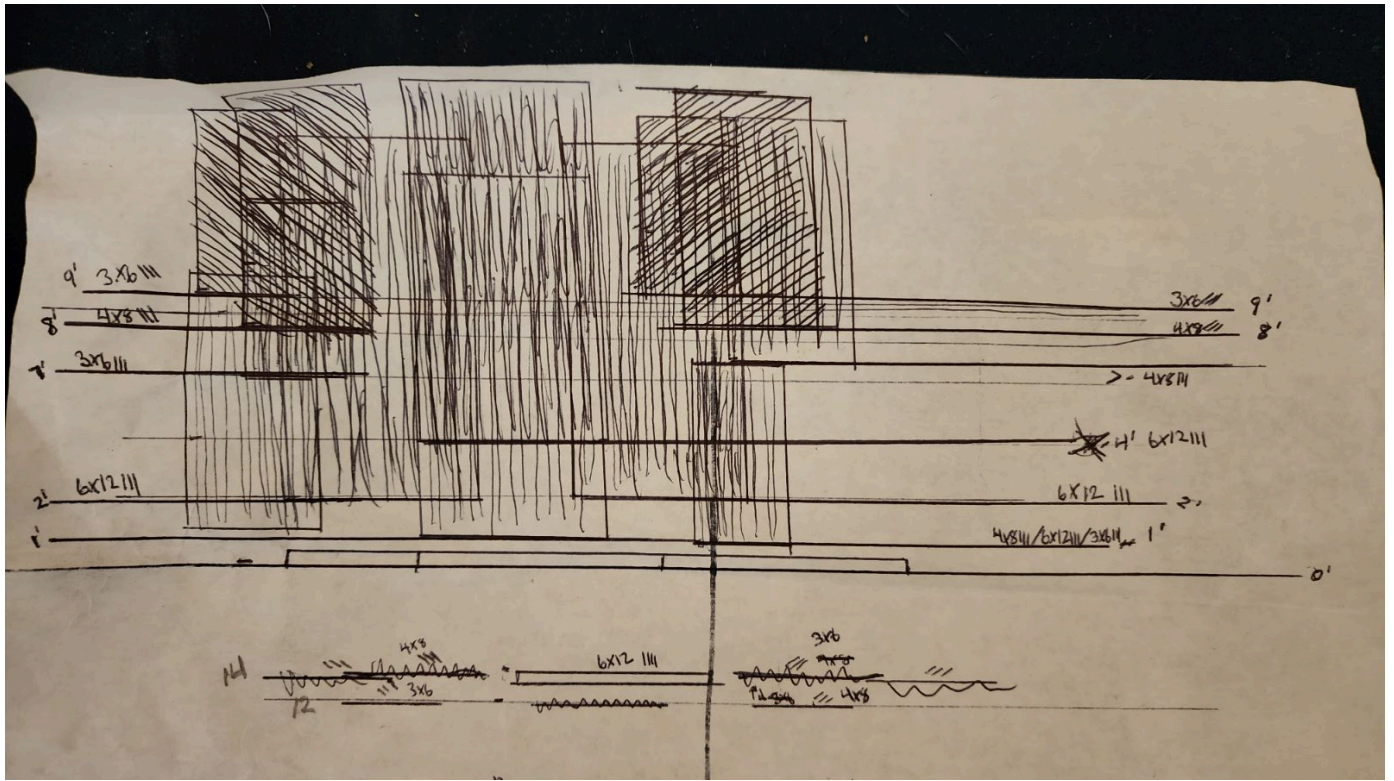
Named after the infamous Willie Lynch letter which is a purported speech from a British slave owner in 1712, detailing strategies for maintaining control over slaves by exploiting divisions among them. Its authenticity is widely disputed among historians. This section recounts the discovery of the nooses on the tree at the school. I think it symbolizes the idea of "this is how you keep them in line" Raylynn and two others "step out of line" by sitting under Old Devoted, thus the nooses being a retaliation and attempt to gain back control.

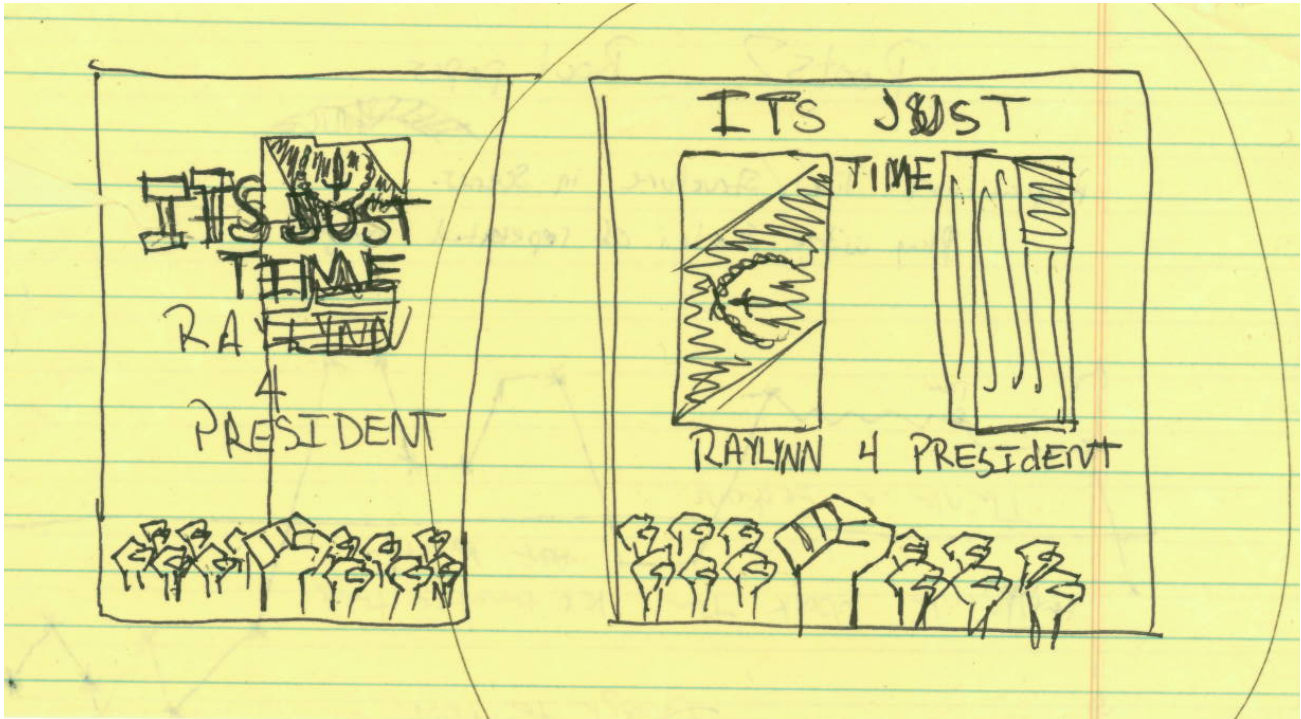
BLOOD @ The Root



Good

Bad





Cue #	Page	Cue Name	Placement	Notes															
0	-	PRESHOW	House Open	Preshow playlist What's the preshow vibe?- conscious rap songs (kendrick, common, chance, pac, etc) or something more dramatic like negro spirituals... or a cross of the two?!															
✓ 10	7	The Student Body	Lights up	Intro music into opening beat Need to add more sounds to this beat- DIRECTOR REFERENCE "Fye Fye" by Tobe Nwigwe															
✓ 18	10		"Hot day in october"	scene conclusion/ transition- some birds fade out into soft r&b/soul underscore?															
20	12	Rylyn's Reflection	"Rule Break Number one"	transition- Rule break sound, presidential? yes but hip hop?															
30	13	D Day	Lights up	outdoor ambience? a little music?- sounds? I like it. will try Sunday															
39	18		"Rule Break number two"	School Bell and transition music															
40	19	The Cutting Room	Lights up	School bell and stop music and add school ambience/ historical sounding music or mood underscore-mood is intense and factual															
✓ 49	23		"nothin' but a word"	transition music- starting to hear united greif or something like here															
50	24	The First Vote	Lights up	stop transition- quirky underscore? simple beat like a tv show ✓ yeah, lets see what happens															
53	26	Asha Enters		intensifying music/sound															
58	27		Actors exit	transition music- ✓															
✓ 60	28	Willy Lynch	Lights up	afican drums- powerful- history lesson- hip hop- intense- breathy REFERENCE MUSIC FROM REHEARSAL "Hit Em' Up" by Tupac- blood on the leaves remix?? oh shit what if defamt versions of blood on the leaves is the core of the sound plot?? hmmm															
63	29	NOOSE	"Three nooses hangin"	Beat drop- arie- heavy- intense- feels warpy and off putting - im picturing how it feels to be moving thru rever's psychic vision but get stuck looking at slavery. lol thats harsh but yeah															
✓ 65	30		"what the story is"	restore to previous vibe- reality															
✓ 69	31		"don't fuckin' forget it"	transition music- gangster- include sound of kettle pot for next scene															
70	32	The Pot Callin' The Kettle	Lights up	underscore music- white girl thats black- amirah? DIRECTOR REFERENCE Fresh Prince or Kid 'N Play. Ice Ice Baby by Vanilla Ice - "Lean Back" / discuss possibility of underscoring scene with it too - not in reality- DIRECTOR REFERENCE that trump song from the rehearsal video- moving, upbeat, kinda gangster															
73	33		"all i got to say 'bout that"	music shift- back to reality- calmer underscore ✓															
* 79	36		"Let's go D"	transition music - does the tree moments have a similar undertone? foreshadowing feature? transition settles into underscore, pen flick sound- DIRECTOR REFERENCE "Dreams and Nightmares" and "Fight the Power"- j&ah hype and powerful ready to start some shit Yes lets try it.															
80	37	Flick of my Pen	Lights up	transition settles into underscore, pen flick sound- DIRECTOR REFERENCE "Dreams and Nightmares" and "Fight the Power"- j&ah hype and powerful ready to start some shit															
83	38		protesting starts	underscore fades- intensifying strings or drum beat/ drone rumble															
89	41		"action is taken"	pen flicks, transition music- DIRECTOR REFERENCE Breaths into clock ticks or some other sound that indicates "thinking about time"															
90	42	The Aftermath	Lights up	underscore music- news report vibes, civil rights movement vibes															
99	42		"come together"	transition music - murmers?															
100	43	Secred Secrets	Lights up	Transition fades- school yard ambience? in reality															
109	47		"Just 'case you were wonderin"	transition music- after a racial love scwabble															
110	48	Slippin' Thru	Lights up	underscore music- DIRECTOR REFERENCE Slippin by DMX- not in reality- soft gangsters need love															
113	48		"in the cracks"	underscore fades- back to reality- maybe reality has a consistent sound , best, vibe throughout															
119	49		"we've got to jump on it"	transition music - moving into hype shit															
120	50	Telephone Game	Lights up	underscore music - need to find the right vibe for this- high energy- feels like a montage- messy gossip- wildn out- "misbehavin"															
129	54		"real shiload"	transition music															
130	55	Interrogation	Lights up	underscore music- intense- manly- why am i hearing "its a man's world"? lol															
139	56		"and thats the truth"	transition Music															
140	57	This Just In...	Lights up	underscore music- type writer into beat- someone is dancing! narration of events vibe... DIRECTORS REFERENCE rehearsal video "Keyboard Type Beat"															
149	58		"Send"	send notification, transition music															
150	59	Sayin' What Need to be Sa	Lights up	school bell- underscore- reality- maybe just a little hallway ambience- at this point im giving up on reality having music but ill play with it															

Cue #	Page	Cue Name	Placement	Notes											
169	62		"on my own"	transition music											
160	63	Press- Ure	lights up	underscore music- press room- pressure to be black- in reality- pulse beat ambience music											
169	67		Torta Leaves	transition music- <i>lonely</i>											
170	68	Cop A Plea	lights up	underscore music- in reality, at home- stressful - <i>in hearing march music kinda. slow and distant</i>											
179	72		"back from that"	transition music											
180	73	Survival Code	lights up	Music- created - <i>need to refine this beat- DIRECTOR REFERENCE prison! Don't care about Us by Michael Jackson</i>											
183	74	Survival Code pt 2	"Ahhhhh"	transition into ancestral realm- howls- beat slows and warps into old school kinda negro spiritual vibe- ohhh the hums!											
185	74		"gonna add?"	transition into liberation- release of energy, upbeat and tribal- marching- protesting- a little riot crowd ambience - <i>maybe add riot roar cues between different chants to fill in?</i>											
187	76	Epiouge	lights on Raylynn	surreal moment, previous music becomes airy and majestic to take you out of the protest world but is still present like slow motion- <i>needs some transition from protest vibe built into the top of this cue maybe a sound warp blend</i>											
189	76		"tomorrow is coming"	ending music- liberation- happy- birds- <i>maybe previous heavy scenes can have a little rain and thunder for darkness?!</i>											
190	77	CURTAIN CALL	Yep tomorrow	curtain music - <i>DIRECTOR REFERENCE LIR Every voice and sing https://youtu.be/ogw-tcFFink - blood on the leaves or something else noticeable and high energy</i>											
200	-	WALK OUT	End of show	short walk out playlist											

Sound/Movement Ideas

Scene	Choreography Movement Style	Music or Actor Generated	Vibe/Mood	Notes/Thoughts
The Student Body Pg. 1-10	Stepping Routine	Actor Generated but open to adding music along with it	"Fye Fye" by Tobe Nwigwe (the energy and hype feeling from this song)	This number should feel like an HBCU probate that acts as a prologue for the show. Page 10 – At the end of this scene, can we add some sort of conclusion sound to transition us into the next scene? I said something like a school bell, but it doesn't have to be that; I'm interested to hear your thoughts.
Willie Lynch Pg. 28 - 31	A dance/reenactment of some sort. Feels very contemporary and on the nose/almost mime/vaudeville but infused with hip-hop	Music that supports Justin's retelling. Simple beat underscore?	I can hear the rhytm flowing well over "Hit Em' Up" by Tupac or something similar	Justin is acting as our MC. His lines aren't written in a stanza, but they still have a certain rhythm to it.
The Pot Callin' The Kettle Pg. 32 - 36	Something casual/ What would besties do? Handshake routine? Dance routine? Pop Culture reference? Thinking something like Will and Jazz from Fresh Prince or Kid 'N Play.	Maybe both?	LMAO Maybe she gets Ice Ice Baby by Vanilla Ice	Do you think Asha needs some music under her monologue at the top of this scene? It says shift, music, movement at the end of her monologue. I want to use this moment to shed light on the good in the relationship between Asha and Raylynn.
Flick of My Pen Pg. 37 - 41	The students have to include swag surfing as a dance move at some point in their crowd chanting.	Actor generated for sure. Stomping, clapping, vocal sounds, ad libs	Feels like a slower version of Everybody Say Sausage Keep it Going	This is the start of the tree protest! It's gotta be hype and powerful!

Telephone Game Pg. 50 – 54	I want to try a few things with this. The current idea is to have small groups of gossipers that are highlighting each moment of gossip.	I'm not sure? Thoughts?	I don't know lol	I know this sounds silly, but picture this. The same energy, pacing, and intent as "It's All Over" in Dreamgirls. It's the gossip, quick paced chaotic energy I'm connecting too. Is there a hip-hop equivalent to this vibe?
This Just In... Pg. 57-58	This is De'Andre's tableau of his arrest. It's similar in movement to the Willie Lynch Scene	I'm not sure? Thoughts?	I don't know lol	This is a solo dance piece while Toria is narrating what is happening to him. I'm not sure if there is music maybe sounds that enhance what she says? Thoughts?
Survival Code (Part One) Pg. 73 – 74	This is movement and dance and step.	I think it could work with both or either or. I'd love to hear your thoughts.	Feels like They Don't care about Us by Michael Jackson	I think that vibe fits the whole prison sequence section. It ends when the prison walls begin to close in on De'Andre.
Survival Code (Part Two) Pg. 75	This is movement and dance and step too. It will be like the tree protest in Flick of My Pen, BUT I want the movements to incorporate more lines and precision.	The script specifies they chant over a hip hop inspired beat.	I'm not sure	I don't "hear" anything but them chanting lol. I have no idea what this beat could sound like.
(Raylynn's Reflection) Pg. 76	At the end of the Raylynn's final words I wanted to highlight the hope at the end of the play and this idea of coming together to tell the story. But I wanted it to be incorporated into the curtain call as a sort of performative de-role.	Thoughts?	I'm open to any thoughts you may have on the ending/ curtain call	I had this bright idea that Raylynn could start singing Lift Every voice and sing and then the rest of the cast comes out and joins in hug each other, grab hands and do a final bow. (Then I was like, is this too cheesy? Is this not appropriate, in the moment I thought it was beautiful, lol. But like does, it match the rest of the show's aesthetic with hip hop? Thoughts? I then also found a hip-hop version of it I thought we could start out with the original way then have the beat drop and be this version. https://youtu.be/ogw-tcFFlnk

Overall, do you have any thoughts of sound or music that transitions us into the next scene? Some moments feel like it may be needed but it could also just be silence or some other thing that "transitions us". I only listed the scenes that included music and dance moments.

List of Dance Moves that can be Incorporated

The Running Man

The Charleston

The TLC

The Creep

Biz Markie

Wop

Footwork

Cabbage Patch

The Reebok

Ki 'N Play/Funky Charleston

The Jack in the Box

Baseball Bat

The Fila

The Humpty Hump

The Wobble

The Bart Simpson

Elbows Up

The Carlton

The C-Walk

The Roger Rabbit

Happy Feet

The Aunt Viv

The Roller Skate

The Chicken Head/Monastery

The Smurf

The Spongebob

Wutang

The Jerk

The Reject

Move it like Bernie

Drop

Lean wit it rock wit it

Nae Nae

Whip

Millie Rock

Dab

Dougie

The Mary J

The Sprinkler

Flossing

Hit the Folks

Heel Toe

A-Town Stomp

Cat Daddy

Hit the Quan

Shmurda

Woah

The Tootise Roll/Butterfly

The Stanky Leg

Raise the Roof

Zoom

Stick it and Roll it

Kick Ball Change

Walk it Out

Loose as a Goose

Harlem Shake

Hammer Time

The Alf

Notable Journal Entries

Rehearsal Journal #1

9/18/23

Post-Rehearsal Thoughts

* *Hopeful for today's* song for the finale (joke). Lol, they're so silly.

I was very nervous today but excited. The 1st rehearsal went well! I'm really ecstatic about this! With this being a more collaborative process, I talked less and listened more. At 1st, everyone was waiting for me to tell them exactly what I wanted, but I encouraged an open discussion. We sat in a circle and briefly described how we were feeling, then dove into the text. We worked on assigning lines to everyone. Each person gave inspiration, explanation, and input on what would work well for themselves and others – an ensemble. We also walked on the rhythm of the group scenes: *Flick of My Pen*, *Student Body*, *Free the Cedar 6 Protest (Survival Code)*, and *Telephone Game*. Everyone seemed happy and in the good vibes, just a little tired, but that will improve with time. We also talked about the importance of the autumn equinox. We did a de-role clap, stretch, and breath activity, then shared our plans for the rest of the night. What we were going to do once we left. Overall, it was very successful! I pray it continues to go well. Oh! We moved an ensemble member to the principal because the original one had to drop out. We also lost a white ensemble student, and one black ensemble student didn't show up. I hope this doesn't change the dynamic and purpose of having ensemble students. Oooooo!! T. came up with an excellent idea for the final protest by doing the church-style choir split voice thing, which, 100% obviously, must matter in my research later, lol. It's giving soprano, alto, tenor! I am loving this and coming home feeling happy and not overwhelmed. Now, off to regular homework!

Signed,
An excited Director

Rehearsal Log #5
9/25/23

Pre-Rehearsal Thoughts

What I Want to do

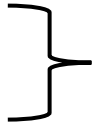
* Check-in*

- (Poem) – Read Poem by Tasha DeVon

- Start w) intimacy talk
- Stoplight system
- Circle to introduce physical zones
- Eye contact exercises
 - Raylynn + Asha
 - Toria + Justin
 - De’Andre + Colin
 - Principal + DA
 - Seth, Bryant, Emma

Human Machine

- Hip hop
- Poetry
- Dance



<u>Viewpoints</u> Kinesthetic Response Architecture

Movement Parameters

- only travel in L's
- only travel forward and backward
- only travel in diagonals
- only in travel in circles

End rehearsal with working with script + focus on pacing
Starting from the [interrogation or top]

During Rehearsal Thoughts

Start at 6:39pm

→ Circle time Question: What kind of food do you feel like?

During intimacy work exploration, we got a better feeling of cast mates, how each other moves and their body dimensions — vulnerability within our bodies + being comfortable being in close proximity and being far away, feeling and expressing character at the same time

****BREATH SUPPORT!****

You all will pass out by this show's end; we need to work on breath support and stamina. (Note to self: Incorporate group sing-along with dance warm-up)

General Notes

- Let the exploration inform the character
- "Acting isn't finding differences but the similarities." ~ Meryl Streep
- Mostly sleeping movement in the play
- Unlearn everything someone ever told you about remaining "grounded," "planned," and "still" for your monologues. These monologues command life from the voice AND body to drive the narrative forward.
- Explore the opposites of the characters. What are things your character would NOT do?
- Raylynn and De'Andre: Feel a connection to the brother/sister bond. Spend more time together during rehearsals.
- Asha's care for other Black people – what does that look like?
- Question for the room! When did you first discover your race or become aware of it?
- The line where you stand in the lines. What is it? Activity YouTube.
(Note to self: How do you make them move during their monologues?)
- We discussed Justin's code-switching moments - finding those moments when his true self emerges.
- Work on building a tree; does anyone have any ideas?
- Fighting over groups
- Three students under the tree, who are they?

Post Rehearsal Thoughts

11:16pm

Today, rehearsal was okay. Everyone's energy was in a funk, so it felt gross – not fun. I tried my best to feed the energy with warm-ups, group dancing, etc., but it still felt distracted and tired, like people didn't really wanna be there. It's hard to do an ensemble piece that relies on so much devised and collaborative movement and vocality when no one is present. The thought just occurred to me. When do we lock stuff in? When do I make definitive choices? And I guess I make those alone? I felt sad after rehearsal because it didn't start to feel great until the end. Not having two main characters (Justin and Colin) from the start is hard on energy. They're missing the first week and a half because of prior show commitments. I'm also having doubts about my casting of the ensemble, not because of their performance or them, but because I'm not sure how I see them fitting in the story anymore. Trying to "fit" them in is now challenging since it's a smaller group than I envisioned – I'm annoyed. Is this bad? What can I do? Diminish their part? No. Stay true to the process. I saw something here, so I have to see it through. I want it to be good, but it's all about the process. It will work out fine; I just can't see it now. Energy is essential in this type of theatre or in the performance period. I want to ensure I'm always cultivating the best and most positive energy.

Signed,

A Determined turned Defeated Director

Rehearsal Log

10/2/23

Pre-Rehearsal

Today, we're going to start blocking. I have a skeleton layout of the set to work with, so that makes it easy. I never start blocking without a sketch from the designer. Understanding the world's layout makes things much easier. I'm excited. I'm going to block the whole show in three days.

Check-in

Warm-up

- Circle time
- Follow the leader dance warm-up

Utilizing discoveries from the Human Machine game played previously, create four tableaux of a protest. Little do they know, they're creating their own blocking with the games we play. They're creating and finding their own rhymes with the rhymed games and expanding their concept of "play" and impulse among each other.

The sound designer sent me some music today, and I've been on ten ever since! I find myself rhyming every day as I work on this play. I enjoy the poetic and style elements I bring into my daily life.

Post-Rehearsal

Today, we blocked the moments in the show and created the tree! Finally, figuring that out was a mess. We attempted abstract shapes, cheerleader pyramids, and other random acrobatics that could be a terrible idea. But! We settled on historical symbols. These moments signify justice, "the fight against oppression," or have become synonymous with a movement. We have the "Olympic Black Power Fist," the "I can't breathe" hands around neck hands, the "We shall not be moved" crisscross sit on the ground, the "Wakanda Forever" stance, the "Hands up don't shoot," the Colin Kaepernick "Take a Knee," and the "Hands out arrest" pose. Today was a good, productive day.

Signed,

A productive feeling Director

Rehearsal Log

10/11/23

Pre-Rehearsal

My first time seeing a noose in person was just now. I asked my professor if he knew how to tie one and when they thought we could start working with them. I never really thought of the impact it would have on me personally. I was so focused on preparing the group that I didn't prepare myself. After asking, his reply was, "Unfortunately, I do." Here was my professor, a white man from the South, whom I have great respect and admiration for – tying a noose in front of me. I watched and listened to him as he explained why and how he knew how to tie one. He thought back, remembering how to tie one (because it's not an apparent everyday knot like the "clove hitch" we use for hanging curtains and whatnot.) My professor worked on it, recounting his childhood and what he witnessed. I watched his hands shake as he grasped the rope and began to form a shape that obviously held painful weight for him. My classmate, the scenic designer for the show, was with me; for him, learning how to tie one was important because he would ultimately become responsible for the other nooses in the set design. We stood, watching, listening, taking every word in. I never felt air so thick, not because of tension or malice between us. But this object created it. The energy that existed in that object once in the shape became alive. In my playwrighting class, our professor teaches about the concept/activity in playwrighting called "the cathexis box". It's when you load emotional value into an otherwise meaningless object. The noose reminded me of that. It was just a rope at first. The rope that had been sitting out for weeks was not bringing my attention, but it was so emotionally loaded after becoming a noose. It didn't need any additional emotional value added to it. I had never seen it in person, only in movies, and it all felt surreal. I decided to wait a few days before bringing it to the group. The designer, our professors, and I needed that processing time. I left feeling grateful and blessed that my ancestors endured this and that I was sure they were happy to see me and how far we've come. But it's also sad that it's still something we're fighting for. It's hope. I feel blessed, grateful, thankful, and hopeful for our "tomorrow".

Signed,

A Director who just had an out-of-body experience

Trauma Informed Directing Journal/Self-Reflection

In rehearsals, I make it a point to have group discussions about intense subject matter or things and get really specific about it. I think our biggest talks were about the word *faggot* and the nooses. We had a deep conversation about the nooses, I know I had never seen one in person, let alone touch one. We shared our experiences and encounters with them (if any). Our scenic designer had to learn how to tie one and during our talk he tied it and we each passed it around the circle. It was a very emotionally charged yet impactful conversation. We all left feeling more comfortable and with more understanding for each other and how simple change in the shape of the rope could have such an impact.

Another thing I have made a point to implement in my directing process are check-ins and de-role exercises. The check-ins are a great way to gauge how everyone is feeling, share something about their day and just release anything in order to be more open for rehearsal. I think it's great because many of us are never genuinely asked, "How are you doing, today?" and give a real response outside of "fine" or "good and you?". It also helps me gauge how far to "push" someone that day or if we should skip working on certain things too.

The de-role/check-out exercises change depending on the subject matter and group of actors. Most of them are relaxation technique activities like laying on the floor breathing or stretching. The relaxation ones, help calm energy down, especially if we've been working on something really intense. I also begin all check outs with repeating affirmations, the group repeats them after me. I think this is just a good practice in general and find it adds self-love and awareness; we say things like "I am wonderful" and "I am loved".

We also do more active check outs like group claps or run around, while chanting things like "I'm ready to go home!" Sometimes we sit and I will ask each one of them what they plan to do after rehearsal. I find that these are great ways to release energy as well as draw their minds and attention back to "reality" so instead of being focused on rehearsal now they're thinking of other things. And sometimes, we may sit in silence, meditate, or even sometimes pray as a group – whatever is needed in the moment.

Most of the methods depend on the group of actors but the overall concept is the same every time. Much of this I learned through Intimacy work, cultural sensitivity training, and the Black Acting Methods practices. I believe wholeheartedly that the director's first responsibility is to make sure you take care of your actors. Simple things and just listening goes a long way; it builds trust and ensemble. So many people don't have these tools or skills, some lack other outlets to communicate. And many go on not aware that a particular show or character is "carrying over" into their lives. Like playing a bad character and wondering why you're angry all the time, lol.

BLOOD AT THE ROOT

AUDITION INFORMATION

In this document, you can find all the information you'd need to audition for the UNO theatre production, *Blood at the Root* by Dominique Morisseau. This information includes:

- What is this play? Why are we doing this play?
- What are the roles available in this play?
- How do I prepare for this audition?

After going through all this, if you have any questions, please feel free to contact R'Myni at rwatson4@uno.edu

HOW DO I PREPARE FOR THESE AUDITIONS?

1. You can read the play yourself here: [Blood at the Root Script](#)
2. Familiarize yourself with the characters and audition information.
3. Rehearse your monologue/spoken word piece!

WHAT IS *BLOOD AT THE ROOT*?

Blood at the Root, a 90 minute play that was originally produced in 2014, written by Dominique Morisseau, who is one of the most produced playwrights in America today. Her plays explore race and class from a social justice standpoint and *Blood at the Root* is no exception. What is really captivating about her writing is her ability to embed humor, warmth, and the undertones of familial love into heavy subject matter. This play is also about high school students. It is inspired by a real case in Jena, Louisiana in 2006. It's not a docudrama--it's fictional, but you need to understand some basics about the students who came to be known as the Jena 6.

THE JENA 6

In 2006, in Jena, Louisiana an incident at a local high school spiraled into a racially charged, national outrage for the social injustice against six Black teens. At Jena High School, there was an area underneath some trees in a courtyard that was understood to be for whites only, even called the “white tree”. A Black freshman asked the principal if he was allowed to sit there; the principal said yes, and that freshman student sat there with his friends during lunch. In the subsequent days, white students snuck into the courtyard and hung nooses from the trees.

Following this, protests, and violent conflict broke out among the student body. Six Black students were accused of beating a white student, ultimately knocking him unconscious. Five of the six were charged with attempted murder, and tried as adults, though most of them were still minors. Only one white student who was involved with the fights and was charged with a minor battery and received probation. The white students who hung the nooses were dismissed as pranksters and never identified by the school, and so their punishments were never known. These Black students had their lives effectively derailed by a justice system that saw their lives as less than. As time went on, there were issues with the way the media portrayed the events that took place; and to this day, the story is still unclear. However, in 2007, a year after the incident, the tree was cut down.

Again, *Blood at the Root* is fiction. The play uses the Jena 6 as a jumping off point to talk about our obligations as citizens in the face of racial injustice. However, it keeps some historic details such as the tree, the nooses, and the indisputable fact that our justice system, from school discipline to courts and prisons, continuously fails to treat Black men as equal citizens under the law.

WHY ARE WE DOING THIS PLAY?

Together as artists, we have an obligation to tell these stories because BLACK LIVES STILL MATTER, PERIODT! This play doesn't have a formal conclusion because to wrap it up neatly would be a disservice to the representation of the path to social equity. I guess you could say, there is a bit of Afro-pessimistic ideology surrounding the piece, just as it seems to do in our world today. In a world that seems to be so divided, and ever oppressing the lives of countless individuals, there should be opportunity to band together. To find common ground. We must listen to each other's stories and lay our prejudices out at our feet to seek understanding, to acknowledge our wrongs and change for the better. The playwright describes this as a devised production – to her, that means that the words on the page are only half of the piece, only part of the process. We have freedom to reimagine as we put together and to fully collaborate. Making art together can result in change and this play has the propensity to do that.

ROLES:

There are six core student roles and some sections of the play that would work with an expanded ensemble--protest scenes, scenes where the audience hears many voices discussing and processing the events at the school.

Important note: The roles of Raylynn, De'Andre and Justin are intended to be played by Black actors. Colin, Asha, Toria, and the DA, for the purposes of this story, must be played by white actors.

RAYLYNN: (Black/F) smart, funny, passionate, romantic. She's eighteen, lightly jokes with her brother, De'Andre, and her friend, Asha; but she's also fiercely loyal to De'Andre.

TORIA: (White/F) funny, bossy, and foul-mouthed. She's believer in journalism and bearing witness to the inequities in her school. She thinks it's her obligation to get people to pay attention

ASHA: (White/F) Raylynn's best friend, and "Black by association". She's welcome "the cookout" and is more comfortable around Black people. She's flirtatious, silly, and the least committed character to any political stance of identity.

JUSTIN: (Black/M) Editor of the school paper and strongly believes in journalism but is more cautious than Toria believing that compromising and staying quiet, and out of the way will ensure him peace. He is quiet and often feels like an outsider being dismissed by both the Black and the white students.

COLIN: (White/M) a mysterious transfer student and the quarterback of the football team. He seems to be hiding something. He is also the teammate with De'Andre and enjoys spending time with Raylynn.

DE'ANDRE: (Black/M) De'Andre is Raylynn's older brother. He is the symbol of the Jena Six. He has a strong sense of justice, but his hot-headed nature can lead to impulsivity. At the top of the play, he is a goofball, playful and fun; however, at the end we see a man who is broken, lost, and has had what defines him taken away.

DA: (White/Any gender) The district attorney assigned to the case for Colin vs. the six Black students. A conservative, nationalist, bigot undertones.

PRINCIPLE MILLER: (Any race/Any gender) The principal of the high school; always concerned with the safety and well-being of the students but falls to the mercy of the state and school board.

AUDITION PIECES:

ACTORS INTERESTED IN RAYLYNN. & DE'ANDRE:

You know what day today is? – Today a hot as hell day at school. Today I don't care what's on the lunch menu cuz I probly ain't eatin' it no way. Today different. Today got a weight to it. Today makes three years since my mama passed. Got shot right on our front porch. Driveby. Today I woke up to the sound of my daddy cryin', even though he pretended like he wunn't. And now my daddy sit on that porch 'til he rot. Today I ate extra flapjacks just so I wouldn't waste no food cuz Mama used to hate that. Today gonna mean somethin' different, y'heard. Today can't be like no other day. Today gotta count for somethin'.

ACTORS INTERESTED IN TORIA:

Like how many girls at this school have covered up their abortions because their parents are too primitive to allow a sex-ed course that isn't taught by eighty-year- old Mrs. Wellsley who wouldn't know how to model puttin' on a condom if she had a ten-foot penis statue right in front of her – Or how about the number of boys on the football team who'd rather be dating each other than all the girls they swap semen but because we're so anti-homo they take it out on every chick at Cedar High and that's why the number of relationship violence is like – sky high right now!

ACTORS INTERESTED IN JUSTIN:

You know what Toria? I'm the editor now. I'm the editor and the copier and the publisher and everythang else this dyin' paper needs, and I'm also the one student who hasn't stopped talkin' to you for basically everythang because you're so obviously annoyin'. So write another damn article or else walk cuz I ain't got the time to argue with you no more about it.

ACTORS INTERESTED IN ASHA

So my mama sent me over to live with Daddy in Georgia for a coupla years. He had himself a new wife and everythang. Livin' good in Hotlanta with a new house and all that. Wife was a black woman. Her name Sharon and she was cool as hell. I liked her out the gate, and that's sayin' a whole lot cuz I ain't like nobody out the gate who be datin' my daddy. But she was somethin' special. Treated me like a daughter. Ain't had her own kids, but had a bunch of nieces and nephews and she told 'em to call me cousin. So they did. They say "whaddup cuz" like that, and I remember feelin' for the first time like I belonged somewhere.

ACTORS INTERESTED IN COLIN:

So I was standin' front of that Piggly Wiggly on Jefferson askin' for change to catch the bus back home cuz by this point, school was almost over. Was cuttin' class all day but knew I had to get home or I'd have hell to pay. Had spent my last dime at the Big Boy tryin' to get me some lunch, so I start beggin' folks for whatever they had. Quarters. Dimes. Even pennies. And thas when this fella with this raspy voice say to me, "How much y'need, dere?" And I look up, starin' straight into the face of Philip Frazier –At first I ain't said nothin'. Soon as I saw it was him, I just went dumb. Couldn't remember my own name for a second. Then he get impatient wit me, like "I say what you need dere?" So I say – real stupid-like – "Um...can I have a quarter for the bus sir?" Couldn't think of nothin' else to say.

ACTORS INTERESTED IN THE DA & PRINCIPAL MILLER:

Please disassemble this gathering immediately. Or the authorities will be forced to take action against you. Students at Cedar High, listen real good. Please disassemble from the tree immediately before disciplinary action is taken.

CALLBACK PIECE

This piece comes from the end of the play when De'Andre is in jail. It is poetic and embodies the nature and style of a choreopoem. We would like to see you create music, rhythm and incorporate movement into this piece. Take influence from Hip-Hop, spoken word and beat boxing. This is an opportunity to be creative for callbacks because we will build this section of the play around the unique abilities of each performer for full collaboration.

Black face/male body/always a threat
It's the rules it's the rules ain't remember the rules.
Hands high/out of pockets/keep anger in check
It's the rules it's the rules ain't remember the rules
Don't look in the eye
No saggin' at night
Keep hands out of pockets
Hold 'em in plain sight
Nod to the officer, never get smart
Hold back the defiance/keep the rage in ya heart
Don't matter you right
Don't matter you true
Black face/male body/ain't gon' listen to you

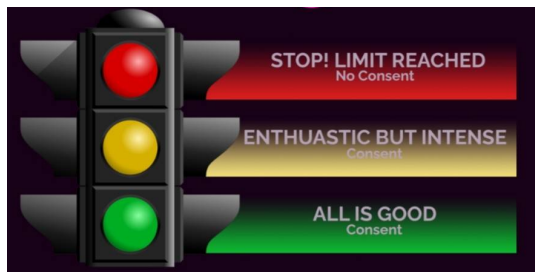
Intimacy Work Basics for Rehearsals

Stoplight System

Red – Stop! Do NOT touch me here, hands off.

Yellow – Proceed with caution, make adjustments

Green – All good to go!



Guidelines

- Always get consent! “How are you feeling today?” “How do you feel if I touch here?” “How does this make you feel?” Try to avoid asking “Yes/No” questions.
- Your boundaries are perfectly fine where they are! Shame does not exist in this space.
- You don’t have to explain why you have created a boundary for yourself.
- Boundaries can change from day to day.
Example: I bruised my arm, which is normally green, however, now it’s yellow because it’s sensitive and should be acknowledged with caution. (Not that you have to explain why anyway)
- Boundaries as an “actor” may differ from your “normal” day to day personal boundaries
Example: In rehearsal, my thighs may be Green, but if you were to walk up to me and touch them outside of this setting, it’d be uncomfortable.
- Try to use anatomically correct and gender-neutral language when describing body parts. Avoid using slang or colloquially acceptable terms.
Example: Don’t say ass, say buttocks. Don’t say boobies, say chest.
- If you are ever uncomfortable please let your stage manager or director know, immediately, you can do this privately or call **Red** for immediate attention.
- Intimacy work isn’t limited to kissing or sex scenes, they include: violence, language, racial tension, and any intimate emotional moment that could occur in a scene. Sometimes these intense moments can trigger things from our personal life and make us feel uncomfortable. It’s important to stop and reassess. Ask yourself, is this uncomfortable towards trauma, or uncomfortable towards growth.
- This is a *safe* space, always.



THE UNIVERSITY of
NEW ORLEANS
SCHOOL OF THE ARTS

BLOOD AT THE ROOT

Written by **Dominique Morisseau**
Directed by **R'Myni Watson**

CONGRATS TO THE CAST!

RAYLYNN	J'aiLa Price
TORIA	Emani White
ASHA	Torie LaCaze
JUSTIN	Walter Dixson IV
COLIN	Sam Cooley
DE'ANDRE	Justin Davis
PRINCIPAL MILLER	Quivonne Carr
THE DA	Chad Roberts
ENSEMBLE STUDENT	Bryant Berry
ENSEMBLE STUDENT	Emma Cox
ENSEMBLE STUDENT	Seth Mouton

Welcome to Blood at the Root

Yoooooo, I am so happy to share this process with you and I can't wait for us to bring it to life together. This work speaks to me in unimaginable ways. I feel divinely connected through the story and how it relates to my life, my culture, and my state's history. First, as always, I want to thank you for being here. Your presence alone has shined a light on this process that I never thought I'd see. If this will be your first time performing here at UNO, I would like to welcome you aboard! If you are returning to the stage or have previously worked with me, welcome back! This play differs from the others I've directed because this is a choreopoem. If you know me, then you know my favorite play in the whole world is *For Colored Girls...* So you can imagine how excited I am to dive into this style of work. We got hip-hop, poetry, dance the whole sha-bang.

This cast and production team is filled with talent and skill. No doubt, *this show finna be dope af*. I would like to take this time to thank you in advance for trusting me as your director. I hope that you enjoy this experience. I hope that you not only view this as an opportunity to perform but also a chance to grow in your craft, to learn from one another, and to show the world that theatre can be an act of social justice and that we can change the world in the best way that we know how; and that's one play at a time.

Bruh, and to think, this year is the 50th anniversary of Hip-Hop?! This play being chosen wasn't an accident, just as you being cast in it wasn't a stroke of luck. It's all rooted in a greater purpose. I pray this process makes a positive impact on your life. I understand and respect the sacrifices you're making, and I thank you for sharing your gifts and talents with us.

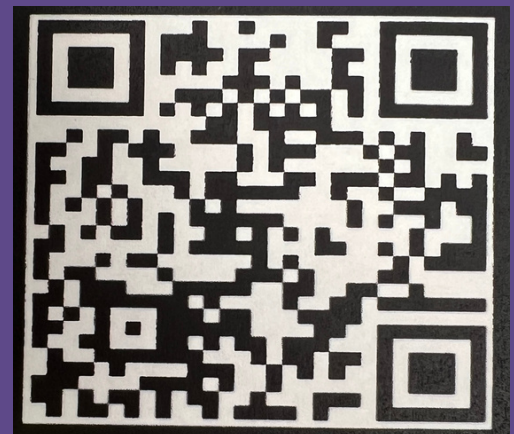
Peace, Love, & Soul,
Your director,
Myni

The Cast and Crew of Blood at the Root wanted to use our platform to support our community. We wanted to support an organization that advocates for the arts and for social justice.

We chose The André Cailloux Center for Performing Arts and Cultural Justice! Please scan the QR code or contact a team member to make a donation to this organization.



**SUPPORT
THE
ACC!!**



“GETTIN’ SOME SHADE”

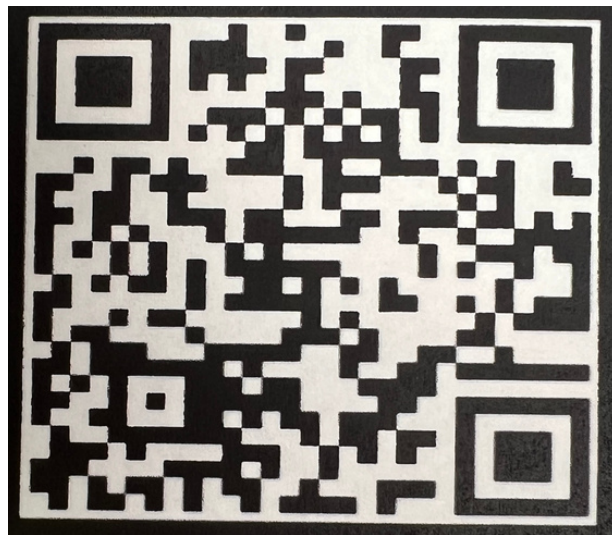
“Gettin’ Some Shade” is a lovely way to fight this hot day in October! It’s a refreshing sweet, iced tea garnished with mint and lemon. If you’re feeling anything like characters in this play then maybe you should try the Extra Shady Edition. This one includes New Orleans Style Bourbon.

GETTIN’ SOME SHADE

\$5

GETTIN’ SOME SHADE (EXTRA SHADY)

\$5



Donations received from our special treat tonight will go towards supporting the André Cailloux Center for Performing Arts and Cultural Justice

NO DREAM DEFERRED AND THEATRE UNO PRESENTS

DREAM BIG

BLACK THEATRE NIGHT

Blood at the Root



PRE-SHOW DISCUSSION

NOVEMBER 12TH @ 1:00PM

The Intersection of Art and Activism

This is a panel discussion about how art assists social justice movements. This conversation is sponsored by the Andre Cailloux Center for Performing Arts & Cultural Justice and No Dream Deferred. Come to hear from prominent professionals, artists and activists from our community. Located at the University of New Orleans Performing Arts Center in the Nims Theatre.

BLOOD AT ROOT MATINEE

NOVEMBER 12TH @ 2:00PM

Free Admission!

Blood at the Root is a fictional play inspired by real events that took place in Jena, Louisiana in 2006. Although it is a play, it has hip hop elements, spoken word, and dance included. It is a captivating story of high school students, layered with social injustice and social equity for all, but is also embedded with humor, warmth, and the undertones of familial love. Located at the University of New Orleans Performing Arts Center in the Nims Theatre.



DREAM BIG RECEPTION

NOVEMBER 12th (*Immediately after show*)

Free Admission!

The reception is a joyous moment to celebrate the production and all of the artists that have come together to tell this story. Join us for a toast after the show to celebrate! Located at the University of New Orleans Performing Arts Center.

Follow us on UNO SOTA and Theatre UNO on
Facebook and Instagram.

www.sotaperformances.uno.edu

UNO CWW & THEATRE UNO PRESENTS

VERSES & VIBES!

BLOOD AT THE ROOT

PRE-SHOW EVENT

Join us for an evening of poetry, spoken-word, rap and more! Experience some of UNO's finest artists and lyricists with a special guest appearance from Sha'Condria "iCON" Sibley!

FREE ADMISSION!

NOVEMBER 18TH

UNO PERFORMING ARTS CENTER LAB THEATRE

DOORS OPEN AT 6:30PM



CLOSING NIGHT PERFORMANCE

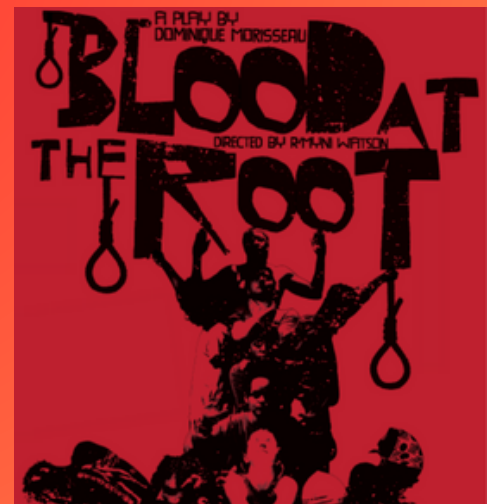
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FREE ADMISSION!

NOVEMBER 18TH

UNO PERFORMING ARTS CENTER NIMS THEATRE

STARTS AT 7:30PM



THE UNIVERSITY of
NEW ORLEANS

CREATIVE WRITING WORKSHOP

Follow us on **UNO SOTA** and **Theatre UNO** on
Facebook and **Instagram**.

www.sotaperformances.uno.edu



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SCHOOL OF THE ARTS

THEATRE



THE UNIVERSITY of
NEW ORLEANS
SCHOOL OF THE ARTS
THEATRE

A PLAY BY
DOMINIQUE MORISSEAU

BLOOD AT THE ROOT

DIRECTED BY R'MYNI WATSON

WED-SAT 7:30PM / SUN 2PM

PREVIEW WED & THURS NOV 8 & 9

SHOWING
NOV 10TH - 12TH
NOV 16TH - 18TH



EXPLICIT
CONTENT

ROBERT E. NIMS THEATRE | PERFORMING ARTS CENTER | L.I.N.O., CAMPLIS
FOR TICKETS VISIT LINDOTA.EVENTBRITE.COM OR SOTAPERFORMANCES.LINO.EDU

THEATRE UNO
presents

Blood at the Root

by **Dominique Morisseau**

Directed by R'Myni Watson

NOVEMBER 10-12 & NOVEMBER 15-18

University of New Orleans Performing Arts Center

Robert E. Nims Theater

Notice:

This play uses explicit language & depicts racial tension.

This performance runs for 90 minutes & there will be no intermission.

CAST

Raylynn **J'aiLa Price***

Toria **Emani White**

Asha **Torie "T" LaCaze**

Justin **Walter Dixson IV**

Colin **Sam Cooley**

De'Andre **Justin William Davis**

Principal Miller **Quivonne Carr**

The DA **Chad Roberts**

Ensemble Students **Bryant Berry**

Emma Cox

Seth Mouton

(*) indicates that this project is being completed in partial fulfillment for the MFA in Film & Theatre

PRODUCTION TEAM

DIRECTOR R'Myni Watson*	TECHNICAL DIRECTOR Diane K. Baas
STAGE MANAGER Grace Caroline Curley	CONSTRUCTION COORDINATOR Kevin Griffith
ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER Malachi Smith	CHOREOGRAPHER R'Myni Watson
COSTUME DESIGNER Tiffani Sheriff	STEP MASTER Walter Dixson IV
SCENIC DESIGNER Jacob Bensimon	DANCE CAPTAINS J'aiLa Price, Torie "T" LaCaze
LIGHTING DESIGNER Diane K. Baas	INTIMACY/CULTURAL SENSITIVITY ADVISOR R'Myni Watson
SOUND DESIGNER/AUDIO ENGINEER Amara Skinner	POSTER AND COVER ART Caroline Mendez
LIGHTING OPERATOR Carl Penton	BOX OFFICE TEAM SOTA Graduate Students
SOUND OPERATOR Sara Clawson	MARKETING COORDINATOR Caroline Mendez
PROPS MANAGER Jacob Bensimon	SOCIAL MEDIA/MARKETING J'aiLa Price, Walter Dixson IV

PUBLICITY/SHOW PHOTOS
Torie "T" LaCaze, Olivia Mixon

SCENIC CONSTRUCTION CREW
**Nihal Abdulla, Bryant Berry, Quivonne Carr, Sara Clawson, Sam Cooley,
Alexandra Conway, Walter Dixson IV, Savion Drake, Chad Roberts**

COSTUME CREW
Isaiah Benetrix, Aaron Brewer, Kaylyn Jackson, Jaya Turner, Trinity Lewis



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<https://concordtheatricals.com/resources/protecting-artists>

NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR



R'Myni Watson (Director)

"Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly." ~ Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter from Birmingham Jail"

Many will ask, "Why this play? Why now?" My answer is simple, "Why not?" As the script so eloquently puts it, "*It all got roots.*" This quote from Dr. King is beautiful for this show because it captures the idea that all things stem from another. Like a domino effect, our choices to follow or break rules for the better, create a series of actions and reactions. If injustice continues for one, it will continue for all. *Blood at the Root* is layered with so many social issues and how they all blend into one another. I believe this is because the root of the issues we all face, come from fear or even hatred for our differences. The characters talk about the future and question what they will leave behind. The notion that we do today affects tomorrow is prevalent in the story as well as our reality. What our ancestors did or went through 400 years ago still affects us today and to say that it doesn't, is not only ignorant but disrespectful to those that are currently enduring the residual pain from the past. So how do we move forward? What are we to leave behind? Well, we leave our art. We shape the world, one play at a time despite the oppression we face because as artists we have a duty to pass on the stories. This quote from Amiri Baraka sums it up perfectly.

"The artist's role is to raise the consciousness of the people. To make them understand life, the world, and themselves more completely. That is how I see it. Otherwise, I do not know why you do it."

Being an artist directly places you in a position that encompasses all aspects of being a leader in the movement for social change. We have been running the same race throughout history – passing the baton to those that come to take over the fight for justice. Our art grows with that same passion and continues to press on. *My art fights for me and my peeps!* It feeds our souls.

This art form, Black theatre, it allows us to release. To carry on our traditions. To shape the world around us. To dance and move our bodies. To sing and shout. To clap our hands and stomp our feet. To cry and praise. To make bold statements. To challenge authority. To educate each other. It is a necessary nutrient for the survival of our people.

Blood at the Root has done this and more for everyone who has been a part of this storytelling journey. I hope that it does the same for the audience. Our process and work on *Blood at the Root* has been transformative and life-altering. I feel that many of us involved have tapped into a new area of artistry and have grown in ways that are unimaginable. I pray that we will carry these newfound skills, feelings, and sense of activism along with us as we move on to other projects. To my cast, this is your show and your story, it always has been.

SPECIAL THANKS

LaKesha Glover

Henry Griffin

Lauren Turner-Hines

Justin Maxwell

Andre Cailloux Center for Performing Arts & Cultural Justice

No Dream Deferred



J'aiLa Price (Raylynn)

J'aiLa Price is a third-year MFA candidate and Instructor of Record at the University of New Orleans. She is from Georgia and is a graduate of Reinhardt University holding a BFA in musical theatre. J'aiLa recently worked with The Nola Project playing Helena in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and Gifty in *School Girls; Or, The African Mean Girls Play*. Her other notable roles include Katherina (Kate) in Tulane's Shakespeare Festival production of *Taming of the Shrew*, and Lady Capulet in UNO's production of *Romeo and Juliet*.



Emani White (Torcia)

Emani White is native New Orleanian and is pursuing her MFA in theatre performance at UNO. Emani has an extensive background in tv and film. Some of her credits include: *NCIS: New Orleans*, *No One Will Save You*, *Leverage: Redemption*, *Mike Tyson: Limited Series*, *Street Fighter 6*, and many more. She is making her UNO Theatre debut in *Blood at the Root*. She enjoys riveting storytelling and bringing authentic characters to life. She feels so blessed for the opportunity to work with this talented cast and crew on such a relevant show.



Torie "T" LaCaze (Asha)

Torie "T" LaCaze is a senior film student at the University of New Orleans. Although she is primarily focused on her work behind the screen she has a deep love for performing. Some of her previous works include Mercutio in *Romeo and Juliet*, Heather McNamara in *Heathers*, and Andrew Clark in *The Breakfast Club*. She is super excited to make her UNO debut in *Blood at the Root*.



Walter Dixon IV (Justin)

Walter Dixon IV is a native New Orleanian, and first-year MFA acting student at UNO. Having obtained his B.A. in Performance Art from Dillard University, he enjoys sharing the stage with other talented actors and performers. Some of his professional credits include *The Color Purple*, *Simply Irma*, *The Lion King*, *The Glove*, *24 Hour: Life of Pontius Pilate* and many more. Being a part of this incredible program has helped Walter increase his love for the arts and open up infinite possibilities for the future as he continues his graduate studies.



Sam Cooley (Colin)

Samuel "Sam" Cooley is a second-year Creative Writing MFA student at the University of New Orleans and an alumnus of Louisiana Tech University. While Sam's first love is writing, he has recently been exploring his newfound passion for theatre and acting. *Blood at the Root* will be his third performance at UNO. His other performances include *Picasso at the Lapin Agile* and *Dead Name*.



Justin William Davis (De'Andre)

Justin William Davis was born in New Orleans, but was raised in Greensburg, LA. He studied acting at Southeastern Louisiana University and then at the University of New Orleans where he received his M.F.A in Theatre Performance. He works in film and television and has been a part of numerous stage productions in New Orleans. Some of his credits include *Mother Road*, *Tecumseh!*, *Othello*, *The Emperor Jones*, *Summer & Smoke*, *Where The Suga Still Sweet*, and *Angola 3*.



Quivonne Carr (Principal Miller)

Quivonne Carr, is a 20-year-old, native of Ponchatoula, LA. She is a third-year theatre major at UNO. She will be making her performance debut with *Blood at the Root* and is excited to have this opportunity. As she continues her studies at UNO, Quivonne hopes to continue growing in her craft and furthering her skills in performance and other areas of theatre.



Chad Roberts (The DA)

Chad Roberts is making his UNO debut in *Blood at the Root*. His most recent work comes from his involvement with the Riverdale High School Theater Program. His notable roles include Bottom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Ma Ubu in *Ubu Roi*, and The Fat Prince in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. Chad enjoys music and storytelling.



Bryant Berry (Ensemble Student)

Bryant Berry, is a 21-year-old New Orleans native. He is a second-year theatre major at UNO. He will be making his performance debut with *Blood at the Root* and is excited to have this opportunity. As he continues his studies at UNO, Bryant hopes to continue growing in his craft and furthering his skills in performance.



Emma Cox (Ensemble Student)

Emma Cox is a senior film student at UNO. She's been involved with the theater department since the spring of 2022 and has since acted in and worked behind the scenes on numerous other theater and film productions at the school, including *Marie Antoinette's Head*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Closer to Heaven*, and *Is God Is*. She's honored to be a part of this show and feels so blessed to be given the opportunity to work with this amazing cast and crew.



Seth Isril Mouton (Ensemble Student)

Seth Isril Mouton is a fourth-year undergraduate theatre major. His previous credits include *The Addam's Family Musical* at the Azienda Theater and Reinfield and (Chuck Hall) in UNO's production of *Is God Is*. *Blood at the Root* will be his second performance at UNO. After graduation, he plans to continue pursuing his career in acting with local companies and projects in the New Orleans area.

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SCAN TO CHECK OUT ALL SOTA
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NEXT AT THE NIMS

No Exit

by Jean-Paul Sartre
January 31-February 10, 2024
Directed by David W. Hoover
Robert E. Nims Lab Theater

She Stoops to Conquer

by Oliver Goldsmith
April 10-20, 2024
Directed by Madison Smith
Robert E. Nims Theater

Creative Writing Workshop Concert Readings (CWW):

Your Children Will Follow

by Grace Caroline Curley
Friday, December 1, 7:30pm
Robert E. Nims Lab Theater

LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Bulbancha [boul BAHN cha]



This production was produced by Theatre UNO. We do this to acknowledge that we are on stolen land. There is no empty space. There is No. Empty. Space. Every space has histories, caretakers, tillers, cultivators, and protectors. Erasing these histories is violence. Disrespecting the people and their labors is violence, and to this day we collectively suffer from the embodied trauma of that ongoing violence. The land keeps the score. The water also keeps the score. Bulbancha is one of the many names for this place that is colonially known as New Orleans, and Bulbancha literally means “place of many names” or “land of many tongues”. Located next to the great Okwa-ta, Wide Water, Lake Pontchartrain and the Mississippi; it is the unceded ancestral land of the Choctaw, Chitimacha, and Houma peoples, customs, and traditions. There is no empty space. I say Ase’ to the caretakers, protectors and expert Houma, Choctaw, and Chitimacha peoples of Bulbancha. I say Ase’ to my African ancestors whose blood and labor has added to the cultural shaping of this place. We do this to acknowledge those before us, but we must move from acknowledgement to commitment. Think of your privilege. Think of your opportunities. Think of those before you and those who will come after. What does commitment look like for you? Ase’

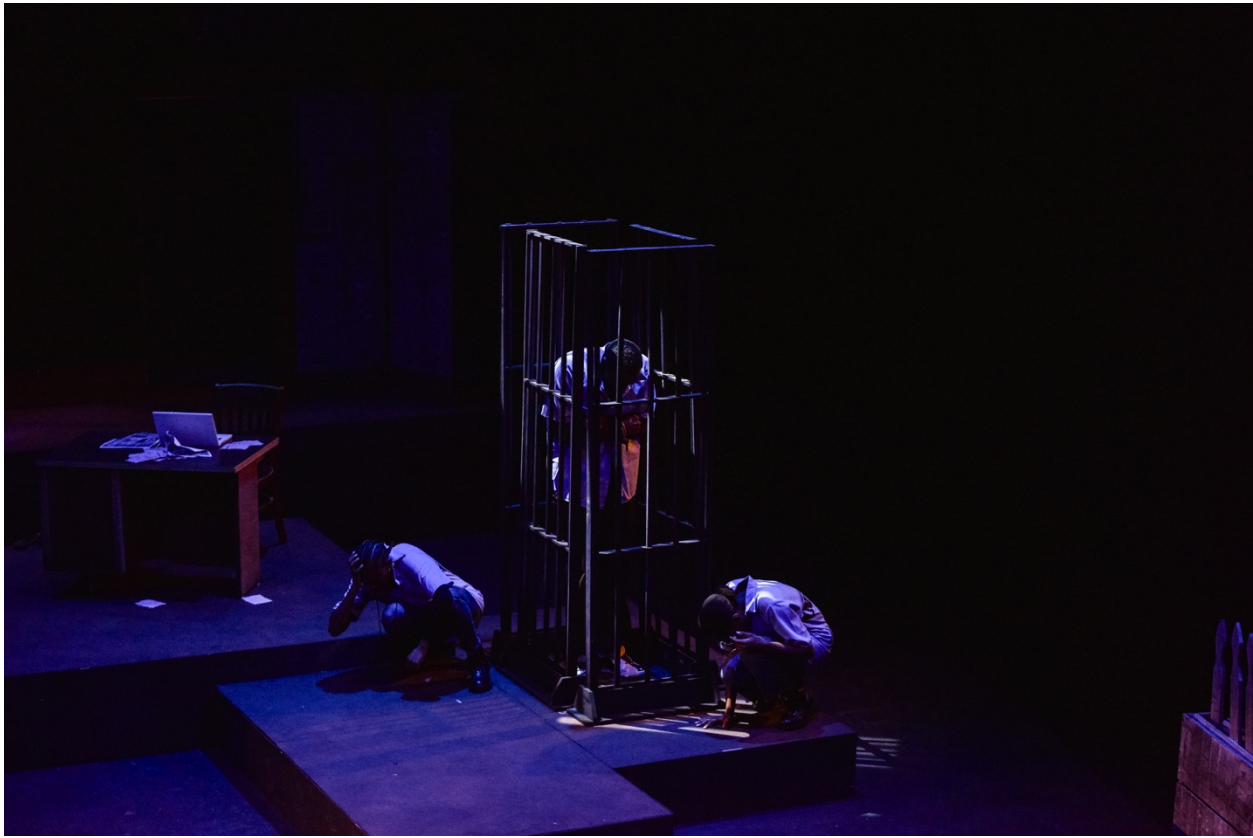
~ Lauren Turner-Hines & R’Myni Watson













Vita

The author was born in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. She earned her bachelor's degree in Speech Communication with an emphasis in Theatre from Jackson State University. In 2021, she joined the University of New Orleans graduate program to pursue a Master of Fine Arts (MFA) in Directing. Her research interests include Black Theatre, Absurdism, Theatre of Cruelty, Post-Modernism, Critical Race Theory, and Afro-pessimism in the arts. She is an Alpha Psi Omega National Theatre Honor Society, Chi Lambda Chapter member. Her production of *Blood at the Root* also traveled to the Region 6 Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival as an invited production. This production also received several National Production Awards from the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival including, *Outstanding Achievement in the Direction of a Play by a Student*, *Distinguished Achievement in Performance and Production Ensemble*, *Distinguished Achievement in Production Design*, *Distinguished Achievement in Sound Design*, and a few others.