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CARVING MY OWN BENCH BY THE ROAD: EXAMINING THE SEATS OF POWER FOR BLACK WOMEN EDUCATORS THROUGH PLAYWRITING

by

DAWN C. WHIPPLE

(Under the Direction of Ming Fang He)

ABSTRACT

In my dissertation inquiry, I explore the seats of power held by Black women educators in secondary education public schools in Georgia. Theoretically building upon such works as Black feminist thought (Hill Collins, 2000, e.g., hooks, 1981;), womanism (Walker, 2004; Phillips, 2006), critical race theory (Bell, 1992; Delgado, 1989), and engaged pedagogy (hooks, 1994), I created a play. The work explores the oppression experienced by Black women educators who empower themselves for the benefit of students, in some cases abdicate their power, and in a few instances use their power to oppress others (Freire, 1970). The play is crafted based upon government legislations, public meeting notes, newspaper articles, textbooks and other artifacts. I also use reflective notes, daily conversations, journal entries, and other artifacts to fictionalize the counterstories of the Black women educators in public schools. I challenge the metanarrative of “failing public schools” filled with “ineffective” teachers. Playwriting enables me to answer August Wilson’s call for: honesty, purpose, and Black aesthetics (Bryer & Hartig, 2006) in all playwrights.

Nine meanings have emerged from my dissertation inquiry: (1) Black feminist thought empowers Black women educators and is beneficial for all students. (2) “White supremacist capitalist patriarchy” (hooks, 1981) suppresses both students and teachers and provokes Black women educators into acts of liberation and protest. (3) Black mothering in the classroom

represents both power and weakness for Black women educators. (4) Black women educators, who “talk back,” (hooks b. , 1989) battle White resistance and White fatigue that leads to Black exhaustion. (5) Self-definition (Hill Collins, 2000) and self-actualization (hooks, 1994) empower Black women educators to transgress all form of oppressions to engage in pedagogical praxis (Freire, 1970). (6) The assault on public schools (Watkins, 2011) *deskills* (Apple, 1982) teachers and disempowers Black women educators. (7) The school to prison pipeline is changing drastically into the school prison complex, where schools become prisons and students become parolees. (8) Oppositional knowledge (Hill Collins, 2000) and Afrofuturism (Dery, 1993) empower Black women educators to reexamine a complicated past, create a better present and invent brighter future for all. (9) I transgress traditional research inquiries to create a play to tell “hidden” and “silenced narratives” of Black women educators by engaging in *personal~passionate~participatory* inquiry for social justice (He & Phillion, 2008).

INDEX WORDS: Black women educators, Black feminist thought, Womanism, Critical race theory, Engaged pedagogy, Liberating dissertation, Playwriting

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DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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THROUGH PLAYWRITING

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DEDICATION

To Agnes Harvey. My first Black woman educator who taught me how to make biscuits and shop at the grocery store on a budget. And to hold close what's really important.

To the Empty Chair: Kanye West says, "the system broken, the school is closed the prison's open." Your experience is not in vain. Your presence is sorely missed.

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To the Heavenly Seat: Jesus thank You for orchestrating the successes and failures of my life to lead me to this precise place. I truly thank You for Your guidance and Your wisdom.

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To the Love Seat: my mother, Annie Bell Whipple, my father, Richard Whipple and my baby brother Richard Whipple, Jr. this is "our" dissertation. I hope that I "remembered the name" and made the family proud. I love each of you and thank you for supporting me through this journey. To the Recliners: Tessa, Dametrice and Derek you all listened even when you couldn't understand me, thank you.

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CHAPTER ONE: DISCOVERING THE SEATS OF POWER: INTRODUCTION

Ain't I a Teacher? Prelude

Well, Sistas, where there are so many trials there must be a fire.
 I think that righteous anger of grieving mothers
 And the unrest of the miseducated youth
 will place the establishment into an untenable position shortly,
 or at least this is our silent hope.

But what are we really talking about?
 That politician over there says that we need to be held accountable
 for all of these failing scores and failing schools.
 According to them, we are not just failing students
 but our community and ourselves.
 The educational debt is overdue
 and we need to make an accounting of our misdeeds.

Hell, nobody ever asked me what to do in order to fix the system!
 They just gave me unreachable common standards,
 store-bought curriculum, increased class size,
 less instructional time, fewer supports
 and even fewer supplies and told me to make it work.

Look at me, Look at my hands!
 I write lesson plans on my weekends,
 I grade papers late into the night and before the sun gets up.
 I talk to children masquerading in costumes of thugs, loners, and rebels.
 I try to convince them and myself, that within these hallowed halls there's freedom.

I teach the parolees, the patrons, and the pupils alike.
 And ain't I a teacher?

I could work 365 days a year, 24 hours a day
 and still not meet all your expectations and non-negotiables.
 I have taught thousands and seen some of them go off to college
 and others strike out into the world
 Still, others are touted off into a system that they will never break free.
 And ain't I a teacher?

Then they try to sell me on this idea that public education is for everyone.
 That brokenness I feel inside, that tingling feeling creeping up my spine,
 That sinking in my gut, You say is some artificial internal conflict.
 The anecdote is into listening to Talking Ted, or is hidden inside that Remind App,

That if I just try a little harder to be better than my students will achieve because of my
“accelerated intervention.”

What’s this data got to do with equality and being free?

We out here running with no shoes, no water.

And you and yours started running before the gunshot trigger was even pulled.

What kind of race to the top is that?

Then that little man in the designer suit back there on retainer road
says we need to treat this educational system here like it was a business.

We not succeeding because our processes ain’t right.

We don’t make products we build people.

Where is your algorithm for that?

People don’t always compute into a formula or a mathematical equation.

Processes and Procedures ain’t got nothing to do with it.

If teachers were the ones educating all these adults we got running our nations now,
teachers ought to be ones with a seat at the table!

And now we are asking to do it, the system better help or get destroyed in the process!

A Seat at the Table: The Research Phenomena

In the poem, “Ain’t I a Teacher,” I use the legacy of struggle via the voice of Sojourner Truth (McKissack & McKissack, 1992) to describe the challenges, angst, and struggles of myself and other Black woman educators in the classroom. Statistically, Black women work in more economically disadvantaged schools than our White female counterparts (Institute, 2015). With the expansion of school reform, the oppression described by hooks as white supremacist capitalist patriarchy (hooks b., *Understanding patriarchy*, 2004) and the rise of the vilification of public education (Watkins W. H., 2011); teaching is not the noble profession that it once was. Teachers are being asked to do more with significantly less. Public school educators teaching in communities with strong parental support, corporate sponsorship, and a pipeline to higher education and career tracks are continuing to thrive while those teaching in poorer neighborhoods are struggling to make a dollar out of fifteen cents. In other words, teachers are struggling against an educational debt that requires us to do more with less.

Theorist and educator, Gloria Ladson-Billings (2006) defines educational debt as the combination of historical, economic, sociopolitical and moral responsibility the U.S. educational system has towards its citizens. The U.S. educational system has a history built upon “a documented legacy of educational inequities...those inequities initially were formed around race, class, and gender. Gradually, some of the inequities began to recede, but clearly, they persist in the realm of race” (p. 5). Historically, American public schools have not given the same quality education to minorities and women that it has afforded to White male students. Economically, the story is not vastly different from the historical narrative.

The economics of the education debt is sobering. The funding disparities that currently exist between schools serving White students and those serving students of color are not recent phenomena. Separate schooling always allows for differently funding. In present-day dollars, the funding disparities between urban schools and their suburban counterparts present a telling story about the value we place on the education of different groups of students (p. 6).

Ladson-Billings asserts that the sociopolitical debt is a combination of political disenfranchisement and voter suppression which keeps “communities of color ...excluded from the civic process” and from the policy-making processes that directly impact education (p. 7). Finally, the scholar argues further that the U.S. educational system holds a moral debt. Ladson-Billings defines the moral debt as “the disparity between what we know is right and what we actually do” (p. 8). The moral debt is more difficult to quantify and even harder to reconcile. The moral debt can be attributed to the atrocities of slavery and the litany of injustices relegated to indigenous people. Ladson-Billings states that ignoring the complex and far-reaching impacts of the education debt will only impede the present education progress.

Within this educational system of deficits, Black women educators are still struggling to justify our significance, impact, and mere presence within the field of public education. Despite our gains and despite the lack of support, I ask the philosophical question, “Ain’t I a teacher?”

White, female, middle-class teachers dominate the education field. As a result, Black women teachers are underrepresented in the teaching field. “Statistically, Black female teachers represent 7.7% of the United States teaching force, while White female teachers make up over 60% of the American teaching workforce” (Farinde, LeBlanc, & Otten, 2015, p. 32). According to several reports, Black teachers are disproportionately underrepresented within the American K-12 public school system. In fact, over the past years, the number of Black teachers has drastically declined (Ingersoll, 2003). The research shows, that despite our (Black women educators) low representation in the field of public education, we make a major impact. So why are Black women educators choosing to leave public education at a faster rate than their White counterparts? What is happening inside the culture of public education that is deterring African American women from staying?

One contributing factor may be the lack of institutional support. Some research suggests that Black women teachers feel “the absence or presence of institutional support during their college years and how these factors either assisted or delayed their matriculation through their teacher education program. The level of institutional support influenced the length of time it took Black females to gain entry into the classroom.” (Farinde, LeBlanc, & Otten, 2015, p. 43). This lack of institutional support continues into the realm of public education.

In addition, Black women are leaving teaching at a higher rate than our White counterparts. “Research from the Shanker report indicates that teachers of color feel they don’t have a voice in education decisions and have limited professional autonomy in the classroom”

(Zalaznick, 2014). The bottom line is that across the nation teachers of color are placed in schools that are more likely to have less desirable working conditions and this impacts their “desire and willingness to stay” (Griffin, 2015). As I embark on my seventh year of teaching, I have never contemplated leaving more than I have this year. I sympathize and empathize with the frustrations felt by my sistah scholars who are tired of assisting a system that perpetuates and reinforces negative stereotypes of minorities, serves as a recruitment pool for the prison system and continues cycles of poverty and disenfranchisement.

It is obvious from the data from the prison to school pipeline (Schept, Wall, & Brisman, 2015; Gass & Laughter, 2015; Archer, 2009) that the pipeline is real, relevant, and in need of voices and intervention from Black women educators. The Albert Shankar Institute, a nonprofit committed to promoting quality public education, believes teacher diversity is a student “educational civil right.” Their report on, *The State of Teacher Diversity* (Albert Shankar Institute, 2015), states that

minority teachers can be more motivated to work with disadvantaged minority students in high-poverty, racially and ethnically segregated schools, a factor which may help to reduce rates of teacher attrition in hard-to-staff schools...Minority teachers tend to have higher academic expectations for minority students, which can result in increased academic and social growth among students...All students benefit from being educated by teachers from a variety of different backgrounds, races, and ethnic groups, as this experience better prepares them to succeed in an increasingly diverse society (Albert Shankar Institute, 2015).

The research shows that Black women educators are an asset not a liability to public education. Our hasty exit away from the profession should sound alarms, questions, and research.

Over the past seven years, I have worked for three different Georgia Title 1 schools. I have worked primarily as a middle school English Language Arts teacher at two different Title 1 schools and have begun teaching this year at a Title 1 high school. During this time period, I have taught under three different set of standards and two different standardized assessments. What I find most problematic about this summary of my experiences is that it is devoid of the relationships I have built with students, faculty, and parents. This sanitized and whitewashed paraphrase of my experience does not tell my story.

I am fueled by the Ayers' question, "What is it that you want to change?" (Ayers W. & T., 2010). When it comes to education, I want to change everything. I want to change how people view students, what it means to learn, what it means to teach, what it means to value and devalue education. While I am motivated in a myriad of directions concerning public education, I feel the primary space begins with teacher voice, my voice in particular. What is the problem that I want to solve? I want to recover my own teacher voice, and I want to tell my story and that of the other Black women educators who work with me.

Kitchen Chair: Autobiographical Roots of My Inquiry

Setting: 1990, in the kitchen of a shotgun house with a tin roof in Dawson, GA. The kitchen is visibly worn with a peeling laminate floor and outdated yet functional gas stove. A large dining room table with simple construction and a plastic tablecloth decorated with fruit fills the center of the room. The top of the Maytag Frigidaire holds a glass cake stand with Grandma's Japanese Fruit Cake. The kitchen countertops are lined with homemade fig preserves, canned vegetables,

and three vintage wooden boxes marked SUGAR, FLOUR, and COFFEE. Grandma Agnes is sweeping the floor with a wooden broom. She is a heavy-set woman with dark ebony skin donning a floral house dress and worn house shoes. She concentrates heavily on her task as small beads of sweat dripping from her brow. Dawn, a nine-year-old African-American girl, (also one of Grandma Agnes' granddaughters) a heavy-set child with a bright-colored shirt, shorts, and two pigtails. Dawn is visibly clearing off the table from breakfast. The scene opens with Agnes diligently sweeping and Dawn walking back and forth from the table to the sink stopping occasionally to converse with Grandma Agnes.

Dawn: Grandma, where do you want me to put the leftover biscuits?

Grandma Agnes: How many left?

Dawn: All of yours are gone, just the ones I made. I did everything you told me.

Grandma Agnes: Hush child, when something don't do right you just try again.

Dawn: 'K so now what do you want me to do with the biscuits?

Grandma Agnes: Just put'em in the old pie pan on top the freezer by the door there.
Brownie 'll eat'em.

Dawn: Grandma, you gonna feed'em to the dog?

Grandma Agnes: You gon eat'em?

Dawn: Nah

Grandma Agnes: Nah...what?

Dawn: Nah Ma'am

Grandma Agnes: Alright then. Put'em in the pan.

Dawn slowly walks to the pan sitting on top of the large deep freezer by the window. She places the burned biscuits in the pan. She turns and walks back toward the dining room table and turns quizzically stage left.

Dawn: Grandma?

Grandma Agnes: Hmm?

Dawn: That's a pretty bed in that spare room.

Grandma Agnes: (she stops sweeping and stares closer at her granddaughter) I ain't never told you bout that bed?

Dawn: No Ma'am

Grandma Agnes: Well Big Ma, my grandmother, got that bed as a wedding present back in 1919. She loved that bed, even after Pop Pop left.

Dawn: He left? Why he do that?

Grandma Agnes: He had a hard life. Dawson wasn't the easiest place for a Black man to live back in those days. He originally left to find work in Florida.

Dawn takes a sit at the kitchen table and looks up expectantly at her Grandmother.

Dawn: Did he come back?

Grandma Agnes: For the first few years he wrote letters but then he just stopped. No, no he never did come back.

Grandma begins sweeping again more vigorously.

Dawn: (knowing that she has slipped into a touchy subject, she seeks to steer the conversation saying) It's a pretty bed though...what year did you say?

- Grandma Agnes:** 1919...that's the year Big Ma got married. She got that bed in 1919 made of cast iron too. She loved that bed. Yup 1919.
- Dawn:** That will make a nice heirloom
- Grandma Agnes:** Hair what?
- Dawn:** No Grandma, not "hair" Heirloom it's like things that you pass down from one generation to the next.
- Grandma Agnes:** When I go you need to take that bed. Keep it in the family.
- Dawn:** Me?
- Grandma Agnes:** Why not you? You'll keep it safe... been in our family since 1919.
- Dawn:** Grandma you ain't going nowhere...you ain't never gon die.
- Grandma Agnes:** Sugar, I don't know bout that but I do know I want you to have that bed. Yup been here since 1919. (Grandma smiles to herself and continues to sweep the floor. Dawn smiles and shakes her head, getting up she continues to clear the table. The house lights dim and the stage is dark).

End Scene

Seven Years Later

The scene opens with a 17-year-old Dawn standing center stage and facing directly toward the audience. The stage is sparse with only necessary props used by the supporting actors on stage.

- Dawn:** (looking directly at the audience) When I was a child I thought and acted as a child but when I got grown I put away childish things (1 Corinthians 13:11, The New King James Version). I remember the day when my innocence was lost. I was a senior in high school and was in the process of visiting colleges. I was scheduled to visit Wofford College...the

Harvard of the South. (She lifts her hands to signal two big air quotes). My parents had been unsure about me traveling with my friend, Nicole, and Felicia for the weekend. Well, not so much Nicole as Felicia. My parents were never comfortable with the unknown. I remember calling from school thinking that my location would sway their opinion. (Dawn picks up a rotary phone sitting on a tall table that is located upstage, stage left)

Dad?

Dad: (another spotlight stage right reveals a man in his 40s standing with a corded phone to his ear.) Hey, Dawn.

Dawn: Dad you didn't forget about me going to Wofford this weekend did you?

Dad: Dawn, I don't know about that

Dawn: But Dad...

Dad: Dawn, I think it would be better if you took the bus home and we can talk about it later.

Dawn: Well I have to let the girls know by tomorrow...it's Thursday now.

Dad: Come home on the bus, Dawn.

Dawn: Ok...bye. (Dawn hangs up the phone slowly. She looks back at the audience and begins to speak again). I went home on the bus. I felt funny. You know how people say they have butterflies in their stomach? Well, I had baby birds. I felt clammy and anxious. I knew something was wrong but, I couldn't put my finger on it.

Mom enters the stage from stage right. She walks directly up to Dawn who turns to greet her.

Mom hugs the girl fiercely and begins to sob openly like a child.

Dawn: Momma? Momma, what's wrong?

Mom: (pulling back to look at Dawn's face) You don't know? He didn't tell you?

Dawn: No Ma'am

Mom: Your Grandmother's dead!

Dawn begins to cry as well. Mom embraces her child and they weep together. Slowly Mom releases Dawn and fades off stage. Dawn slowly turns back to the audience and wipes her face.

Dawn: My grandmother's funeral was filled with a weird combination of our family and the White family that my Grandmother worked for until the day she died. As a matter of fact, Miss Rose wept more than my family and me combined. It took several years for my parents to settle my grandma's estate. On several occasions, I would remind Mom and Dad about the bed. (Dawn turns stage right and speaks to Mom who is standing over her left shoulder) She said it has been in our family since 1919. (Dawn turns stage left and speaks to Dad who is standing over her right shoulder) We need to get it. (Dawn turns and looks back at the audience) Well, I lost the bed. Lost probably isn't the right word but according to my mother, my uncle decided to sell some of Grandma's things. He sold an old hutch, a dresser, and the bed. I asked her if we knew who he sold it to and if we could get it back. My mom just said, "He sold it to some White folks up the road Dawn...it's gone." Just like that, it was gone. I don't know if I ever quite forgave my uncle or myself.

While the interlude above is a fictionalized account of several incidents from my childhood, the sacred and hallowed space of the kitchen table is a real and known entity to many African American women. When one is living in a white supremacist capitalist patriarchy (hooks b. , *Ain't I a woman*, 1981) the oppressed must find “safe spaces” (Hill Collins, 2000) to communicate and commiserate. Unlike other areas outside of the home, the kitchen in Black families is traditionally ruled by women. In a world of chaos and destruction, the kitchen is a symbolic representation of control, creation, and renewal.

One goes to the kitchen primarily to find something to eat. Nourishment to abate one’s physical hunger but since the body cannot live by bread alone, one can find spiritual and emotional food as well. The kitchen table chair offers Black women a space to discuss family, politics, history, and share secrets. These spaces are run by women in service to other women. They serve as training grounds for future generations. It is in this space that I learned some of my very first life lessons. By losing my grandmother, I didn’t just lose heirlooms but a strong connection with my own sense of safety.

I was left with memories. Walker says, “...always, in one’s memory, there remain all the rituals of one’s growing up...” (*In search of our mother's gardens: Womanist prose*, 2004, p. 18). She describes them as “warm” and “vivid.” My memories of the rituals of baking biscuits, boiling jars for preserving, and holding one’s tongue in front of “compknee” (anyone outside of the circle of family and trusted friends) are not lost. They remained safely within me.

Writing “Kitchen Chair” became a cathartic experience. It allowed me to unlock and rediscover something that I thought was long gone. In writing, I was able to move past some of the hurt and anger and put some of the pieces back together.

I know through personal experience that “Kitchen Table Talk” is a sacred space where Black women share information, history, secrets, confidences. Even though I lost the bed, my grandmother imparted something even more valuable: the importance of this sacred safe space. She shared with me a portion of my history; she gave me something to value. The event depicted in “Kitchen Chair” was one of my conversations that happened around my grandmother’s kitchen. As I continued to grow, I would watch my aunts, mother, and grandmother “hold court” and discuss everything from politics, food preparation, and the local town gossip. I realize that this form of communication is one that I unconsciously gravitated towards and cultivated in my personal career. In a profession where there is an unspoken pressure to “perform” and be different than the stereotype, it is therapeutic to have a conversational space for healing and restoration.

As an educator, a scholar, and a Black woman I occupy and transition between safe and unsafe spaces.

Move That Chair Outside: Context of the Study



(My Squad [photograph], 2016)

“Ms. Whipple, who are those women in the picture? Are they your sisters?” “No, not my blood sisters. They feel like sisters but were not related. That’s my squad.” The student inquiring about one of the pictures on my classroom door nodded her head in understanding. In the group selfie, I and five other black women educators are smiling into the camera for the

second time. The first photo was deemed unacceptable by the group, a couple of eyes were closed, we had moved locations to have more light and someone said, “I wasn’t ready.” The photo was taken outside of a local restaurant after one of our monthly meetups. We meet every couple of months to celebrate, converse, and commiserate our personal and professional accomplishments and challenges.

The official definition for a squad, as determined by the Urban Diction, is a: “crew, posse, gang: an informal group of individuals with a common identity and a sense of solidarity. The term is a bit flashy and is more likely to be heard in hip-hop lyrics than in spoken conversation.” The term squad adequately defines this group of Black women educators who I have cultivated both personal and professional relationships during my time in public education. No real entity placed us together outside of our mutual occupation and common concerns and interests surrounding education in general. Surprisingly the group is an intergenerational mixture of teachers and administrators, and we have remained close despite our movement to different schools and my recent move to a different city and county.

The majority of the “data” for my research pulled from our collective experiences and observations as Black women educators. We have what I call “Kitchen Table Talk;” however, we have taken our kitchen chairs (metaphorically) and moved them outside. This is the type of conversation is a combination of therapy, mentoring, career counseling, gossiping, and connection. King & Ferguson (2011, p. x) describes the transition to the sacred “kitchen table” space:

Although much of what we learned we absorbed by what we saw women do, there was also the spoken tradition. Initially, we learned by overhearing women talk with each other in a soul-to-soul sharing of their lives, dreams, and goals. As girls not yet invited to the

table where “grown folk’s business” took place, we hovered as close to this power and mystery as we were permitted. This way we could feel for ourselves the exhilarating energy of women as they deconstructed the lives of other folks, or problem solved, made plans and delineated visions. But as we came of age, these kitchen-table-talking women intentionally included us. Our incremental acceptance was the rite of passage that culminated in a seat at the table.

The Black women educators in this circle have graduated from merely listeners and observers to being active and vocal participants. The irony of our meeting is in this safe space where dare to speak and give voice to thoughts and actions that could never happen in our professional lives. We speak to what bell hooks calls the “white supremacist capitalist patriarchy” and how it impacts our lives as educators.

Using the stories of these Black women educators, combined with my own experiences as a Black woman educator I seek to create a study that is localized and theoretical. In limiting the locale and the participants used to gather data, I hope to uncover information that could be applied universally.

The Complicated Conversation in Office Chairs: Interlude

From: aurora.post@peachcounty.edu

To: charles.whitman@peachcounty.edu

CC:

Subject: Culturally Relevant Curriculum

Mr. Whitman,

I want to thank you for all of your help and support that you have provided to me as I become acclimated to Peach County High School. I've taken the time to review some of the model lessons and supplemental texts that you use in your 9th grade Literature Class, and I have a small concern. While I know that culturally relevant texts and pedagogy are essential to the success of teaching our students, I am uncomfortable with one of the text selections. The inclusion of "The Cool" by the rapper Lupe Fiasco is one that I question. I am concerned about using a text that glorifies gratuitous drug use and uses the n-word casually as a "friendly" reference to Black people.

Respectfully,

Aurora Post

9th Grade Literature

Peach County High School

aurora.post@peachcounty.edu

"Your silence will not protect you." Audre Lorde

From: charles.whitman@peachcounty.edu

To: aurora.post@peachcounty.edu

CC:

Subject: RE: Culturally Relevant Curriculum

Ms. Post,

Thank you for your concern, however, I don't see the problem in using this text. I realize that you are new so you don't have the same level of experiential knowledge as me. From my experience, the students enjoy listening to the music and engage in the lesson. More importantly, the n-word is not new to them; many of them use the word in and outside of the classroom. We as teachers, should not shield our students from the harsh realities of life but give them tools to combat them. I think you are really making a big deal out of nothing. This is one of many texts you can use to teach the course, so if you don't feel "comfortable" use a different text.

Sincerely,

Charles Whitman

9th Grade Literature Curriculum Team Lead

Peach County High School

charles.whitman@peachcounty.edu

"Only the educated are free." Epictetus

From: aurora.post@peachcounty.edu

To: charles.whitman@peachcounty.edu

CC:

Subject: RE: RE: Culturally Relevant Curriculum

Mr. Whitman,

My concern is larger than just my own classroom. While I certainly will not teach this text as a part of my course, I am concerned about you and any other educator in the building who would consider using this text as an acceptable instructional practice. It is problematic in a myriad of ways. One you are the team leader for our curriculum, so if you co-sign the use of the text then other teachers will feel comfortable in using this texts and others similar to it in nature. Two, you are White. When you present a text of this nature to a group of minority students, you are telling them that it is okay to use the n-word and, some of the students may believe that you support and possibly use the word yourself. I believe the fallacy in your argument is that just because the students use the word does not mean that we as teachers should engage in this. Furthermore, students don't always vocalize when they are offended by a particular lesson or topic. How do you think students feel when you use a text that includes this word? How do you think students feel when you say the word?

Respectfully,

Aurora Post

9th Grade Literature

Peach County High School

aurora.post@peachcounty.edu

“Your silence will not protect you.” Audre Lorde

From: charles.whitman@peachcounty.edu

To: aurora.post@peachcounty.edu

CC:

Subject: RE: Culturally Relevant Curriculum

Ms. Post,

So based on your argument, we shouldn't teach *To Kill a Mockingbird* now? Or other literary works that use the n-word? That's censorship and I as the team leader will not support such a myopic, closed minded and dare I say racist position.

Sincerely,

Charles Whitman

9th Grade Literature Curriculum Team Lead

Peach County High School

charles.whitman@peachcounty.edu

“Only the educated are free.” Epictetus

My circle of Black women educators has often discussed the difficulty of speaking truth to power. The above exchange is just one small example of how our efforts are traditionally received. As Black women educators, we may voice valid concerns, but what we are greeted with is white fragility and an inability to acknowledge white privilege.

Is that Seat for Me?: Purpose of the Study/Research Questions

When it comes to my place as an educator, I feel like I am a character inside of a story. I have yet to surmise if I am a protagonist or an antagonist, a hero or anti-hero, a dynamic or static character, a major or minor character. If I were to assume that I am the hero within my own narrative, then I have become stagnant in my hero's journey. At this point, I understand the difficulties and challenges facing public education. I have heard the summons of Paulo Freire, bell hooks, Jonathan Kozol, and Howard Zinn that something is “rank in the state of Denmark” or, in this case, within the American public education system and our nation as a whole. I heard the call, and I am refusing to accept the charges. I don't have the strength or the wherewithal to combat such a mighty enemy—an enemy without and an enemy within which further complicates the issue.

Joseph Campbell outlines the Hero's Journey in his seminal work, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Campbell, 1972) which describes the archetype of the Supernatural Aid or what is commonly known as the Sage Mentor:

For those who have not refused the call, the first encounter of the hero-journey is with a protective figure (often a little old crone or old man) who provides the adventurer with amulets against the dragon forces he is about to pass (p. 63)...What such a figure represents is the benign, protecting power of destiny. The fantasy is a reassurance—a promise that the peace of Paradise, which was known first within the mother womb, is

not to be lost; that it supports the present and stands in the future as well as in the past (is omega as well as alpha); that though omnipotence may seem to be endangered by the threshold passages and life awakenings, protective power is always and ever present within the sanctuary of the heart and even immanent within, or just behind, the unfamiliar features of the world. One has only to know and trust, and the ageless guardians will appear. Having responded to his own call, and continuing to follow courageously as the consequences unfold, the hero finds all the forces of the unconscious at his side (p. 66).

For me, Curriculum Studies has served as my Supernatural Aid, my Sage mentor. I now understand that the gnawing feeling inside my stomach when I sat in data meetings, or professional developments, or listened to the veteran teacher speak was not mere indigestion but my conscious alerting me that something was and is really wrong. “Education is suffering narration sickness,” (Foucault, 1977, p. 72). The “sickness” is within. The sickness comes from not sharing, understanding, or in some cases using our collective narrative voice.

During my progression over the last three years, I’ve come to understand that this feeling is not only justified but also shared amongst many curriculum theorists and fellow scholars. Something is truly wrong with the system of public education. Originally when I was asked, “What do you plan to do after you graduate?” My snappy comeback would be “I’m going to Disney World!” While a trip to the Magic Kingdom at the end of my dissertation work will surely be needed and warranted, I now realize that my true purpose after graduation is to be that of a teacher activist.

In that vein, I don’t want to wait until the end of my formal educational journey. I have questions that begged to be answered now. How have do Black Women educators survive and thrive within a public education system that is built on a white supremacist capitalist patriarchal

power structure? What sort of support systems do Black women educators develop? How can I develop a dissertation that is theoretical, authentic, and honors the legacy of the community of Black women educators with whom I work? So why would the system of public education stifle the voices of Black women educators, particularly when their involvement can be beneficial not only to black students but all students? Why do we allow ourselves to be silenced? What is our collective experience and can listening to this experience give insight into our mass departure and lack of relevance in public education?

These questions concerning the experiences of Black women educators are worthy of study and represent a unique phenomenon happening in public education. I am interested in this as a potential research topic because we as Black women educators hold a unique position within the system.

Don't Touch the Box on the Chair: Interlude

Empty stage with a single spotlight shining down on a simple wooden chair with the seat facing the audience. Resting on the chair is an elaborately-jeweled box. Pandora cautiously approaches the chair from stage left. During the monologue, Pandora paces in and out of the spotlight; she circles the chair, reaches for the box but never picks it up.

Pandora (monologue): I've got so many questions. Why can't I just take a quick peep inside? What secrets do you hide? (Pandora says this line kneeling eye level, staring into the box). Hello... anyone there? Anyone home? (Pandora reaches toward the box, but as if her hand is slapped, she withdraws her hand quickly). Epi says my curiosity knows no bounds and it will only get me into trouble. I say why are men the only ones to make the rules? The gift was for me. Surely my father wouldn't do anything to harm me. Ha! Why are you kidding yourself? Zeus

only has regards for Zeus. He did make me promise. Alright...Fine...you win, for now, but one day, one day soon I will know your secrets.

I Have to Sit Down the Aftermath of Opening Pandora's Box: Theoretical Framework

According to the myth, Pandora elects to open the forbidden box. Disease, destruction, and death enter the world, one other item is released from the box, hope. Studying theory for curriculum studies is very similar to opening Pandora's box. These theories reveal the ugliness of oppression. Oppression is a system that is completely rigged historically, economically, socially and politically. However, hope provides the foundation for resistance.

Take a few minutes to imagine a teacher standing before a classroom of wide-eyed students. When most people imagine this scene, the imagined teacher is White and female. There is nothing "traditional" about Black women in public education. Therefore, the theoretical framework that I employ will not be traditional. My research is dominated by womanism, Black feminist thought and engaged pedagogy. Critical Race Theory is used as a secondary theoretical framework. This patchwork quilt of frameworks woven together reflects the current situation encountered by Black women educators in the field of public education.

Telling the stories of a community of Black women educators requires theories that accurately describe the intimate and authentic relationships that have developed within this circle of women. Womanism is a theory that "connotes the uniqueness of feminism among women of color and stresses the mother/othermother who acts a mentor for other, usually younger, women" (King & Ferguson, 2011, p. 72). This theoretical framework explains some of the interrelationships between me and my group of sistah scholars. In many ways, we operate as mother and othermothers in each other's professional and personal lives.

Before we can begin to engage in telling our stories, we have to know who we are. Black feminist thought provides a theoretical framework for self-definition and exploration. Black feminism is distinctly and decidedly different from feminism. Black feminist scholar, Brittney Cooper eloquently states:

My understanding of what it means to be a feminist comes primarily out of thinking about how black women have had to combat these systems, whether in the workplace or in church or in their families, and to recognize that there are cultural differences. One classic example I talk about in the book is [how] black feminists and white feminists had really different responses when Michelle Obama decided she would become the “mom in chief.” White feminists read that as a rollback of the years of trying to challenge the idea that a woman’s role should be as a stay-at-home mother. Black feminists said black women made it possible for white women to go out in the workplace because we took on some of that domestic labor at home. So we consider it a feminist thing for Michelle Obama to be able to make that choice at that high of a level (Luberecki, 2018).

Cooper is not the only Black feminist who speaks to the distinct differences between Black and White feminist. Scholars bell hooks (*Ain't I a woman*, 1981), Patricia Hill Collins (*Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment*, 2000), Toni Cade Bambara (*Blues Ain't No Mockin Bird*, 1971), and Angela Davis (*Women Race and Class*, 1983) all address the intersectionality experiences by Black women. “Black feminists...[believe] that they experienced the triple whammy of discrimination based on sex, race, and class” (Schiller, 2000). This distinction is an integral part of this inquiry. The experiences and power of Black women educators are impacted by gender, race and class.

Later in the Washington Post interview, Brittany Cooper argues the importance of Black women embracing the emotion of anger. She boldly wears the moniker of ‘Angry Black woman,’ articulating that, “[e]loquent rage is a way to think about black women’s anger as a political response. Rather than thinking about anger as an emotion we should attempt to quell or suppress, that anger is the emotion that keeps us honest. Typically when you see black women’s anger being expressed in public, it is in response to systemic levels of injustice, and that anger is what I call clear and expressive” (Luberecki, 2018). Black feminist thought empowers Black women to embrace all aspects of themselves rather than conforming to “controlling images” (Hill Collins, 2000).

As a Black women educator, I am still fighting to become empowered, both personally and professionally: “As a critical social theory, Black feminist thought aims to empower African-American women within the context of social injustice sustained by intersecting oppressions. Since Black women cannot be fully empowered unless intersecting oppressions themselves are eliminated, Black feminist thought supports broad principles of social justice that transcend U.S. Black women’s particular needs” (Hill Collins, 2000, p. 22). This theory is used to tell the stories of Black women educators, like myself, who use principles of social justice to meet the needs of minority students, to engage with institutional power structures and to lift up other educators within the educational community.

Critical race theory (CRT) presents a case for using counterstories as a strategy for fighting oppression and injustice: “The critical race theory (CRT) movement is a collection of activists and scholars interested in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 3). It is imperative that these counterstories be used in juxtaposition to the dominant narratives of teachers who are inept and in need of

accountability. Pinar (2011) describes the obsession with creating measurable processes within American education as “a mad, mostly male, fantasy” (p. Loc 5146). This study utilizes the framework of CRT to support the voices of Black women educators in contributing to the current body of knowledge.

There are also reoccurring themes in CRT serves as a foundational knowledge for this study. CRT postulates that race is a “pervasive and permanent part of American society” (Matsuda, Lawrence III, Delgado, & Williams Crenshaw, 1993, p. 4). The American public educational system, just like other American institutions, are historically, economically, socially, and politically racist. It is a system that favors students who are white and male.

CRT objects “claims of objectivity, neutrality, colorblindness, and merit” (Matsuda, Lawrence III, Delgado, & Williams Crenshaw, 1993, p. 4). The theory insists on placing history in context. Culturally relevant curriculum and pedagogy are some of the tools that are being used by educators to illuminate and combat false claims of objectivity and neutrality in public education. According to Santayana (1954), “those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” Therefore, it is imperative that educators not only know the history of American public education but that we are able to place these dates and events in context. Educators must ask the difficult questions. How do the historical events of public education work together and against each other? What powers are working to control and manipulate the outcome of certain historical events inside of public education?

In addition, this theory favors “the experiential knowledge of people of color” (Matsuda, Lawrence III, Delgado, & Williams Crenshaw, 1993, p. 4). Like all teachers, there are some things that one can only learn through hands-on experience. Black women educators learn first-hand how racism and oppression are passed on like heirlooms to the next generation. The

imprints and impressions show up in the classroom through writing, discussions, and questions. CRT crosses many boundaries and is inherently interdisciplinary.

Despite the belief that racism is permanent, CRT theorists work to eliminate racial oppression (Matsuda, Lawrence III, Delgado, & Williams Crenshaw, 1993, p. 4). These tenets align perfectly with the work of Black women educators. Despite the statistics of “failing schools,” rigged educational systems riddled with racism, classism, and sexism, and an increased scrutiny through school reform; there is a contingent of Black women educators who are committed to the idea of public education. We see some redeemable qualities and are committed to fighting racial oppression. These stories are valuable and necessary. They are stories that need to be told.

The CRT movement was birthed from the law but has been embraced by scholars in many other fields including education: “Today, many in the field of education consider themselves critical race theorists who use CRT’s ideas to understand issues of school discipline and hierarchy, tracking, controversies over curriculum and history, and IQ and achievement testing” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 3). I count myself amongst this number of emerging scholars. I see how students under my charge are labeled, diagnosed, and misdiagnosed by colleagues who have no credentials and are muddled with their own internal biases. As an educator, you may hear teachers say things like, “watch out for that one, they are so aggressive” or “they are ADD!” These statements are often times attributed to Black students, male and female, by teachers with no degree or background in psychology. In spite of this reality, Teachers’ lounges are rife with amateur psychological assessments of students.

Ladson-Billings (Introduction, 2006) argues, “CRT scholars challenge the dominant stories of a racist U.S. society” (p. 1). CRT challenges us to reexamine history, acknowledge the

“permanence of racism” (p. 2) but to not resign ourselves to “despair and surrender” (p. 2) but to be empowered by hope and embrace “a greater resolve in the struggle” (pp. 3-4). This is particularly important for educators to be armed with tools to liberate ourselves, fight oppression, and challenge dominant discourses. CRT is considered radical by some scholars and is often met with resistance or rejection. Bell (1992) states that, “The presentation of truth in new forms provokes resistance, confounding those committed to accepted measures for determining the quality and validity of statements made and conclusions reached, and making it difficult for them to respond and adjudge what is acceptable” (p. 143). The CRT framework empowers me to embrace an innovative form of inquiry that challenges the dominant discourse surrounding educational research.

Finally, I use bell hooks’ concept of engaged pedagogy. In this pedagogy teachers and students collaborate together in order to learn. Teachers transform from a singular figure into three-dimensional people. Teachers actively embrace a “process of self-actualization that promotes their own well-being” in order for teachers to “empower students” (hooks b. , *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom*, 1994, p. 15). In the current climate of public education, many issues are addressed including teacher accountability, improving classroom instruction, and increasing student engagement but rarely the well-being of teachers themselves. Issues of bias and white fragility make it challenging for Black women educators to develop and grow as educators outside of the realm of performance and expected stereotypes. An old adage says, “happy life, happy wife.” Metaphorically, hooks extends this statement by acknowledging that a teacher who is well balanced in mind, body, and spirit are in a better position to empower students. I postulate that Black women educators who practice engaged pedagogy develop an

increased capacity to empower students. This teaching practice challenges the current status quo of the public educational system.

Using the legacy of mentorship celebrated in Womanist theory, the legitimization of counterstories in CRT, and the empowerment provided by Black feminist thought and engaged pedagogy; I seek to create a theoretical framework that addresses the Black women educator from the inside out. As educators, we encounter our environments from the perspectives of race, class, and gender. This multiple use theoretical framework allows for me as a researcher to account for all of these perspectives.

The Bench by the Road: Literature Review

There is no place you or I can go, to think about or not think about, to summon the presences of, or recollect the absences of slaves . . . There is no suitable memorial, or plaque, or wreath, or wall, or park, or skyscraper lobby. There's no 300-foot tower, there's no small bench by the road. There is not even a tree scored, an initial that I can visit or you can visit in Charleston or Savannah or New York or Providence or better still on the banks of the Mississippi. And because such a place doesn't exist . . . the book had to (Morrison, 1989).

Acclaimed author, Toni Morrison uttered these words during an acceptance speech for the Melcher award on October 12, 1988. The award was given for Morrison's novel *The Bluest Eye*. Morrison is passionate about creating honoring spaces for Black people. As an author, she recognizes a void in the body of literature, in our collective history. Morrison says that "the past offers the present and the present contorts the past" (Nicholls, 2015). She sees no true separation between time. Her writing reflects a keen interest in how the past continues to offer the present and how what we now know in the present manipulates our view of the past. Her work is

authentic and raw. As a writer, Morrison does not shy away from controversial issues. *The Bluest Eye*, her first novel is evidence of this fact. The protagonist, Pecola, is raped by her own father. Surprisingly, in the work, Pecola does not tell her own story. A set of sisters and the community as a whole give evidence, testimony, and shape Pecola's story in fragmented bits of history and orations. Morrison's writing flows in and out of a stream of consciousness through children and adults within this community. The reader follows the pieces and learns the seriousness and shamefulness of Pecola, a little Black girl who desires blue eyes.

On this educational journey, I have found several kindred spirits: Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Derrick Bell, and August Wilson. These kindred spirits guided my literature review and provide models for developing my dissertation. They represent a combination of Black voices both male and female. Their writing styles cover novels, essays, plays, and theory. In many ways, the writing process of these Black writers differs from that of others.

Alice Walker, the author of numerous books including *The Color Purple* and *The Temple of My Familiar* and *Everyday Use*, uses much of her work to fill a void, a need that has been created by the vacuum of sexism and racism. Alice Walker describes how this sense of purpose affects her work: "...I write not only what I want to read—understanding fully and indelibly that if I don't do it no one else is so vitally interested, or capable of doing it to my satisfaction—I write all the things I should have been able to read" (In search of our mother's gardens: Womanist prose, 2004, p. 13). It is with that spirit that I approach my work. I am writing and researching not just that what I am interested in but I am seeking to fill in the gaps for things that I should have been able to read about teaching as a Black women educator.

Derrick Bell, lawyer, professor, and scholar is credited with being one of the originators of Critical Race Theory. He enjoyed a career as a successful law professor. In fact, he was the first

tenured African American professor at Harvard Law School. He abdicated his position in protest of Harvard Law School not having any tenured Black women law professors. Bell proved his commitment to fighting racial inequality and injustice in and outside of the classroom. His work, *Faces at the Bottom of the Well* (1992) highlight his theoretical contributes of counterstories.

Bell says,

in this book, Geneva Crenshaw, the civil rights lawyer-protagonist of my earlier [work], returns in a series of stories that offer an allegorical perspective on old dreams, long-held fears, and current conditions. The provocative format of a story, a product of experience and imagination, allows me to take a new look at what, for want of a better phrase, I will call ‘racial themes.’ ...I realize that even with the challenge to rethinking these stories pose, many people will find it difficult to embrace my assumption that racism is a permanent component of American life” (Bell, *Faces at the bottom of the well: The premanence of racism*, 1992, p. 12)

This literary work successfully combines allegory, fables, and dialogues and includes analysis and critique. The standout story from this work is the science-fiction short story, *The Space Traders*. Aliens contact America and offer gold and a complete environmental makeover in exchange for all the African Americans who live in the United States. The request is met with questions and some considerable discussion. There is even a national referendum to decide the fate of the African Americans: “By 70 percent to 30 percent, American citizens voted to ratify the constitutional amendment that provided a legal basis for acceptance of the Space Traders’ offer” (p. 190). The denouement of this piece is not an artificially sweet end. Bell asserts when given a choice America will always choose its own self-interests over the lives of African

Americans, thus the permanence of race. He advocates that “it is a story less of success than of survival through an unremitting struggle that leaves no room for giving up” (p. 193).

The playwright August Wilson is yet another kindred spirit. He wrote about the Black experience in America with ten plays that spanned over ten decades. When asked if, “do you have a total stage picture from the audience’s perspective as you write or do you write from the viewpoint of each character, dropping into each voice as you write?” August Wilson responded by stating, “the characters actually do what they want to do. It’s their story... What you confront is part of yourself, your willingness to deal with the small imperial truths you have accumulated over your life. That’s your baggage. And it can be terrifying. You either wrestling with the devil or Jacob’s angel, the whole purpose being that when you walk through that landscape you arrive at something larger than you had when you started. And this larger something should be illuminating and as close to the truth as you can understand. ...So I write from the center, the core, of myself. You’ve got that landscape and you’ve got to enter it, walk down that road and whatever happens, happens. And that’s the best you’re capable of coming to. The characters do it, and in them, I confront myself” (Bryer & Hartig, 2006, pp. 10-11). This practice of writing and not separating oneself from the writing is a practice that I infuse in my own research. Pure objectivity is a myth. All research is subjective in some way even if it is in the study design itself. Truth can be found in subjectivity. And, August Wilson’s writing is evidence of this. His work is reflective of real people in speech and in actions.

Fences, an August Wilson play, was recently released as a major motion picture. After watching the movie, my mother asked, “Is Troy [the protagonist] crazy?” I laughed. My mother continued, “No, Dawn I’m serious I think he was mentally ill.” This sparked a candid discussion of our family tree. I began listing several Black men in our family who could have easily served

as the character model for Troy. Troy is a 53-year old husband and father, a sanitation worker who feels that he missed his true calling as a Major League baseball player due to a small stint in prison for an accidental murder. Despite having a loving wife, a decent home, and a son destined to earn a football scholarship Troy serves as a tragic hero. He wreaks havoc in his own life and those around him.

Wilson's approach to playwriting is to begin with character and followed by plot come as a secondary point. In an interview with Charlie Rose, journalist and talk show host (1996), Wilson credits "spiritual resources" for inspiring his writing. When writing his work *Seven Guitars* he describes how the character of Vera appears to him:

04:44

[August Wilson's Head](#): Yes. Well, I wanted to-- in the '40s, what I wanted to do is I wanted to show the blues, and I wanted to show a look behind the blues, the interior psyche of the blues man and how the songs actually came into being, and I was going to-- trying to show the relationship of the blues man to white society in a relationship to white society. In white society, they were often viewed as rapists and drunkards, et cetera, and in black society, they were viewed as the carriers of the tradition. And I began to work the play with these seven guys, seven blues men--

05:22

[Charlie Rose](#): Yeah. It started off with seven in your head?

05:25

[August Wilson](#): It started off with seven, and they were sort of in a lineup, and someone named Floyd Barton had been murdered, and they were questioning these guys. And they thought by virtue of their answers, you could sort of piece together Floyd Barton's

life. When I was working on this-- this happened in my imagination, of course, this woman walked on stage or walked in here, and--

05:45

[Charlie Rose](#): In your head.

05:47

[August Wilson](#): In my head, yeah.

05:48

[Charlie Rose](#): This was Vera.

05:50

[August Wilson](#): Yes. And one of the guys came over and said, "You know, what is she doing here? This is supposed to be an all-man play. Tell her to get out of here." And I said, "Let me handle this." And I went over, and I asked her what she was doing, and she said she wanted her own space. And I said, "You want your own scene." And she said, "No. I want my own space." And I wasn't quite sure what she meant by that, and I thought the best way to deal with the situation was to close my notebook and walk away from it. And I came back a couple months later and opened up my tablet and said, "Okay, now you have your own space." But what I was trying to do as I was trying to write a play that was set in the '40s that were representative in some ways of black America in the '40s without any women in it, and that simply wasn't going to be. So I let her in the play, and when she came in, two other women came in behind her.

06:34

[Charlie Rose](#): Now how-- why would you try to do that? Why would you try to write a play about the black experience even connected to blues men without including women?

06:40

[August Wilson](#): Because I was foolish. I mean, I wasn't really, I wasn't really thinking, you know. But-- (August Wilson-Charlie Rose, 1996)

Wilson describes an interesting process to creating his plays. The characters come first and through his process he allows the characters to speak to him. Ironically enough, they will intrude on other characters, like Vera did, when their voices are not being heard. In the passage above, Wilson began writing a play about men; however, a woman appeared and demanded her “own space.”

In developing my own writing, I want to emulate some of the best attributes of these writers. I want to mimic the authentic orality of Walker and Morrison. I want to embrace the controversial topics of works like *The Color Purple* and *The Bluest Eye*. Both authors incorporate othermothers in their work who serve as mentors and give advice to characters within the story. Derrick Bell encompasses a thoughtful and strategic illumination of the theory that is approachable and engaging, even for those outside of the field of law. August Wilson uses a process that focuses on characters who allow his plays, though specific to a place and time, to have a universal appeal. All of these writers offer narratives that speak to the experiences of Black people in a way that appeals to those inside and outside of the community.

The Work Bench Engaging in Subversive, Alternate and Decolonizing Research:

Methodology

The Epic of Gilgamesh is the oldest written story in known history. It was originally translated from cuneiform. The story that we read today is incomplete because the original was made on clay tablets and parts of the story are completely lost. In simplistic terms, the basic plot follows the journey of an arrogant king, Gilgamesh who is half God and half man. He is

haunted by the death of his best friend Enkidu and becomes obsessed with seeking out the secret to eternal life. The story is over 4,000 years old but is still seen as a relevant text, not simply because of its age, but for the universal themes the text provides. What is life? What is death? Why are we here? Gilgamesh is not the only story to have this kind of impact. There are many stories and many still that have not been written down.

This dissertation transgresses traditional dissertation formats (He, 2000; He, Ross, & Seay, 2015). Stories are important and creating fiction is a viable and valid form of research. In this study, I explore the metanarrative (stock story) of how schooling mutes and anesthetizes the counterstories of Black women educators (myself included). This writing is informed by government legislation, public meeting notes, newspaper articles, textbooks, and other artifacts. I also use reflective notes, daily conversations, journal entries, and other artifacts to fictionalize the counterstories of the Black women educators in public schools: “All authors link their inquiries to their personal stories as mothers, grandmothers, teachers, administrators, and community activists. They are deeply invested in their participants and the issues; some could say to portray their findings; some could consider this work to be ‘soft’ and ‘unscientific.’ They take an activist stance; this could be constructed as ‘personal’ and ‘non-academic’” (He & Phillion, 2008, p. 271). The final work in this research is written as a play. As a part of my research process, I include a critical analysis of the work in the literary style of Derrick Bell and Toni Morrison to give insight and theoretical connections to larger themes.

Arts-based research is not a new methodology. Arts-based research has a number of fundamental elements, several of which were used in this study. The expression is not standardized: “Humans have invented a variety of forms of representation to describe and understand the world in as many ways as it can be represented” (Barone & Eisner, 2011, p. 164).

Following this reasoning, it is only natural that research should and can be conducted in a multitude of ways.

Within this diversity, there are set norms for every genre: “Each form of representation imposes its own constraints and provides its own affordances” (Barone & Eisner, 2011, p. 166). In this case, plays are written and then performed before a live audience. It includes performances that unlike novels and short stories as an element of oratory and performance. Both of these elements are essential when relaying the stories of Black women educators. It is not simply a matter of writing down what someone says but giving the audience a glimpse into the pacing, pauses, and inflection in the writing adds a necessary layer to increase engagement and understanding.

This study does not focus on posing a research question and providing a specific answer. Issues of systematic racism and patriarchy are too historically, economically, politically, and socially entrenched to resolved with one dissertation: “The purpose of arts-based research is to raise significant questions and engender conversations rather than to proffer final meanings” (Barone & Eisner, 2011, p. 166). Following this dictate, the purpose of this research is to raise significant questions and encourage conversations about issues that would be ignored or disregarded when using a more traditional format.

In traditional research, composite characters have been used in case studies, the dialogue in ethnographies, formal interviews and plot is an element of case studies.

Novels, for example, are not random samples of someone’s life but generalize by providing an image, a picture, a narrative that stands for situations like it. The character in the novel itself is a surrogate or proxy for characters like him or her and thus provide guidance to the reader that enables the reader to find the novel’s hero in situations outside

of the novel. In fact, Aristotle pointed out that fiction is truer than history since history deals with events that pass while fiction addresses situations that apply to what is enduring (Barone & Eisner, 2011, p. 170).

The same could be said for protagonists and other characters inside of a play. One strategy I would take from this an incorporate in my own methodology is seeking out topics and issues that are “enduring.” I write about individual situations and circumstances with the intention that they resonate with others and not just Black women educators.

Fiction is powerful because it has the ability to speak a truth. Denzin (1997) defines fiction as “a narrative that deals with real and imagined facts and how they might be experienced, made up stories fashioned out of real and imagined happenings, and that tells a truth” (p. 160). In this manner, fiction is similar to some other forms of qualitative research like ethnographies and case studies that in order to protect the identities of the participants may create pseudonyms omit information or consolidate facts and information.

As a researcher, I address issues that challenge White privilege and White fragility: “The fictional format offers a chance to observe these complex issues in all their nuances and to invite diverse readers into the text in a pleasurable way. Fiction can draw us in, giving us access to new yet familiar worlds in which we might meet strangers or through which we might reflect on our own lives. Through the pleasure, and at times the pain, of confronting emotionally charged truths, the process of reading fiction can be transformative, as the process of writing it. Fiction is engaged” (Leavy, 2013, p. Location 221). Using fiction as a research practice allows me to draw a diverse audience and invite them to engage with the research. The objective is to invite the audience into the intimate and private spaces of Black women educators. This process gives an

opportunity for Black women educators to share our stories and discuss our differences and similarities.

As a research practice, writing fiction-based research differs from traditional research methodology: “Fiction-based research practice requires several things from the researcher: creativity, attention to craft and aesthetics, reflexivity, and openness (or adaptability)” (Leavy, 2013, p. Location 851).

Just like scholars, fiction writers engage in research in order to achieve verisimilitude. Leavy (2013) defines verisimilitude as “the creation of a realistic authentic, and life-like portrayal, and it is the goal of both fiction and established social science practices like ethnography. Fiction writers and qualitative researchers both seek to build believable representations of existing or possible worlds and to truthfully or authentically portray human experience” (p. Location 253). In addition to creating fiction that includes verisimilitude fiction-based research follows a set of criteria used for evaluation and analysis. Tom Barone (2011) outline some criteria for assessing arts-based research: incisiveness, concision, coherence, generativity, social significance, evocation, and illumination.

“By incisiveness, we mean that the research gets to the heart of a social issue. It goes to its core. It does not get swamped with details that have no inherent significance and do little to increase the cogency of the research itself. Incisiveness means that the work of research is penetrating; it is sharp in the manner in which it cuts to the core of an issue” (Barone & Eisner, 2011, p. 148). This criterion allows this study to focus on a specific group of Black women educators. As a researcher, the objective is to create a play based on research that speaks directly to the experiences of this select group.

Concision and coherence are used to enable “members of an audience to see social phenomena from a fresh perspective” (Barone & Eisner, 2011, p. 149). In creating this work, I adhered to the traditional dramatic structure. The plot included an exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and dénouement. This structure allowed for “components in a complex form [to] hang together” (Barone & Eisner, 2011, p. 151).

In creating this work, I hope to spark generativity. Generativity or “the ways in which the work enables one to see or act upon phenomena even though it represents a kind of case study with an n of only 1. Generativity is not to be confused with the traditional research notion of generalizability, although the two notions are similar” (Barone & Eisner, 2011, pp. 151-152). Will viewers of this work go protesting in the streets and spark an entire movement of change? That would be ideal but, more realistically I intend to first take responsibility for my own voice and claim my own power and agency as a teacher. The objective is by claiming and modeling my own voice that others will follow suit. It is the classic teaching model of “I do, we do, and you do.”

Social significance “pertains to the character, meaning, and import of the central ideas of the work...What one is looking for is something that matters, ideas that count, important questions to be raised” (Barone & Eisner, 2011, p. 153). Concepts like racism, feminism, and classicism are gaining prominence in the popular American culture. These concepts are becoming more mainstream thanks to social media and music.

The final two criteria are about understanding. These elements are important because “through evocation and illumination that one begins to feel the meanings that the work is to help its readers grasp” (Barone & Eisner, 2011, p. 153). To embrace an alternative form of research is intriguing and reinvigorating as a researcher. However, if it is not understood or fails to add to

the body of knowledge by shedding a different perspective on an issue than the research has failed. Fiction-based research is a legitimate methodology that offers a unique perspective on academic research.

The Naming of Names

The play is set at the fictional Taylor Beasley High School. Named after Mother Mathilda Taylor Beasley. “Mathilda Taylor dared to teach at a time when doing so could have cost her dearly. Among Mathilda Taylor’s many acts of charity, she will be remembered for the small, secret school she ran from approximately 1850 to 1860. She remembered the ‘kindnesses that had been done in her childhood by Negroes’ and taught slave and freed black children in her home in Savannah at a time when it was forbidden to do so” (Goergia Historical Society). The location of the school is never explicitly stated however, this research is built from the experiences of Black women educators in Georgia. The selection of the fictitious name is a representational nod to the location of this inquiry and the history of subversive acts of rebellion that have empowered Black women educators for decades.

Under old Jewish customs it wasn’t unusual to have wait almost two years before naming a baby. Names were thought to embody the personality and in some ways the destiny of children.

The naming of a Jewish child is a most profound spiritual moment. The Sages say that naming a baby is a statement of her character, her specialness, and her path in life. For at the beginning of life we give a name, and at the end of life a "good name" is all we take with us (Simmons, 2002).

While the characters outlined within my play are not my children, the intimacy that I shared with them feels like that of a familial bond. Due to the sensitive nature of the subject matter in this

inquiry, I have created composite characters to represent my participants and my own experiences. The selection of names for characters was an arduous and detailed process.

There is a historical nature in the characters of Madison Kennedy and Kennedy Madison. This concept is explored more fully in the theorizing section entitled, “Overrepresented and Underserved: Serving time as a Black Women Special Education Teacher.” However, the fact that there are two special education teachers that serve as foil characters is an important archetypal element. As noted in the character description, for one another is symbolic of the “interchangeable” characteristic bestowed upon special education teachers. They are viewed as pawns to be used to push, move and punish Black bodies.

The principal, Earl Grey, carries a double meaning. Traditionally, Earl Grey is known as a popular tea brand. It was named after Prime Minister Charles Grey, who coincidentally was responsible for overseeing the abolition of slavery in the British Empire (Legacy Staff, 2017). In the South, asking someone to “spill the tea” is a euphemism for sharing news and gossip. The arrival of Mr. Grey is big news at Taylor Beasley high school. Grey represents the infiltration and coup of Taylor Beasley high school. Much in the same manner as the sudden and violent takeover of corporations and lobbyists into public education.

Seat 32C: Significance of the Research

The stage opens with a spotlight on a single character sitting in an airline seat. The passenger is a heavy-set middle-aged black woman who appears to the audience uncomfortable in the airplane seat taking depth breaths and visibly sweaty.

Passenger: I hate this. My palms are sweating and I can’t control my heart rate. I knew that I should have stopped by the airport bar before I boarded the plane. Damn turbulence making it

the air too choppy for drink service. God, why? Ok breathe. Just breathe. (The passenger opens her eyes. As an airline mask falls directly in front of her face.)

Flight Attendant (voice-over): Ladies and gentlemen, the captain has notified us that we are losing cabin pressure. Your oxygen masks have been released from the ceiling above you. Please make sure that you securely place the mask on yourself before helping others around you.

The passenger hurriedly places the mask over her face and begins breathing deeply. After a few deep breaths, the spotlight grows and the passenger begins looking to her left and right. She notices that the people sitting on her left and right are not people at all but rather mannequins. She removes her mask and begins pressing buttons on her seat and yelling

Passenger: Hey, You aren't real! None of you are real! (looking up to the sky) What is this?

I agree with Paulo Freire (1970), there is a sickness in the narration; only when we hear and listen to the narrative voices within, around, and outside of the system will we be ready for the antidote, figuratively and literally. While this research does not seek to offer a cure for a complete recovery, it serves as a preliminary diagnostic of the disease. This work is significant because it disrupts the status quo in design and approach. Personally, this work is significant to me as a researcher by allowing me an academic space to communicate the experiences of myself and other Black women educators. Like Alice Walker, I wrote what I wished I could have read before beginning as a public school educator seven years ago. In this process of metaphorically learning to breathe, I have begun to critically question the learning environment itself in an effort to separate the real from the fake.

CHAPTER TWO EXAMINING THE SEATS OF POWER FOR BLACK WOMEN

EDUCATORS THROUGH PLAYWRITING: PART I

The Procession of the Chairs: Prelude

Playwrights write for a variety of reasons and to meet various personal and public expectations. Engaging in playwriting as a form of research I am committed to the following precepts established by August Wilson for playwrights: honesty, purpose, and black aesthetics. According to Wilson,

...I've always worked hard to reward that faith that was placed in me. And, when you're working to do that, I think you can do better work. It's hard sitting out there writing plays, not knowing whether they're ever going to be produced. But, on the other hand, when you know your play will be produced, you have a greater responsibility, because someone will get up on stage and say what you've written; so you've got to be sure you are communicating what you want to say. You have a responsibility to be honest (Bryer & Hartig, 2006, p. 92).

For Wilson, playwrights have a core responsibility to engage in honest work to be truth-tellers, to act as a mirror to the American psyche, to Coming from a historical context where words, ideas, and thoughts have to be hidden from human consumption, it is refreshing to engage in a process that is not hidden but seeks to be uncovered and open.

...it is important that we understand who we are and what our history has been, and what our relationship to society is so that we can find ways to alter that relationship and, more importantly, to alter the shared expectations of ourselves as a people. The suffering is only part of black history. What I want to do is place the culture of black America on stage, to demonstrate that it has the ability to offer sustenance, so that when you leave your parents' house, you are not

in the world alone. You have something that is yours, you have a ground to stand on, and you have a viewpoint, and you have a way of proceeding in the world that has been developed by your ancestors (Bryer & Hartig, 2006, p. 105).

There is a deficit in the conversation in public education. The following is my substantial offering of purposeful honesty and engagement in black aesthetics. These elements are necessary and needed to move the “complicated conversation” of curriculum and education forward. The purpose of this writing is to create an honest space that represents the experiences of some Black women educators. It is to allow the audience a glimpse into the kitchen table talk of Black women educators.

Characters

JUANITA APPLGATE, a 30-year art teacher

DR. ABENI WILLIAMS, a *ten-year educator, current Academic Coach former English teacher*

MADISON KENNEDY, a *petite seventh-year special education teacher*

KENNEDY MADISON, a *plus size seventh-year special education teacher*

IFETA UMAR, an *eager first-year Social Studies teacher*

KENYA SAMUELS, a *third year Science teacher*

PRINCIPAL EARL GREY, *the new principal at Taylor Beasley High School*

FLIGHT ATTENDANT

MS. STONE, *school secretary*

CHARLES YOUNGER, AKA LIL YOUNGIN’

THE CONSCIOUS COLLECTIVE (*each chair represents a conscious soul*)

ROCKING CHAIR

THRONE

THE BENCH (two voices that speak in unison)

CHAIR IN A BOX

AIRLINE SEAT

ELECTRIC CHAIR

Setting

Dark stage. "Pomp and Circumstance" is playing loudly at first and slowly is faded out as each character brings out her chair and has a sit or begins an interaction with the object. The chairs should be placed in this order from stage right to stage left: rocking chair, throne, the bench, office swivel chair, new chair still in the box, and the airline seat. A spotlight appears on a Rocking Chair occupied by Juanita Applegate. She is an African American woman in her early to late fifties with a huge curly wig, reminiscent of Diana Ross. She wears a Kenta cloth dress. She sits regally in the rocking chair and begins rocking back and forth while hand stitching an Afrocentric quilt. A voiceover is heard speaking the part of the Rocking Chair.

Rocking Chair: My roots run deep. Deeper than most 'round here. I've seen many come and go.

But through all the changes, I'm still here. I was here the first year this place was built. I know there are others with less wear and tear. There are others that can spin in circles and provide all sorts of supports. But my back is strong, I'm seasoned. The wind comes and I move with steady determination back and forth. Don't be fooled by my ebb and flow, just like a tree planted by the water, my roots run deep. I shall not be moved.

The spotlight moves to the Throne. The music becomes louder for a few beats and then fades lower as background noise. It is an elegant gold plated chair with ornate decorations. The back is lined with a plush purple cushion as well as the seat. Dr. Abeni Williams is immaculately dressed without a hair out of place. As the Throne speaks she is filing her nails, styling her hair

with a handheld gold mirror and periodically removing imaginary pieces of lint from her clothing.

Throne: Lush (*the word should be stated slowly with a dramatic pause*) is the word you can use to

describe me. Only the best. And why not? I deserve it! And you should want better for yourself too. This is genuine. The real deal. The original article. The realest of the real. Smoother than the underside of the pillow. Finer than wine. No, wait finer than pink Moscato tickling your taste buds. I know my value and my worth. See when you stay ready you don't have to get ready. I work smarter not harder.

The spotlight expands to include both the throne and now the bench. Again the music increases in volume during the transition and shifts lower as the characters begin to speak. The bench is wooden and large enough to support two people. Madison Kennedy and Kennedy Madison both occupy the bench. Their outfits mirror one another. If one is wearing a red top with a black skirt than the other has a black top with a red skirt. This motif occurs for the entirety of the play. Their hair is styled in the same manner and they often mimic or repeat each other's movements.

The Bench: Are you just about finished? (*two voices speak in unison*)

Throne: Excuse me?

The Bench: Are you just about finished? With all your grandstanding it's too difficult to tell.

Throne: Why I never...

The Bench: And by the sound of it, you never will.

(The spotlight immediately fades out on the Throne and Dr. Abeni Williams and moves to the bench. Both Kennedy Madison and Madison Kennedy are holding clipboards and are furiously

writing down things on their lists. At a certain point they exchange clipboards and continue with their annotations.)

The Bench: You are precisely what is wrong. Keep your head down. Do what you're told.

Don't make waves. Keep the main thing the main thing. Stay on the bus. "Disability is a natural part of the human experience and in no way diminishes the right of individuals to participate in or contribute to society. Improving educational results for children with disabilities is an essential element of our national policy of ensuring equality of opportunity, full participation, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency for individuals with disabilities" (United States Congress, 2002). Everyone deserves the right to learn and the system is designed to ensure this process takes place. Trust the system.

The "New Chair" Box (missing pieces and all sort of items...the chair is slowly formed throughout the play but ends of missing pieces, pieces get lost and ends of being an ill-formed chair looking nothing like what it looks like on the box. Seek out an IKEA model type chair for this endeavor.)

Office Chair: Hello? Can anyone hear me? Is anybody out there? *(Everyone on stage immediately stops actions and stares at the new chair box and Ifeta Umar. After a moment the characters go back to their silent interactions with their respective chair on stage. Umar begins to remove the tape from the box in an attempt to open it. While she is at her task, the Office Chair speaks.)* Surely someone is here. I'm not alone...am I? I'm so excited to get started and serve. I have all of the latest strategies and techniques. I want to be the absolute best...the TOTY: Throne of the year. *(Dr. Abeni Williams stops her actions, saunters over to the Office Chair and gives it disapproving stare.)* I know it is my first year but I can dream, can't I. Now if I can just get started. *(Dr. Abeni*

Williams shakes her head and saunters back taking her place on the throne. Ifeta Umar is visibly struggling with getting the box open. She appears to succeed only to find that the larger box contained a medium box inside.) Ohhh Nooo! If first, you don't succeed try, try again. (Ifeta is visibly frustrated and sits beside the box.)

The spotlight shifts to Kenya Samuels sitting in an airline seat. The passenger is a slender middle-aged black woman who appears to the audience uncomfortable in the airplane seat. Though she doesn't speak she is taking depth breaths and is visibly sweaty. The music begins to swell even louder than before.

Airline Seat: Stop that incessant racket! (This line is shouted and the music ceases immediately all of the other characters on the stage stop their actions and look at Kenya Samuels who is visually distressed). I hate this! My palms are sweating and I can't control my heart rate. I knew that I should have stopped by the airport bar before I boarded the plane. Damn turbulence making it the air too choppy for drink service. God, why? Ok breath. Just breath. (Kenya Samuels, who has been seating in the airline seat with her eyes closed, opens her eyes, as an airline mask falls directly in front of her face.)

Flight Attendant (voice-over): Ladies and gentlemen, the captain has notified us that we are losing cabin pressure. Your oxygen masks have been released from the ceiling above you. Please make sure that you securely place the mask on yourself before helping others around you.

Kenya Samuels hurriedly places the mask over her face and begins breathing deeply. After a few deep breaths, the spotlight grows and the passenger begins looking to her left and right. She notices that the people sitting on her left and right are not people at all but rather mannequins. She removes her mask and begins pressing buttons on her seat and yelling

Kenya Samuels: Hey, You aren't real! None of you are real! (*looking up to the sky*) What is this?

The lights go down to black. End scene.

Theorizing Prelude: Interlude

Every culture has rites of passages, rituals, ceremonies that represent the transition of moving from one stage to the next. The opening scene of the prelude contains allusions to the institutional rites of passages for all schools: graduation. The theme of *Pomp and Circumstance* has been played as a graduation theme since the early 1900s.

Sir Edward Elgar composed *Pomp and Circumstance* — the title comes from a line in Shakespeare's *Othello* ("Pride, pomp, and circumstance of glorious war!") — in 1901.

But it wasn't originally intended for graduations. Elgar's march was used for the coronation of King Edward VII. It first became associated with graduations in 1905, when it was played when Elgar received an honorary doctorate from Yale University in 1905, but it was played as a recessional, not as a processional, at the ceremony (Hoffman, 2003).

The tradition of playing this particular song soon evolved and can now be heard in graduations across the nation. The use of this song in the opening alludes to the ever presence of European influences, heritage, and history inside of public education.

Just as students have rights of passage, rituals, and ceremonies, so do educators. This theme will be reoccurring throughout the work. The institution of public education is a silent character within the play, representing a structure of power and oppression. Despite the transgressive and transformative work of the Black women educators who are the focus of this work there is still an ever-present machine, entity, institution if you will that is moving and like clockwork that follows rituals, routines, and movements.

The procession of the chairs encompasses literal and figurative meanings. The ceremonial procession represents the institution of public education and with it, each individual educator brings her own identity, experiences into the system. They are simultaneously oppressed and a part of the system.

Teaching While Black: Black Mothering in the Classroom

Being a 38-year-old woman, I have inevitably been asked the same question within the first 15 to 20 minutes of casual conversation. “Do you have any children?” For the last five years, my response has been the same: “yes.” This answer beckons the follow-up to the initial inquiry: “How many?” To this, I reply, “Oh about one hundred and fifteen this year.” After the questioner, puts his or her face back together, I explain that I am a teacher. The questioner will nod, knowingly, and the conversation will continue. I know that I am not alone in this belief that after a while students start to feel like your own children. “The notion of teaching as a natural extension of women’s traditional roles in the home dates back to the early nineteenth century when, in the face of increasing opportunities for men in industry and business, women were called upon to replace men in the schoolyard” (James, 2010). I would argue, just as many Black feminists and womanist scholars have, that for Black women the role of mothering others began with slavery. Many African American slaves had, their own children stripped from them while they were forced into roles of being surrogate mothers and teachers for White people’s children. While this position of mothering transformed over time it was still viewed as more of a forced default position rather than a voluntary pursuit.

In education, these women [Black women] are such a strong force because of the history attached to this position. With education being one of the few professions in which African Americans could work, the matriarch was a substantial figure in African-

American culture and education. The matriarchs reacted to the social, emotional, educational, and sometimes even financial needs of their students. The matriarchs drew upon matriarchal tradition to help their students get prepared for classes and life in school. (Jeffries, 1995)

Black women in education have historically filled a void of nurturing emotional and social instability. According to hooks' "for black folks' teaching—educating—was fundamentally political because it was rooted in antiracist struggle," (Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom, 1994). I believe the same could be said for Black teachers in modern times, whether they enter the field knowing this truth or become tried by fire and learn through experience.

This surrogate mothering role has become a responsibility and in many cases an expectation of the pedagogy of Black women.

Black women's experiences, for example, are influenced by their multiple social roles, which are acted out simultaneously. They do not have the privilege of only being women, or of only being Black Americans in particular situations. Instead, their roles are melded.

Usually, they must wear both hats at the same time, (Etter-Lewis, 1991)

Just like every other area of our lives, Black women educators cannot separate being fully Black and fully woman. This dichotomy is embedded in our pedagogy and impacts our teacher effectiveness and perceptions of others.

The role of teachers as mothers is supported legally to a certain degree:

In loco parentis literally means "in the place of a parent." The doctrine, according to its generally accepted common law meaning, refers to a person who has put himself in the situation of a lawful parent by assuming the obligations incident to the parental relation

without going through the formalities necessary to legal adoption. It embodies the two ideas of assuming the parental status and discharging the parental duties (Rumel, 2013).

As a Black woman educator, taking on the additional role of *in loco parentis* in the classroom presents a multi-faceted dynamic. This form of mothering also extends outside of the classroom to colleagues. A dichotomy exists between this “faux” mothering relationship and the students this is extended to. Black women educators are often loyal and have a false allegiance to loyalty or false allegiance to students, colleagues, administrators, and an institution that in many instances does not or will not reciprocate.

Even within the confines of an oppressive White supremacist patriarchal capitalist society, motherhood brings power—the power of immortality, the power to change the world beyond one’s own generation. Thus, the oppressed state of motherhood, and Black motherhood, in particular is tempered by the power of womanist mothering as a revolutionary praxis. When faced with oppression, subjugated groups have two choices—to submit and become victims or to resist and stand as rebels (Abdullah, 2012, p. 58)

Black women educators tend to garner a different level of respect amongst colleagues and students. “Rather than inhibiting rebellion, motherhood has strengthened our resolve, for our resistance was not for our survival alone, but for the legacy that our children would inherit” (Abdullah, 2012).

The character of Juanita Applegate embodies this Black mothering. She proudly proclaims, “My roots run deep.” She acknowledges that her presence is predicated upon all of the Black women educators, formal and informal, who have taught before her. Her literal seat is a metaphor for ancestry and resilience. The chair in which she sits in a rocking chair which embodies a sense of history and presence. It is reminiscent of the old Negro spiritual, “Just like a

tree planted by the waters/I shall not be moved.” Her power is demonstrated in not only in what she says but in how other characters respond to her. In Act One, the other characters fall at attention in her presence. Though she has no legal authority outside of *in loco parentis*, she commands a classroom, influences others and incites rebellion. “Womanist mothering is forward-thinking, proactive, and visionary. It goes beyond the moment of resistance struggles are won, and is rooted in the imaginings of alternative realities” (Abdullah, 2012). Womanist mothering is representative of the instructional strategies used by Black women educators to not only wield their own power but to cultivate and guide this power within others.

Self-Identification in Public Spaces

But stay woke

Niggas creepin'

They gon' find you

Gon' catch you sleepin' (oh)

Now stay woke

Niggas creepin'

Now don't you close your eyes

(Goransson & McKinley Glover, 2016)

Living in the United States itself, as a Black woman, is primarily fueled by survival. Survival at home, survival at work, and survival within our communities. That survival is under constant attack in both public and private spaces. “When Black women’s very survival is at stake, creating independent self-definitions becomes essential to that survival” (Hill Collins, 2000, p. 112). Black women educators, in addition, to defining themselves in their private spaces also carry the responsibility of defining themselves in public spaces amongst students,

colleagues, administration and the community at large. The women in this work, represent black women educators who have defined their roles inside of the educational community. Whether it is as othermothers, activists or transgressors.

It is also vitally important that as Black women educators define themselves, that they carve out safe-spaces to explore and discover their identities.

As the enslaved women traversed from the Black female-dominated site of the kitchen into the White-dominated space of the dining room, they carried with them their self-constructions of worth in comparative to the dominant culture and their culture.

Then and now, while domination and exploitation of Black women's bodies and employment are material limits, Black women creatively use alternative ways of existing in the margins of society and that allows them to center their cultural ways of knowing as the standpoint to render visible their own acceptable notions of black womanhood. Safe spaces constitute sites for re-imagining, emancipation, and protection (Gaines, 2016).

Despite opposition and oppression, Black women educators thrive on self-definition and continue to find safe-spaces to explore and discover. In the context of this play, the voices of Black women educators are the key focus. This is an intentional method used to create a safe space to help understand the complexities of Black women educators relationships, challenges, communication styles and sisterhood as a whole. In the play, each Black women educator is represented by a chair that embodies a certain consciousness. The Rocking chair represents the long-standing history of Black women educators. The Throne represents the ideals of our aspirations and hopes which are grandiose. The Bench represents our ties to legalese, the fact that we work inside of the institution of public education, inevitably creates restrictions, limitations, and challenges. The Chair in a Box represents our undying capacity for hope. Hope

in our present and hope for our future. And finally, the Airline Seat represents our awareness of what hooks refers to as the “white supremacist capitalist patriarchy (Jhally, 2002).” The mixture of “isms” that intersect and dominate Black women educators access to resources, perception by others, and in many ways has infiltrated our own self-definition. While most Black women educators have a portion of each of the chairs inside of them, together they represent the collective consciousness and the seats of power that Black women educators wield.

Act 1, Scene 1: Pre-Planning

The scene opens with all of the chairs lined up across the center stage in this order from stage left to stage right: the rocking chair, the throne, the airline seat, the bench and the new chair.

Each actress is standing beside her respective chair and interacting with the other character.

Juanita Applegate is visibly missing from the opening of this scene. Her chair is on stage but she is not.

Dr. Abeni Williams: She will not be pleased.

Kennedy Madison: You worry too much about the wrong things. She will be just fine.

Madison Kennedy: That’s right just fine. Don’t worry. *(Both Kennedy Madison and Madison*

Kennedy giggles conspiratorially. Ifeta Umar shakes her head as she begins to push the box marked NEW CHAIR from stage right to stage left. Umar places her box in front of the rocking chair.)

Dr. Abeni Williams: Kenya, you tell them. They won’t listen to me. I’m trying to warn you that she will not be happy.

Kenya Samuels: Williams is right, she will not be pleased but, then again she never is so why would this be any different?

Ifeta Umar: Well I’m going to do it anyway and she will just have to be displeased. We can’t

live our lives based on her feelings. *(She crosses her arms with a determined look.)*

Juanita Applegate: What is this? *(All of the ladies jump in reaction to the booming voice of Juanita Applegate. The ladies almost as a point of a routine jump to attention at the voice that calls from offstage before making a grandiose entrance from stage left. The other ladies are standing at attention in a single file lined and facing the audience directly.)*

Ifeta Umar: I thought we could try something different. *(answering nervously but relaxing her stance...the others remain at attention).*

Juanita Applegate: Who told you that we need to try anything new? *(Juanita Applegate begins to observe the women like a commanding officer. She gives a look to Kennedy Madison and Madison Kennedy. Without speaking they look at each other and nervously switch places while resuming theirs at attention stance.)*

Ifeta Umar: No one had to tell me. I just felt we could all benefit from a little change.

Juanita Applegate: And that's what's wrong with your generation. Always trying to change things that nobody even asked you to change. How do you think you got here? Huh?

Ifeta Umar: Well Ma'am at your age if you don't know, I don't think I should be the one to tell you.

Juanita Applegate: Don't get fresh. I taught you and your mama. And if you listen probably could teach you a thing or two bout procreating. It is the old ways, the rituals, the old school that helped us through. It's how we got here. That's what works and got you and all of us here to this point. *(Juanita Applegate claps her hands twice and both Madison Kennedy and Kennedy Madison rush to pick up the rocking chair back to the front of the line. Williams gives Umar a smug I told you so look. All of the ladies, as if on cue begin to take their individual seats and get in line.)*

Kennedy Madison and Madison Kennedy: Did you hear the news?

Dr. Abeni Williams: This is a big school what news? Besides school hasn't even started yet, what kind of news could there really be at this point?

Kennedy Madison and Madison Kennedy: If you don't want to hear it then we can go elsewhere.
(The ladies stand and begin exiting stage right.)

Dr. Abeni Williams: Alright I'll bite...what is the BIG NEWS! *(The ladies make an about-face, rush back to their seats on the bench with big smiles.)*

Kennedy Madison: Taylor Beasley is going private.

Madison Kennedy: That's right its part of a public-private school initiative the school board wants to develop and Taylor Beasley high school has been selected as the founding site.

Kennedy Madison: My friend on the board says that some local corporate sponsors are making an official proposal at the next meeting.

Madison Kennedy: But the meeting is really just a big formality and that the district has already decided. There are rumors that Lil' Youngin will be the "face" of the new school.

Dr. Abeni Williams: Lil' Youngin? Are you talking about Christopher Younger? That little boy still gives me nightmares.

Kenya Samuels: What do you mean nightmares? How do you know him?

Dr. Abeni Williams: He was a senior here my first year teaching at Taylor Beasley. He was a holy terror, a shepherd for Satan.

Kenya Samuels: You can't be serious. He was a child.

Dr. Abeni Williams: He was a demon. You know how students graduate Sum Laude and Magna Cum Laude, well Christopher graduated "Thank You Lordy!" He constantly skipped

class, got into fights. During the last week of school, he started a giant food fight in the cafeteria. I believe there are still hotdogs rotting in the rafters.

Juanita Applegate: That would account for the smell in there. Ain't been cleaned right since '09. I remember old Mr. Younger as well. Brighter than the sun in July but simply refused to apply himself. I remember talking to him about his art. He was a talented artist but he was always getting ISS or OSS. Never really did learn how to focus.

Kenya Samuels: Taylor Beasley is a public school. What type of nonsense are you two talking about? They can't just shut down a public school without having public hearings and letting the community know. This is a neighborhood school. The community needs us.

Ifeta Umar: What would that mean for us? I mean if the school went private, would we still work here?

Kenya Samuels: I'm not saying that Kennedy and Madison are wrong but, there are processes in place. We are a proficient Title 1 school that is serving the community. Didn't we make all those gains on the CCRPI last year? Why would you close a school that is proving to be successful? It just doesn't make any logical sense. Ladies, I think this is some exaggerated gossip.

Juanita Applegate: Well, I can't believe they finally ousted Merit. I mean I wasn't her biggest fan but, she didn't deserve to be terminated. What was the district thinking? It's not like we got people busting down the doors to run this place. She was a decent principal.

Dr. Abeni Williams: Her biggest fan? Wasn't she like your biggest nemesis? I still remember the screaming match you two had in the open faculty meeting a few years ago.

Juanita Applegate: The only reason we got into it was because she was always trying to cut the

budget for art supplies. I understand the importance of core subjects like English, Math, Science, and History but art can enhance our students understanding of all of those subjects. Do you know that some of our students only come to school to go to their elective classes? We have got to do a better job of preserving...

Dr. Abeni Williams: I don't think any of us would argue with you. However, every subject needs more funding. When you're in that position you've got to make the hard choices. I value electives but you need core content to graduate.

Juanita Applegate: spoken like a true future administrator. Ahh Williams didn't you apply for an administrative position here?

Dr. Abeni Williams: I'm very fulfilled as an Academic Coach (*visibly shaken by the comment*).

Kenya Samuels: Well I just hate that she wasn't even allowed to say goodbye. 29 years of faithful service and you get walked out by security. I mean really, who deserves to be discarded like that?

Kennedy Madison: What do we really know about this new principal? What's his name?

Madison Kennedy: Earl Grey, like the tea.

Dr. Abeni Williams: He appears to have the support of the school board. You can view his resume in the board minutes.

Kenya Samuels: And did you?

Dr. Abeni Williams: Did I what?

Kenya Samuels: You know exactly what I'm asking. Go ahead spill it. Spill the Earl Grey.

Dr. Abeni Williams: He is a graduate of the Wharton School of Business. He has plenty of business experience in accounting but absolutely none in running a school. It is actually quite shocking when you think of the other candidates.

Juanita Applegate: Other candidates, like who? You?

Dr. Abeni Williams: I wasn't referring to myself but now that you mention it. I probably have more experience in running a school than our new administrator. Hell, Umar has more experience.

Ifeta Umar: Hey! That's not fair. It's just my first year. I was hoping to work and learn under Ms. Merit. I realize that I didn't know her that long but, she seemed really nice during the interview. It was one of the reasons I chose to teach here.

Juanita Applegate: Well I met Mr. Grey a few days ago while I was bringing in some donated art supplies and I was nonplussed. He reminded me of a used car salesman. Mark my words, that man is slicker than a can of oil. Watch out for that one. The complete opposite of Merit. She and I opened this school together. We were just young girls back then but we taught right across the hall from one another. That reminds of the time when...

Dr. Abeni Williams: I would love to hear more about that but I've got to get those school registration forms printed and a couple of other items.

Kenya Samuels: I've got to call a parent and work on some grades.

Juanita Applegate: School hasn't even started yet what are you talking about?

(The Loudspeaker interrupts the discussion. Kenya looks visibly relieved.)

School Secretary: Teachers please pardon this interruption there will be an active shooter training and a faculty meeting in the Media Center in 10 minutes. Again teachers the active shooter training and faculty meeting will begin the in the Media Center in 10 minutes.

Dr. Abeni Williams: Why is Ms. Stone always so proper? There are no students here and what

could she possibly be interrupting?

Kennedy Madison: You should be careful what you say about her, she has been the secretary here for as long as we can remember.

Madison Kennedy: She will be here after we all retire.

The lights go down to black. End Scene.

Theorizing Act 1 Scene 1: Interlude:

Still No Seat at the Table: Hidden Conversations of Black Women Educators

Langston Hughes (1994) wrote of a powerful sentiment in his poem, *I, too, sing America*, “I am the darker brother. They send me to eat in the kitchen/When company comes, But I laugh and eat well, And grow strong. Tomorrow, I’ll be at the table when company comes. Nobody’ll dare say to me, ‘Eat in the kitchen,’ Then. Besides, they’ll see how beautiful I am and be ashamed—I, too, am America.” Unfortunately, the frustration he expresses, mixed with the longing and even hope in his poetry is still echoing and resounding today. Black woman educators are still at the kitchen table. Their voices, like that of many educators, are mere afterthoughts in relationship to concepts like school reform, community-based activism, corporate partnerships and the list goes on and on. This exclusion from the conversation has resulted in Kitchen Table talk. Hill Collins (2000) defines this occurrence as “...daily conversations, through serious conversations and humor, African-American women as sisters and friends affirm one another’s humanity, specialness, and right to exist” (p. 102). This scene illuminates the kinds of discussions that occur when Black women educators are among themselves. “The issue of Black women being the ones who really listen to one another is significant, particularly given the importance of voice in Black women’s lives” (Hill Collins, 2000, p. 102). This metaphorical “kitchen table” creates a safe haven for Black women educators

to have an authentic conversation and real reactions about the public education space. Despite being able to have valuable conversations with one another there is still not a seat available at the big dining table that is public education. These conversations remain hidden and Black women maintain a label as the “black sheep” inside of public school culture.

Act 1, Scene 2: The Faculty Meeting

There are three rows of ten chairs facing the audience. Interspersed between the chairs are the rocking chair, the throne, the bench, the airline seat. Ifeta has made some progress with her chair. The base is constructed with no back. During this scene, she can be visibly seen working on the chair and trying to tape together directions. Madison Kennedy and Kennedy Madison sit on their bench in the front row. They both have clipboards and are scene visually taking detailed notes. They are both visibly frustrated with the conversation being held by the ladies, who are sitting directly behind them.

Madison Kennedy and Kennedy Madison (*make the following aside to the audience in unison*):

The hurry up and wait is the worst. You are running at top speed but when you turn and look back you are right where you started. This is what teaching is. For every big win there is always a significant loss. A hamster on a wheel makes more traction. (*They take their seats on the bench and the scene resumes*).

Dr. Abeni Williams: Well this is a complete waste of time. Lock the door. Become MacGyver and create a weapon out of a stapler and rubber bands. I’ll tell you this. If we have an active shooter...

Juanita Applegate: What do you mean “if”? Huh, more like when we have one. (*Kennedy Madison and Madison Kennedy both stop writing at the same time and glare back at the ladies*).

Dr. Abeni Williams (*visibly rolling her eyes and intentionally increasing her volume*): I'm filled with the audacity of hope, so if we have an active shooter on campus, I'm getting my purse and climbing out the window.

Juanita Applegate: You are blessed and highly favored, some of us have classes on the second floor but, I don't mind turning my paint gun into something more lethal.

Ifeta Umar: At least you are inside of the building, I'm in the Learning Annex.

Kenya Samuels: The Learning Annex? Is that what they are calling it this year? Are you talking about the trailer park?

Ifeta Umar: Dr. Grey said it was the Learning Annex.

Kenya Samuels: Any area with over 15 trailers is a park. A trailer park. You need a map just to navigate that side of campus.

Dr. Abeni Williams: Can't they just send us an email? Seriously same old mess every year. Nothing is going to change until something tragic happens.

Kenya Samuels: I believe that it is a bold move that the district hired a principal with absolutely no teaching experience.

Juanita Applegate: Bold it is positively incompetent. It is abundantly clear to me that the patients are now running the asylum. And I don't trust it. He's over there looking casket sharp. This is pre-planning. Who is he tryin to impress? Slick he just too slick. What kind of name is Dr. Earl Grey he sounds weak just like the tea?

Ifeta Umar: He says that he has had experience managing people at a fortune 500 hundred company.

Dr. Abeni Williams: That is nowhere as difficult as it is to manage a group of teachers and not

to mention disciplining students. Besides, do you know how many educators have been vying for that position?

Juanita Applegate: Like you?

Dr. Abeni Williams: Well why not me? I have a doctorate in Curriculum Studies with a concentration in Educational Leadership, I have spearheaded the new teacher's mentorship program, and I know data inside and out.

Juanita Applegate: Ok, ok you don't have to run down your resume. I have been here since you began your career. *(Kennedy Madison and Madison Kennedy turn and shush Applegate. She continues increasing her volume and glaring back at the ladies).* Hell, I was at your graduation. *(Kennedy Madison and Madison Kennedy turn and shake their heads in disgust).*

Dr. Abeni Williams: And I am still waiting on my graduation gift.

Juanita Applegate: Chile my presence was your present.

Kenya Samuels: It's obvious the district is up to something. I want to know more about this P.E.N.

Dr. Abeni Williams: What is a P.E.N?

(Kennedy Madison and Madison Kennedy now turn and glare at the ladies completely frustrated with the talking. The ladies pick up their clipboards and move to two open seats away from the ladies.)

Kenya Samuels: The district sent out an email last week, the P.E.N. stands for the Personal Educational Network. They are a private company that works with public schools. According to their company website, they make all of these promises about a "streamlined educational process" that produces "accelerated learners." I hope and pray

that our district is not foolish enough to fall for such a ‘quick fix’ solution. Our educational challenges are way more complicated than that. I’m going to attend the school board meeting next Tuesday to see this discussion first hand. Anybody else want to join me?

Ifeta Umar: I would love to but, with setting up my room and prepping for the first day of school I can barely keep my head above water. By the time I get home every day, it’s all I can do not to fall asleep on the sofa. *(All of the ladies begin to get up and gather their things)*. Does anyone know who I need to contact to get a new lightbulb for my classroom?

Madison Kennedy: You have to send an email to the school secretary. She handles all maintenance requests.

Kennedy Madison: And as for you, we’ve got enough meetings to attend.

Kenya Samuels: Aren’t you concerned about what is going to happen? *(Rolling her eyes and turning away from Kennedy Madison and Madison Kennedy, Kenya looking at Dr. Abeni Williams and Juanita Applegate)*.

Dr. Abeni Williams: It isn’t from a lack of concern. I just know that the district will do exactly what they want to do. Our voices mean nothing. It’s like yelling at a speeding train. You can’t stop it and you end up hoarse and frustrated. However, if you want to go I say go for it!

Juanita Applegate: Huh! I know that to be true!

Kenya Samuels: So you don’t believe in fighting?

Dr. Abeni Williams: That’s not what I’m saying at all. Fighting is not always necessary. Sun Tzu

says in the Art of War that, “supreme excellence consists in breaking the enemy’s resistance without fighting...the skillful leader subdues the enemy’s troops without any fighting” (Tzu, 2003). We’ve got to fight without them knowing that we are doing it.

Juanita Applegate: Now that word will preach.

Lights fade to black. End Scene.

Theorizing Act 1 Scene 2: Interlude:

No Justice, No Peace: The Rise of School Violence

“Just seven weeks into 2018, there have been eight shootings at US schools that have resulted in injury or death” (Beckett, 2018). To say that the increase of school violence is an issue in public education is no longer a debatable subject but a statement of fact. In contrast, to the lack of offering for mental health services for students and teachers, there is an increased focus on surveillance. Fueled by the narrative that criminalizes Black people (Alexander, 2010) there is an increased surveillance and policing of black bodies in public schools. “For decades, Black students have been more likely to be suspended than their White peers despite any evidence suggesting they are more likely to misbehave” (DeMatthews, Carey, Olivarez, & Saeedi, 2017). Statistically more mass school shootings are committed by white students, white males in particular. However, the focus of discipline is increasingly on Black students.

David vs. Goliath: Fighting the Myth of Failing Public Education

The biblical story of David and Goliath has often been characterized as the story of the underdog conquering over the favored winner. In the Old Testament story, King Saul, the king of Israel, seeks a warrior to settle a war with the Philistines. Both sides have agreed to send their best warriors to fight in order to settle the disagreement. David, a shepherd boy, volunteers and

agrees to fight a 6'9 foot warrior named Goliath. David defeats Goliath using a skillful blow to the head using three stones.

According to scholar, philosopher and author, Malcolm Gladwell, most have misinterpreted the story of David and Goliath. He states that David and Goliath have become a metaphor for “improbable victories” (Galdwell, 2013), but he argues that David is not the underdog but rather a calculating competitor. During this time period, there were three types of soldiers: cavalry (horsemen), infantry (foot soldiers), and artillery (archers and slingers). “[A] slinger is someone who has a leather pouch with two long cords attached to it, and they put a projectile, either a rock or a lead ball, inside the pouch, and they whirl it around like this and they let one of the cords go, and the effect is to send the projectile forward towards its target. ... It's not a child's toy. It's, in fact, an incredibly devastating weapon” (Galdwell, 2013).

We misunderstand Goliath and David. Neither are who they appear to be. Gladwell further argues that Goliath was not the dominating warrior he appears to be as well:

...Goliath is head and shoulders above all of his peers in that era, and usually, when someone is that far out of the norm, there's an explanation for it. So the most common form of giantism is a condition called acromegaly, and acromegaly is caused by a benign tumor on your pituitary gland that causes an overproduction of human growth hormone. And throughout history, many of the most famous giants have all had acromegaly...And acromegaly has a very distinct set of side effects associated with it, principally having to do with vision. The pituitary tumor, as it grows, often starts to compress the visual nerves in your brain, with the result that people with acromegaly have either double vision or they are profoundly nearsighted (TED Talks, 2013).

Gladwell postulates that Goliath was suffering a disease and though he is seemingly the one with the advantage in this situation he is actually the weaker competitor.

The preceding scene speaks against the Metanarrative of “failing schools” and the proposed solution of Captain Corporation swooping in to save the day. Metaphorically, the entity of Taylor Beasley can be viewed as the David and the looming P.E.N. corporation as the Goliath. The “fight” and power within our protagonists, a group of Black women educators, should not be underestimated or devalued.

On a larger scale, the assault represents an attack on the ideals of public education transition from democracy based to market-based. The marketplace becomes the barometer by which the “effectiveness” of public education is evaluated. Teaching and curriculum are now driven by testing, data, and checklists for college career and readiness. These elements have infiltrated teaching lounges, classrooms, professional developments and the community at large. CEOs and corporations have become the leading voices in education (Giroux H. A., 2012; Wilson E. K., 2016; Noguera, 1994). There is a myth of privatization and charter schools is a solution to a problem that reaches far beyond the public education walls.

With little public input, corporations and foundations now guide school reorganization. They are fashioning a new America to conform to their economic and political ideology. School “reform” is a major target in the scheme. Employing the language of democracy and distress, corporate reformers mask tyrannical political actions. The proposed sweeping changes inevitably disrupt the long-cherished concept of the neighborhood school. Great concern is now expressed about the school consequences of this enterprise...Corporate ideology influences the writing of new federal legislation, the creation of nontraditional schools, the lambasting of colleges of education, and the

advocacy of curriculum change without engaged democratic debate. The mugging of public education is engineered by “reformers” deeply committed to the market vision. School reform is inextricably connected to the reconfiguration of the labor market, urban gentrification and the new social order (Watkins W. H., 2011).

Applying a corporate mindset is a dangerous and detrimental practice within public education. Even from the adoption of corporate terms in educational settings like “non-negotiables” and “efficacy.” These business terms imply that the “failures” of public education lie in the simple realignment of people and processes. As history has proven time and time again, humans are unpredictable. There is no algorithm or equation that can be used to provide the “perfect” education for any student. Faceless corporations invading public education is an inhumane practice that results in appointments of leaders who are more interested in the bottom line than in developing young minds. Public schools produce more than mere data and statistics but rather we help to cultivate and grown human beings. Our power, our abilities should not be underestimated. Our history may be forced to repeat itself and the giant will fall.

CHAPTER THREE: EXAMINING THE SEATS OF POWER FOR BLACK WOMEN

EDUCATORS THROUGH PLAYWRITING: PART II

Act 2, Scene 1: A Complicated Conversation

This scene opens with a spotlight on Dr. Abeni Williams standing downstage center looking directly at the audience.

Dr. Abeni Williams: Snakes don't nurture their young from birth. Just like sea turtles but more deadly. You're on your own from birth. So how can I expect you to understand the pedagogy of care? No one taught you that your venom kills. It's all production and efficiency with you. I see you slithering from one to the next. Hell Stevie and Ray see it. I analyze your moves. You're calculating down to a science. But I can't give you my eyes. You don't see what I see. Or at least you don't want to see what I see. I realize that there is comfort in walking blind. Pay no attention to the man or woman behind the curtain. It's alright to blame it on Black girl magic cause then you don't have to acknowledge the work, the perseverance and sheer force of will.

The stage is illuminated to show a teacher desk that sits center stage facing the audience. Dr. Abeni Williams moves to sit behind the desk in her throne seat with a laptop in front of her. She mimics typing on the keyboard as she recites her lines.

Dr. Abeni Williams: Mr. Whitman, I want to thank you for all of the support and recommendations for assisting me in becoming acclimated to my new role as English Academic Coach here at Taylor Beasley High School. I've taken the time to review some of the model lessons and supplemental texts that you use in your 9th grade Literature Class and I have a small concern. While I know that culturally relevant texts and pedagogy are essential to the success of teaching our students I am uncomfortable

with one of the text selections. The inclusion of the song “I’m that Nigga” by the rapper, Thug B Nasty is one that I question. I am concerned about using a text that glorifies gratuitous drug use, misogyny, and violence as the definition of a “real” Black man. Why would this text be included in our course?

ASIDE (made to the audience): It’s not enough that you colonize our land and bodies, must you colonize our minds, too? You can’t type that Abeni. How do I end this email and still be polite? *(Kenya Samuels enters the room and Abeni turns to greet her).*

Dr. Abeni Williams: Hey Girl.

Kenya Samuels: Hey Doc, you going to the cafeteria?

Dr. Abeni Williams: I would but I have to finish this email to Whitman.

Kenya Samuels: Oh that. Did you figure out how you were gonna address Mr. White Man?

Dr. Abeni Williams: Girl you a mess. And I’m working on it. You know they fragile. If you say one thing with the wrong tone then you’re labeled aggressive.

Kenya Samuels: or President Petty

Dr. Abeni Williams: or Unprofessional.

Kenya Samuels: or Dat Bitch. *(Both women laugh and nod at each other knowingly.)* In the words of MJ, You can’t win, you can’t get even and you can’t get out of the game.

Alright, lady, I will leave you to it. You want your door closed or open.

Dr. Abeni Williams: Go ahead and close it. I wanna get this finished. Okay, here we go...*(Abeni sits back down on her throne looks back at the screen, typing and talking.)* Attached are a few alternative resources. I used some in my own classroom and found that the students truly connected to the material and were able to master the concepts. I relish the opportunity to discuss some viable alternatives to this text. I know that by working

together we can help our students become successful. Respectfully, Dr. Abeni Williams, Ed.D. Academic Coach, Taylor Beasley High School. Where we inspire learning.

Lights fade to black. End Scene.

Theorizing Act 2 Scene 1: Interlude:

Speaking Truth to Power: White Fatigue Equals Black Exhaustion

In public spaces, Black women have to navigate our existence with care. With the rise of conversations centered on race, gender and class in mainstream and social media, White people, especially White men, have become resistant. Resistant to the point that even mere conversations can have dire consequences. “White fatigue occurs for White [people] who have grown tired of learning and discussing race and racism, despite an understanding of the moral imperative of anti-racist and anti-oppressive practices” (Flynn, Jr., 2015). The fact that Dr. Abeni Williams has to have calculated communication against what in a minor case could be viewed as a macroaggression and in a major way be viewed as a racist act is evidence of white fatigue in the workplace. While Williams may have her own self-identification and have this image reinforced by her peers she still must be careful of how her race and gender can shade the perception of others in and outside the classroom.

Developing the skills of what bell hooks refers to as “talking back” is a transformative and revolutionary act. It is the means by which Black women educators regain their voice and agency. However, just with any strategy, Black women must be selective and strategic when we use our voices. If we are not careful, our concerns, our cries, our challenges can become mere background noise and not a rallying cry. Despite the risk, it is better to speak than to remain silent. Audre Lorde says in her poem, *A Litany for Survival*, “So it is better to speak /remembering/we were never meant to survive” (The Black Unicorn Poems, 1978).

Act 2, Scene 2: The Soul of a People

Ifeta Umar is standing downstage, facing the audience directly.

Ifeta Umar: Despite the systems best efforts to the contrary I believe. I'm a believer. Strange I know. In the face of all evidence and negativity and doubt. If there is one iota of hope I cling to it like the last crumb of Mama's homemade pound cake. Yes, sister Shirley Chislom, "service is the rent we pay for the privilege of living on this earth." And some of us are

paying more rent than others. Some of us are coasting living rent-free. But in spite of the glaring inequities, the seemingly insurmountable challenges, I believe.

A bell rings. And Ifeta walks downstage right and straightens her posture while waiting expectantly. There is background noise that sounds like students laughing, gossiping, play fighting and cussing in the hallway. Ifeta smiles and greets imaginary students calling some by name.

Ifeta: Good morning Kimberlyn. Hey Schyler please take the hood off and remove those Headphones before you take your seat. Aidan, please refrain from discussing your genitalia in the room. No, Lee Manuel, I will not be able to accept your report. Yes, it was due six weeks ago. However, we have a major test coming this Friday. How about you focus on excelling in that assignment. It will significantly help your grade. You can come to tutoring. Ok, well you get to follow me on Twitter and get study tips, what about Facebook or Instagram. Fine Snapchat? What do you mean you don't have a



Figure 1 This is a picture of the Golden Stool used by the Ashanti people. The stool is positioned on its side in order to protect the soul of the people.

Snapchat account? I just caught you making a Snapchat video during our group activity yesterday. *(Another bell rings, the ambient noise, however, doesn't die down it in fact increases)*. Alright, class that was the bell. Please take your seats so that we can start. *(The noise continues and in fact increases again. Ifeta is becoming visually agitated. Ifeta returns to downstage center and begins speaking to the audience as if they were her students. There is a spotlight on her with a large chalkboard positioned directly behind her with the words written on the board clear enough for others to read: **The Golden Stool is the soul of the Ashanti people.** Next to the words is an oversized image of the golden stool.)* Class SHUT THE FUSS UP! *(The noise stops immediately. However a male voice can be heard saying "Ooooo Ms.Umar you cussing now?")* No Lee Manuel I said the word fuss. F-U-S-S. It means unnecessary noise. Class, can anyone tell me what this is? *(Umar points to a picture of the golden stool with a long wooden pointer. She pauses and listens to the deafening silence.)* Well, this was part of your reading from last night's homework. *(Umar sighs deeply in defeat but straightens her shoulders before pronouncing with dramatic flair.)* This is the golden stool. This golden stool, STOP laughing Lee Manuel it's not that type of stool. *(Umar begins again but is slightly less confident than the first time she begins.)* This golden stool is not just any chair. It is metaphorical. *(clearly exasperated Umar replies.)* No, Joi, I'm not talking about astronomy. I'm talking about a Met-A-Phor, a figure of speech where a term or phrase is applied to something where it does not have a literal comparison. It is something being compared to something else. For example, if I say that Lee Manuel is a firework. I am not saying that Lee Manuel has physically become fireworks, literally saying his personality is explosive and interesting like fireworks. I see that you are still having

trouble. You haven't learned this in English class? No, can we talk about that more later? Good. (*Clearing her throat before beginning again,*) The golden stool, (*Umar pauses and stares directly down at a male audience member in the front row and uses a stern authoritarian voice*) Lee Manuel, seriously, do you need to step outside so you can compose yourself? (*Umar pauses*) Good! This noble seat holds much historical significance. It was made of wood and covered in gold. Legend has it that the chair floated from the sky and landed in the lap of the first Ashanti king, Osie-tutu. No one sat in the chair. The Asantehene, the King of the Ashanti Kingdom, couldn't even sit in it. The golden stool is placed next to the ruling king in a chair of its own. Gold became a sign of royalty not just in metal but in fabrics as well (Klemm & Harris, n.d.). Ok, sure Lee Manuel one could say that the Ashanti people like gold as much as rappers do. Gold became an important factor in the economic growth of the region. In fact, the Ashanti people were in charge of the gold trade in Africa, long before the Europeans entered into the scene. Even after their land was invaded, the Ashanti people hid the golden stool from outsiders. For the Ashanti people, the golden stool represented unity and their collective identity. It was highly offensive that a foreign power would invade and try to steal the country's most precious item. The Ashanti kept the stool hidden. And only after a peace treaty was agreed upon did the Ashanti people bring the chair out of hiding. Does anyone know why the golden stool was considered so important? Why would the Ashanti people keep it in hiding? No one? Well according to your reading last night there was a very important reading. Stools weren't used just for royalty but also by everyday citizens. Stools were used for sitting and working. Parents would gift children stools. The Ashanti believe that things that you sit in take on your tsun tsun. Repeat after

me “tsun, tsun.” Good. Lee Manuel everything doesn’t need musical accompaniment stop beating on the desk. (*Umar continues in a determined manner.*) The tsun tsun is considered your essence, your personal aura, your soul, the thing that makes you you. In order to make sure that no one stole your tsun tsun you would tip over the stool before leaving the room in order to keep your tsun tsun safe and intact. According to the Ashanti, “the golden stool is the soul of the Ashanti nation.” So when outside forces tried to come and steal it. It was considered highly offensive. The threat wasn’t just of one soul but an entire nation. Yes Lee Manuel you have a question or comment? No you cannot go to the bathroom.

Black Out. End Scene

Theorizing Act 2 Scene 2: Interlude:

An Incubator for Oppositional Knowledge

White flight has created minority-dominated schools. “School boundaries have been gerrymandered in much the same way as these contentious political boundaries. Indeed, neighborhood school zones — rather than reflecting natural, cohesive communities — are often highly gerrymandered into irregular shapes. Whereas political gerrymandering consolidates political power and reduces the voting power of minorities, the gerrymandering of educational boundaries generally fosters inequities in access to educational opportunities and worsens already severe levels of racial segregation in public schools” (Richards, 2017). U.S. schools are more segregated now than in 1965. One small benefit to this desegregation, minority public schools have been able to develop their own *oppositional knowledge* (Hill Collins, 2000) that combats the negative and controlling images of Black students and teachers. The story of the

soul of a people represents *oppositional knowledge* (Hill Collins, 2000) a counter-narrative that combats the myth of Black people being selfish, greedy and without a moral compass.

Black Feminist Educators are for Everyone

Ifeta Umar embodies the womanish and youthful exuberance of Jamaica Kincaid's "Girl," mixed with the self-confidence and hubris of Lucille Clifton. As a young Black woman educator, she is committed to practicing a culturally relevant pedagogy for all of her students. "Culturally relevant pedagogy deviates from other cultural perspectives in its criticality, a critical and intentional deconstruction of the status quo" (Scherff & Spector, 2011). In this instance, she goes beyond the bare minimum of standards and includes information that connects to the students that she teaches. Her willingness to accept and teach culturally relevant curriculum as a matter of practice is what sets her apart from her peers. Being a member of a minority group helps her to understand this strategy not only as a practitioner but as a student. She understands what it is to be accepted and outside of a group.

As Black feminists point out, the distortions and omissions of traditional curricula damage not only Black people (by omission of their contributions, perspectives, and issues of concern to them), they also damage all people. Students lose the opportunity for growth and change if they cannot clearly examine and understand the historical dimensions of current societal dilemmas and oppressions or the ways in which they may help dismantle them. This lack of analysis misleads students to believe and accept that existing societal problems and educational inequities are in reality "natural," "inevitable," due to the inherent characteristics of certain classes and culture (e.g. high unemployment, crime, overpopulation, poverty, low test scores, high drop-out rates, underachievement and overrepresentation in Special Education) (Watkins W. H., 2005).

The work of Black Feminist educators challenge dominant narratives, empower oppressed people and enlighten those in the majority. The practice is liberating, for both students and teachers, the work of Black feminists educators is for everyone.

Act 2, Scene 3: Another Complicated Conversation

This scene opens with a teacher desk that sits stage left facing the audience. Dr. Abeni Williams sits behind the desk in an office chair with a laptop in front of her. She mimics typing on the keyboard as she recites her lines.

Dr. Abeni Williams: Mr. Whitman, Thank you for your immediate response to my previous email. Yes, I realize that we are a “resource county” and as such, each individual teacher can make choices about what texts to include in his or her individual syllabi. However, my concern is about your level of influence. First for the students who are directly impacted inside of your classroom. Secondly, you are the team lead so other teachers will follow your lead when it comes to curriculum selections. The inclusion of the aforementioned text on any 9th-grade literature syllabus is one that should be questioned and evaluated. I am disappointed that you “don’t see the problem with using this text.” I agree that while I am ”new” to academic coaching I am not new to the intricacies of Taylor Beasley High. I am not a neophyte to public education. I have taught for ten years, earned a Bachelor’s in English, a Masters in Secondary English Education and an Education Doctorate in Curriculum Studies and Instruction. My education alongside my experience allows me to bring a wealth of knowledge and experiences to the classroom. Since our relationship is that of colleagues and not one of supervisor and supervisee, I would not anticipate that you would be aware of my expertise.

In terms of our students, I agree that many of them enjoy listening to music that includes controversial subject matter and language. I too have found that using music is an excellent instructional strategy for engaging students. In this case, the topic of discussion is not the musical genre but, the lyrical content. I agree that the word “nigger”

is not new. I will not spend this email reviewing the etymology of such a pejorative term. Suffice it to say, it began as a label that outsiders used to describe the “other.” Many of our students, both African American and other, have reclaimed the word nigger using the term in a variety of iterations, however, the distinction is that these terms are being used by students amongst themselves and not within a formal classroom setting. (*Dr. Abeni Williams stops typing and speaks the following lines out loud to the audience directly.*)

ASIDE: You sir, despite the attempts by “transracial” activist Rachel Dolezal, are not a member of said group. Why are White men always trying to colonize shit? Is it not enough that you took people, land, and property? You gotta co-op racial slurs too? For real though! (*Dr. Abeni Williams returns to her typing and the voiceover continues.*)

More importantly, as educators, we are the standard and barometer inside of the classroom. When you present a text of this nature to a group of minority students you give voice and validity to the content presented in the text. Students may infer that you support the content and use such derogatory language yourself. I believe the fallacy in your argument is that just because the students use the word does not mean that we as teachers should engage in this level of discourse. Furthermore, students don’t always vocalize when they are offended by a particular lesson or topic. How do you think students feel when you use a text that includes this word? How do you think students feel when you say the word? Hip Hop as a genre offers a myriad of options for using culturally relevant texts to teach the standards? This text falls short. I urge you to reconsider the usage of this text in your classroom. As added assistance, I have attached a listing of hip-hop and pop songs that are culturally relevant, engaging for students, and enhance topics aligned with the state standards. Sincerely Dr. Abeni Williams, Ed.D.,

Academic Coach, Taylor Beasley High School. Signature: "The heart of education as a practice of freedom is to promote growth. It's very much an act of love in that sense of love as something that promotes our spiritual and mental growth." bell hooks (bell hooks Urges "Radical Openness" in Teaching, Learning (The Council Chronicle, Sept. 04), n.d.). (*Abeni stops typing and turns to the audience saying*) A.K.A. I'm not having it. A.K.A. Not on my watch. A.K.A. Take your savior complex elsewhere because it is not needed here today. A.K.A. Bye Felicia!

Lights fade out. End Scene.

Theorizing Act 2 Scene 3: Interlude:

Fighting White Fatigue to Fighting White Resistance

If Fox News, the Alt-Right, and others are to be believed there is an attack on Whiteness and even White people in this country. This perception of attack has caused many to be defensive and even resistant to voices that speak against issues of race, class, and gender. For all intents and purposes, Whiteness is reinforced in all areas of American culture. "These systemic normalizations of Whiteness not only threaten teacher education itself, but also its entire pipeline (preservice to professors) because the oppressive mechanisms of White supremacy and manifestations of Whiteness endure and remain undetectable. In fact, they become so normalized that its daily occurrence is rendered as natural as a lion eating an antelope" (Matias, Montoya, & Nishi, 2016). This reinforcement of Whiteness can make some teachers colorblind, both figuratively and literally. When confronting issues of oppression, Black women educators must first choose wisely which issues to address and be ready for backlash, criticism, and disbelief when confronting our White colleagues. As demonstrated in the previous scene, Mr. Charles Whitman becomes defensive and begins questioning the source of the information rather than the

validity of the comments. And he remains resistant despite Dr. Abeni Williams position as an academic coach. She is forced to spend the majority of our argument justifying her right to address the issue rather than speaking directly to her concerns. This hidden distribution of power demonstrates the precarious position of Black women educators even with the support of an institutional title. Race and gender trump all and White fatigue morphs into White resistance.

Act 2, Scene 4: The Wishing Chair

The lights open on stage right with Kenya Samuels. She is striking various yoga poses on a yoga mat while Heavn by Jamila Woods plays in the background. After the second signing of the chorus, the music begins to fade and Kenya rolls up her mat and takes a seat in her airplane chair that is placed behind a teacher desk facing the audience. There is a paper in front of her and she appears to be writing pausing every so often to ponder her words. In this scene, Williams will deliver a monologue and speak directly to the audience. She will get up and read her words out loud while pacing the stage stopping periodically to stretch and pose in various yoga stretches.

Kenya Samuels: I've always believed that heroes are not born but they are made. You are just as heroic as anyone else. It is a matter of you personally accepting the call. You have to be willing to move out of your ordinary world and into something new.

It took ten days before I stopped saying your name during roll call. It took 60 days before I let anyone else sit in your seat. I've thought about you long after your name disappeared from the roll. I wished that our last conversation had been more than just, "where is your pencil? Why did you not bring it to class?"

As a sage, I have failed horribly. I wish I had told you more about how smart you are. And how I admired how you were always able to pick up where you left off, even

after missing a few days of class. I wished I would have told you that Legend worked my last damn nerve too. That his mother missed the mark by giving him such a name by making the expectations too high. I heard a rumor that his sister is named Epic but, I hope that Mr. Cooper was simply making that up. I believe that if I would have allowed you two to fight that day you would have taken Legend out. Some students only learn through kinesthetic, hands-on learning.

I wished you would have had a mentor. Someone you truly trusted, someone you could have confided in about your brother. Maybe they could have helped you to find a more effective way to deal with your younger brother's bullies. Violence often ends in tragedy. We talked about this when we read, "On the Sidewalk Bleeding." But I'm pretty sure you missed class that day and never did the make-up work.

I wish your mother's boyfriend used a better hiding place. I wished your family had lived in a better neighborhood where maybe protection wouldn't have been needed. Who am I kidding? One might need security in really "good" neighborhoods too.

I wish you would have never found that gun and I definitely wish that you would have never given it to your little brother. I wish you would have at least unloaded it properly including the one in the chamber. That small tiny unsuspecting piece of molded metal sealed your brother's fate, that neighbor girl next door and yours too.

In hindsight, I couldn't control anything going on outside my classroom. Hell, there were things that I couldn't control inside the classroom. I wished that I would have shown you *Native Son*, *Black Boy*, and *All American Boys*. Maybe you could have seen just a glimpse of the hope and potential in them that I always saw and still see in you.

I wish you peace and safety in this next chapter of your life. My mind is too cluttered with images of *The Wire* and *Orange is the New Black* to truly understand your real life right now. I hope that you use this experience as a turning point and not the denouement of the play that is your life. You are the protagonist of your own life. Don't let static characters turn your trajectory. There is no elixir or magical anecdote to help you travel back in time. But you through reflection and thoughtful decision making can change the future and work towards resolving the conflicts. Accept the call to adventure and use this tragic exposition to rise and start a new beginning. (*Kenya ends the scene in Lotus position*).

Lights fade. End Scene.

Theorizing Act 2 Scene 4: Interlude:

Part of the Problem: Respectability Politics and Engaged Pedagogy

Respectability politics is an oppressive force on Black women and Black women educators in particular.

What started as a philosophy promulgated by black elites to “uplift the race” by correcting the “bad” traits of the black poor has now evolved into one of the hallmarks of black politics in the age of Obama, a governing philosophy that centers on managing the behavior of black people left behind in a society touted as being full of opportunity. In an era marked by rising inequality and declining economic mobility for most Americans—but particularly for black Americans—the twenty-first-century version of the politics of respectability works to accommodate neoliberalism. The virtues of self-care and self-correction are framed as strategies to lift the black poor out of their condition by preparing them for the market economy (Harris, 2014).

These unspoken but widely known tenets seek to control and curtail the perceived images of Black women. We cannot appear too sexual, too loud too anything. The rise of the politics of respectability has permeated not only the individual minds of Black women educators but we have passed this oppressive force to the students we teach Just as White teachers are involved in macroaggressions and supporting the racists instructional practices, Black women themselves must question how their own pedagogy succumbs and supports a white supremacists capitalists patriarchy agenda.

There is a tenuous string between respectability politics and engaged pedagogy. At the heart respectability, politics is intended to focus on the “best” attributes and traits of African Americans. However, the question arises: What is the best? And what sources of power and influence define this abstract ideal? The Wishing Chair opens with Kenya Samuels in a meditative state. She transitions to Yoga which symbolizes her embracing a self-reflective practice which hooks refers to engaged pedagogy. Through a practice of engaged pedagogy, Kenya Samuels comes to the realization that she focused on respectability politics versus making a true connection and building a relationship with her student. As a result, she is able to see how she is both oppressed and the oppressor.

“Before words are spoken in the classroom, we come together as bodies. . . Being comes from the body. And if we listen to our bodies inside the classroom and out we learn more ways to relate to one another” (hooks b. , Teaching critical thinking: Practical wisdom, 2010). Upon reflection, Samuels realizes all of the missed opportunities for connection and relationship building.

“Commitment to engaged pedagogy carries with it the willingness to be responsible, not to pretend that professors do not have the power to change the direction of our students’ lives” (hooks b. , Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom, 1994). Samuels, too late for the subject of her letter, now understands her position. The audience can infer that she will have a changed perspective that will impact her actions moving forward.

Act 2, Scene 5: Fighting the Sun

The scene opens with both ladies sitting on a bench facing the audience wearing solar eclipse glasses.

Kennedy Madison: Who’s idea was it to take the SPED students outside to watch the solar eclipse?

Madison Kennedy: Couldn’t we have just watched it on C-Span?

Kennedy Madison: Trevor of course people are following you. You’re the line leader.

Madison Kennedy: I have at least five IEPs to complete not to mention the parent conferences.

Kennedy Madison: Amanda keep your solar eclipse glasses on and put your fists down. What are you going to do, fight the sun?

Madison Kennedy: Do you ever wonder about what we’re doing here?

Kennedy Madison: What do you mean? We teach?

Madison Kennedy: No, I mean what kind of impact we are actually making? I mean between the paperwork, required curriculum, and “remediation” what are we really doing? Are we really making a difference?

Kennedy Madison: That really depends. On the student, on parents, on us. Some days yes I feel like I’m making great strides and other days...Thomas, I’m not going to tell you again to take your hands out of your pants. Get the hand sanitizer out of your book bag. Now

Thomas. Sometimes I think we have so many safety nets around here these kids will never touch the ground. In a way that's kind of comforting but, what happens to them in the real world? No one cares if they have a disability or not.

Madison Kennedy: Remember that Black disabled man who was shot by the police?

Kennedy Madison: Which one?

Madison Kennedy: You right (*she says solemnly and takes a dramatic pause before continuing.*)

When I look around at our students, I think about that. They could easily go out into the world and for many of them, people can assume they have all their faculties. It takes one of them being in the wrong place, with the wrong cop and all we have left is a lot of slow singing and flower bringing.

Kennedy Madison: Maybe we're all like Amanda?

Madison Kennedy: What do you mean?

Kennedy Madison: Maybe it's all for nothing. Maybe we're all just fighting the sun.

Theorizing Act 2 Scene 5: Interlude:

Overrepresented and Underserved: Serving time as a Black Women Special Education

Teacher

Kennedy Madison/Madison Kennedy are named after two historical figures: John F. Kennedy, 35th president of the United States and James Madison, known as the father of the constitution. JFK had his legislative dreams abruptly halted with his assassination on November 23, 1963. JFK's reluctant support of a Civil Rights Bill and James Madison's drafting and promoting of the Bill of Rights make them a symbolic representation of America's dreams and ideals deferred. A representation of the guiding legal documents and principles wrapped in lofty ideals and good intentions.

As characters, Kennedy Madison/Madison Kennedy are mirror opposites in physical size, character traits and even in clothing. They are a yin and yang, a light and dark with a twist. Reminiscent of Sesame Street's two-headed monster, they are never seen without one another. In several cases, completing each other's sentences with symbiotic precision. Kennedy Madison/Madison Kennedy desire to change the course of public education, for the most venerable of our student population but the monsters are not only lurking from outside but from within. Kennedy Madison is left asking the existential question: Are we just fighting the sun?

The desire to change educational services in the United States is nothing new.

Throughout the history of the United States, both curricula, and instructional opportunities have continually changed as American society has changed. Students have been taught the necessary skills to live productively, act responsibly, and contribute to American society by becoming industrious citizens. America has been slow to include all children in this education arena...Students with disabilities have often been left behind in the advancement of American educational practices (Bicehouse & Faieta, 2017).

After the failure of No Child Left Behind and the failed start of Race to the Top, special need students, particularly Black special needs students, are suffering at an alarming rate. Researchers, Morgan and Farkas, (Samuels, 2016) argue "[Black] students might be underrepresented in some categories, while being overrepresented in others that often carry a stigma, such as intellectual disabilities and emotional disturbances. Overrepresentation happens often enough that the federal government is correct to guard against it (17). This disturbing trend leads many Black students overrepresented and simultaneously underserved. All while supporting the meta narrative that "black and brown students are fundamentally inferior to white peers" (Samuels, 2016).

This situation is not novel. It was a poignant topic, in the cult classic John Water's (1988) film *Hairspray*. The protagonist, Tracy Turnblad is sent the principal's office due to her "distracting" hairstyle. During the verbal confrontation with the principal, Turnblad calls out the racists labeling practices that are taking place at the school:

Principal: Ms. Turnblad (Tracy nervously gets up and walks somberly into the open principal office door. The principal snatches the teacher's note from her hand). Have a seat.

Tracy Turnblad: Yes Sir (stutters)

Principal: Once again your hair-do is getting you into hot water. Didn't two weeks in hairdo detention have any effect?

Tracy Turnblad: I happen to be the height of teen fashion.

Principal: You're on a one-way ticket to reform school. Well, I'm afraid we're just going to have to change your homeroom. Starting today you report to class 10D room 108.

Tracy Turnblad: Special Ed?

Principal: Yes Ms. Turnblad Special Education!

Tracy Turnblad: But that's for retards, and the Black kids you try to hold back.

(Waters, 1988).

Not much has changed since 1988. Black students are still being labeled and misdiagnosed with special needs. This painful and racist practice continues to have a detrimental psychological impact on students and teachers.

Act 2, Scene 6: Yet Another Complicated Conversation

This scene takes place in a conference room with several high backed chairs. Dr. Abeni Williams is visibly facing the audience. Abeni is having a conversation with two other characters

who are never seen on stage. Mr. Charles Whitman, third-year English teacher. Whitman is a young white male who also coaches the school's soccer team. James Dwight, the assistant principal has called this meeting and is serving as mediator.

Dr. Abeni Williams: James thank you for agreeing to host this mediation today. As I stated in my email to you I feel that *(Abeni stops as though she is being interrupted. Her mouth is open and she swiftly closes it and gives a puzzling look at one of the chairs facing her)*. I'm sorry Charles did you say you feel threatened by my e-mails and that I am creating a hostile work environment? I'm the academic coach for the English department. I'm literally supposed to review your lesson plans and provide you feedback. Can you be more specific about what line in my email made you feel threatened? *(Abeni pauses and waits.)* How could you detect a tone of my email? And how could this tone make you feel threatened? I never mentioned the word racist in my email but now that you mention it. So, James, you are cosigning this? You find this acceptable for our students? I'm pretty calm especially considering the circumstances. I thought this meeting was for us to discuss how to improve the curriculum choices for our students here at Taylor Beasley now it is apparent to me who is the concern.

ASIDE: First off I want to thank you, Mr. Whiteman, because without your ignorance I would have been lulled into a false sense of security. Thinking that my freedom was actually legit and real. It's not that I believe that you are here because you are intent on being malignant. On the contrary, in your mind, you are on a noble mission to save the day. This fact is what makes your actions even more insidious. You are infectious with your authority, your co-opting, your colonizing. You paint an image of us that is well for lack of better terms insufficient. Yes, I will use the term insufficient. And what is so amazing is instead of the students you've made yourself

the victim. (*Abeni turns back to the two chairs and begins speaking again, in a much softer and more professional manner. She has a smile that doesn't quite reach her eyes.*)

No, I am not arguing that we stop teaching classics like *To Kill a Mockingbird*. However, viewing the text with a literary cultural lens wouldn't hurt. I'm sorry you want me to admit to wrongdoing. I am not racist. By definition, Black people cannot be racist. Prejudice, possibly but racist no. You two are White males, one of you who is senior to me in the position I might add. There is no way that I could be seen as racist in this scenario. That's something that I refuse to agree to. What I can say, is that I do not support the use of "I'm that Nigga" by Thug B. Nasty as a poetry study in a high school English classroom.

Theorizing Act 2 Scene 6: Interlude:

Privilege and Cost of Service: Agency and Academic Lynching

Shirley Chisholm, the first Black woman to run for presidential office, said: "Service is the rent we pay for the privilege of living on this earth." Black Privilege - Black tax; knowledge and wisdom without the rewards (Dr. Abeni Williams) injustices and academic lynchings. Struggle to work within a system that is by design a reflection of a larger society's ailments racism and sexism is a cancer that has infected the body of the public education institution. Black women educators serve as some of the "white cells" fighting the disease from within.

academic lynching as a form of domestic terrorism in which individuals apply institutional power through e-mail correspondence, course evaluations, letters destined for personnel files, and other forms of official and unofficial actions, policies, and decisions as part of processes of White racial domination used to define those outside the realm. Put plainly, these systems help to support and maintain White supremacy with the violence of domestic terrorism directed against those seen as threats to the historical

privileging of Whiteness. Institutions and social systems, in turn, do not readily change or move toward more democratic and humanized forms of organization because domestic terrorism is readily and abundantly applied against any efforts by individuals or groups to resist or challenge White supremacy. This unhooking from Whiteness has moved me from conformist resistance to transformative resistance. Individuals whose identity is framed in transformation are critical of the oppression and have a desire for social justice. I began to hold an awareness and critique of their oppressive conditions and the structures of domination. Now, this critique does not come at a cost, as I have argued at the outset of this section, and for me, that cost comes in the form of academic lynching, especially now that I have moved into teacher education (Hartlep & Haynes, 2013).

Act 2, Scene 7: Afrofuturism Art Lesson

The stage has four easels with canvases lined across the center stage. The work is facing away from the audience. Projected on the screen on the backdrop are the works of Ellen Gallagher. Juanita Applegate enters stage right wearing a paint splattered on a black apron. She is wearing a full-length dress with distinct abstract African print. There is a spotlight that shines directly on her as she begins to speak.

Juanita Applegate: You call me Abject, something that threatens your cleanliness and your propriety. What you call me and what I answer two different things, my Mama taught me that. See I've been around long enough to know that the more things change, the more things end up just the same. I remember this one time when I was a little girl, I'd sat at the kitchen table and helped Mama snap peas. Back then if you wanted something to eat you either bartered for it or grew it. We weren't running down to the corner store for every whim and fancy. I had been crying earlier because the little White boy up the road called me "nigger." Mama forbids me to play with him anymore. Nita, that's what she called me. Nita, you can't respond to every little thing. You a dreamer. And that ain't a bad thing. You also Black and youse a woman. That's already two strikes against you. There's a big world out there and it ain't always gonna fight fair. Don't you let nobody still yo dream? Not the world, not your friends, not your family. It's yo dream and youse got a right to it. So what do I respond to? Call me Afrofuturism. I am history, science fiction and African all rolled into one. *(Juanita Applegate begins to walk behind the individual canvases pausing as she delivers her lines).* Class remember that the theme of this year's show is A Seat at the Table: Claiming our Space, Claiming our Voice. Your work should exemplify this theme and use some of the artistic techniques we have

studied in class. Don't simply mimic these artists, examine the techniques used by the artist and use those to create your own work with your own unique point of view.

(Applegate looks quizzically at the first canvas and says) Monet, I like the strokes that you have here. Pay attention to the details. The Devil is in the details.

Principal Earl Grey's voice comes over the intercom and begins to speak with Juanita Applegate.

Principal Earl Grey: Juanita may I speak with you for a moment?

Juanita Applegate: Mr. Grey, I'm in the middle of class. *(she gives the emphasis on Mr.)*

Principal Earl Grey: This will only take a moment of your time. *(Juanita Applegate sighs and reluctantly goes over the Mr. Grey away from the easels).*

Juanita Applegate: Just a moment. *(She walks over to stage right and picks up a telephone).*

Yes, Mr. Grey what was so important that you needed to interrupt my instruction with the class?

Principal Earl Grey: I wanted to make you aware that there have been some major budget cuts.

Juanita Applegate: I see. I'm failing to see where this conversation is headed.

Principal Earl Grey: Well as I said there have been some major budget cuts and unfortunately the art program will be reduced by half next semester. As a result, there is no funding available for the annual student art show. I'm very sorry.

Juanita Applegate: No money? Why are we just hearing about this now? The show is less than a month away and the students have been working extremely hard on their exhibits.

Principal Earl Grey: I have faith in you to develop a creative solution to this dilemma.

Juanita Applegate: Will our athletic department be receiving a similar cut in funding?

Principal Earl Grey: *(clearly flustered)* As you know Dear the football program...

Juanita Applegate: Ms. Applegate.

Principal Earl Grey: I beg your pardon?

Juanita Applegate: You may address me as Ms. Applegate.

Principal Earl Grey: (clearing his throat before beginning again): As you know Ms. Applegate, the football program is a revenue-generating enterprise and not only funds itself but several other athletic programs.

~~Juanita~~ Ms. Applegate: So some of these funds couldn't be used to fund the Art Show?

Principal Earl Grey: Unfortunately not. Again, I'm truly sorry that the funds will not be available this year. *(There is a sound of a heavy click and a loud ringtone. ~~Juanita~~ Ms. Applegate stares unbelievably at the receiver).*

Blackout. End Scene

Theorizing Act 2 Scene 7: Interlude:

Future so Bright I've Got to Wear Shades: Afrofuturism

“Wakanda forever” – the movie, Black Panther, is not only one of the highest selling movies in 2018 it also represents a phenomena in black culture. The script, written by Ta-Nehisi Coates, reimagines an African country that has not been colonized by Europe. Black people in this imagined world have their full agency with a mixture of technological advances and traditional rituals intact. It is a cooperative society of both men and women. The success and embracing of this film, particularly amongst people of color, represents our need to reimagine our future. As African Americans we have always held hope in our future. This hope could be heard in the Negro Spirituals, the Blues, Protest Songs, hip hop and now on the big screen.

Music and film are not the only spaces where Black folks reimagine their future. In this scene, the work of the afro futuristic artist, Ellen Gallagher is featured. Gallagher's Watery

Ecstatic series offers an “aquafuture through aquafuture through Afrofuturist aesthetics” (Chan, 2017). The series of paintings feature the

black Atlantic in counter-memories that reinscribe the historical murder of African women through a myth of their survival and transformation into aquatic beings. The artworks defy contemporary eliminations of, and assaults on, black lives to claim a spectacular present and posthuman future (Chan, 2017).



*Figure 2 Ellen Gallagher Watery Ecstatic Series 2004 12 drawings: watercolor, ink, oil, pencil and cut paper
dimensions variable*

Gallagher is purposeful and intentional in her work. She compares artists, art therapists and art educators as vessels who serve “clients.”

I seek the principal phenomenon of the spiritual blueprint. I find this phenomenon to be an accurate foundation and the deepest common denominator of my different overlapping professions. What is this spiritual blueprint? Every human being has a typical set of actions, likes and dislikes that make him/her him/herself. (Vella, 2016).

This commitment to the black aesthetic is mimicked in the teaching style of ~~Juanita~~ Ms. Applegate. Like Gallagher, Applegate is using art to help students to connect with the past, create a future, and discover themselves. Despite the medium or subject, this should be the objective of all teachers.

In reimagining the future, Applegate has a clear vision of the present. In this scene there is a power struggle between Ms. Applegate and the principal, Earl Grey. Applegate insists on being address with a title. This small struggle for recognition and respect represents the consistent fight that Black Women educators go through to be recognized as professionals inside of public education. As my mother says, “it’s never what you’re called but, what you answer to.” ~~Juanita~~ Ms. Applegate will answer to nothing less than her name.

CHAPTER FOUR: EXAMINING THE SEATS OF POWER FOR BLACK WOMEN

EDUCATORS THROUGH PLAYWRITING: PART III

Act 3, Scene 1: P.E.N. State

There are three rows of ten chairs facing the audience. Interspersed between the chairs are the rocking chair, the throne, the bench, the airline seat. Ifeta has made some progress with her chair. The base is constructed with no back. During this scene, she can be visibly seen working on the chair and trying to tape together directions. Principal Earl Gray voice is heard but he is never physically seen.

Principal Earl Grey: As many of you may be aware, the school board the school board met last night and has decided to partner with the Personal Education Network. This partnership will bring about a lot of exciting changes for the school. First beginning with our name. The name of our school will be changing from Mathilda Taylor Beasley High School to Personal Education Network Institute 1-38-12. The school will convert from a public school to a public-private charter school. We will be adopting the College Consulates' StartingLine curriculum. All teachers are invited to reapply for their jobs pending the results of the end of year review. We thank you for all that you do for the students here at P.E.N. Institute 1-38-12 where we are racing to the top!

Juanita Ms. Applegate: I tried to told ya'll don't trust it. What did I tell ya'll? He slicker than a can of oil.

Kenya Samuels: I've read about this "new" curriculum. It takes all of the autonomy away from the teachers and turns you into a glorified facilitator. It's like they don't trust us to teach. And what about the students? What will happen to them?

Dr. Abeni Williams: I love the kids and they are important but, what's going to happen to us?

You heard him we all have to reapply. And you know our system is rigged right now.

Who among us will qualify under the ever-changing year-end review rules?

~~Juanita~~ Ms. Applegate: I've been here long enough to know that the district does exactly what it wants to do. You can talk but the machine keeps rolling.

Ifeta Umar: I can't do this anymore (*Ifeta throws a wrench across the floor in frustration and begins crying over the broken pieces of the chair.*)

Kennedy Madison: It will be okay.

Madison Kennedy: Don't cry. I'm sure you'll get rehired.

Kennedy Madison: It's too soon to panic.

Ifeta Umar: I wasn't talking about my job. I was talking about this chair! Can someone help me?

Dr. Abeni Williams: Gotta go.

Kennedy Madison and Madison Kennedy: IEP Meeting, sorry.

Kenya Samuels: Parent Conference.

~~Juanita~~ Ms. Applegate: Baby, I'm not gonna lie to you. So I'll tell you the truth. I don't want to do that so I'm not staying. (*She turns and leaves Ifeta with a tool in her hand and a dumbfounded expression*). *The lights fade out. End Scene.*

Theorizing Act 3, Scene 1: Interlude

So You Just Gonna Take My Seat? School Reform without Teachers

"You don't even see what I can bring to the table ... [A]ll you do see is that I don't belong at your table."— Houston, Texas (Turner, 2016)

My road to becoming a teacher and maintaining an active teaching license was a detailed and government regulated process. I didn't simply manifest inside the classroom. I was part of the alternative pathway to teacher certification. I entered education as a second career and had

already earned a Bachelor's in English and a Masters in Mass Communications. I entered a Master's Program and student English Language Arts Education. Armed with this educational experience, I was awarded a provisional certification in English Language Arts. I worked for a full year inside of the classroom before completing my degree and being awarded my professional license.

Despite my official certification, at no time in my eight-year career have I been asked about laws, rules, and mandates that govern the daily practices inside my classroom. Often times, teachers have to talk back to authorities concerning issues like unfunded mandates, lack of instructional time etc. Many of these conflicts could be avoided if teachers were simply asked or even observed in a classroom setting.

Testing has become the barometer by which student success and teacher efficacy is measured. "If we determine success primarily by a test score, we miss those considerable intellectual achievements that aren't easily quantifiable. If we think about education largely in relation to economic competitiveness, then we ignore the social, moral, and aesthetic dimensions of teaching and learning" (Rose, Winter 2015). More importantly, if administrators, schools boards, and departments of education continue to have legislative conversations without bringing teachers to the table we will be open to looting by consultants, publishers and corporations whose guiding values and objectives may not align to our mission of educating students. The school reform movement has created a huge divide between teachers and legislators. Teachers have become the enemy and this adversarial relationship has a negative impact on students. "Scapegoating teachers has become so popular with policymakers and politicians, the media, and even members of the public that it has blurred the reality of what's really happening in education. What's more, it's eroding a noble profession and wreaking havoc on student learning"

(Long, 2012). This mistrust of teacher authority and expertise has made an impact on teacher leadership. There is a growing distrust of having teachers as principals and superintendents. Case in point, I work for Cobb County Schools and our current superintendent has zero educational backgrounds. He oversees the second largest school district in the state but, has never taught inside a classroom. The lack of confidence of teachers as leaders is even more prominent in the appointment of Betsy DeVos as the U.S. Secretary of Education. She entered this position with zero teaching experience but now is responsible for administering federal funding and enforcing federal educational laws for every public school in the United States.

This issue of a lack of trust for teachers becoming educational leaders is further complicated when mixing elements of gender and race. “Women make up 76 percent of teachers, 52 percent of principals, and 78 percent of central-office administrators, according to federal data and the results of a recent national survey” (Superville, 2016). Which means that even though men represent only 24 percent of teachers, almost double this amount, 46 percent are principals. When women of color seek out leadership positions the percentages are even lower. According to Deborah Jewell-Sherman, an African American woman, a former superintendent in the Richmond, VA, district, and professor at the Harvard Graduate School of Education states that race and gender complicate this issue of teacher leadership. "Part of it, I think, is race and gender. I think there is an additional burden for women of color in that role” (2016). While White female educators are not being invited to sit at the table of educational leadership, Black Women educators are still being forced to eat outside.

Act 3, Scene 2: Get Up, Stand Up!

The scene opens with two metal chairs. ~~Juanita~~ Ms. Applegate and Kenya Samuels enter from stage right. Kennedy Madison and Madison Kennedy enter from stage left carrying together a

standard metal bench. Ifeta Umar comes struggling in with a big box behind them. She arrives at center stage and dumps out the content of her box. All of the metal chair parts spill out on stage.

Ifeta takes a seat on the floor and begins to try to put her chair together. Ms. Applegate and Kenya Samuels sit in their metal chairs on both sides of Ifeta. Kennedy Madison and Madison Kennedy place their bench and sit behind Ifeta.

Juanita Ms. Applegate: I tried to told you.

Kenya Samuels: Yeah but I thought they would have at least heard from the community on the issue. I wasn't the only one there. Frank Jones

Dr. Abeni Williams: The community activist?

Kenya Samuels: Yes that Frank Jones. He gave a passionate speech for more community hearings and for the board to slow down and consider the ramifications of the decision. His words fell on death ears.

Ifeta Umar: So what's going to happen now? What do we do? (*says absentmindedly not looking up from her task*).

Kenya Samuels: It's time to fight but how?

Dr. Abeni Williams: I've got an idea but it requires some risk. We could get into a lot of trouble. Good and necessary trouble but, trouble nonetheless.

Kenya Samuels: You know I'm in.

Ifeta Umar: I'm in too. (*Throws down a metal piece and stands up*).

Kennedy Madison: I'm in.

Madison Kennedy: Kennedy?

Kennedy Madison: What Madison? There comes a time where you've got to get up and stand up.

Do you want to keep fighting the sun or do you want to do something that really makes a difference?

Madison Kennedy: (*she hesitates for a moment before responding*) Okay, I'm in too.

Dr. Abeni Williams: In order to make this work, we will need some supplies and a little man power. Or in our case woman power.

(*Abeni looks pointedly at Juanita Applegate*)

~~Juanita~~ Ms. Applegate: Now you already know!

Theorizing Act 3 Scene 2: Interlude:

Community othermothers AND political activism

Grassroots activism has always fueled movements. One can simply look to the Underground Railroad, the 1960s Civil Rights marches and sit-ins for just a few examples. Though these movements were popularized by a few they were sustained by community othermothers. "US Black women's experiences as other mothers provide a foundation for conceptualizing Black women's political activism. Experiences both of being nurtured as children and being held responsible for siblings and fictive kin within kin networks can stimulate a more generalized ethic of caring and personal accountability among African-American women. These women not only feel accountable to their own kin, they experience a bond with all of the Black community's children" (Hill Collins, 2000, p. 189). I would argue, that for Black Women educators the ethic and bond Hill Collins writes about extends to our classrooms. This Black mothering and development into what Hill Collins refers to as, "community othermothers" becomes the catalyst and motivation for the women inside of this play to take political action.

The Black Women educators in the proceeding scene have begun to take their place as political activists in the community. Deciding instead of accepting the status quo and oppression by the public school system that they would express their grievances with action.

Act 3, Scene 3: The Grey Areas

This scene opens with Skyler Jones, a local reporter. She is interviewing Mr. Earl Grey, principal. Unfortunately, Mr. Grey is out of town at a conference and is Skyping in for this interview using the School's auditorium. During this scene, Mr. Grey is in silhouette and his face is never shown.

Skyler Jones: Good Afternoon, I'm Skyler Jones reporting to you live from P.E.N. Institute number 1-38-12 formerly known as Taylor Beasley High School. Recently the school board has decided to convert this public high school to a public private partnership. While board members and local business leaders are excited about this change teachers, parents and students are extremely concerned. Some have argued that the district did not do enough to alert the public of this pending change. Others are concerned about what will happen to the students and the quality of the education when the school is converted. We have with us today Principal Earl Grey. Mr. Grey. *(The stage lights up and Mr. Grey is viewed in silhouette on a large screen behind Skyler Jones).* First, let me thank you for granting this interview with us. It is my understanding that you are currently at a School Innovations conference that focusses on school safety, multi-facility use and fundraising in Las Vegas, NV. Is that correct?

Principal Earl Grey: Yes that's correct. P.E.N. is dedicated to professional development of administration and staff.

Skyler Jones: What do you say about the upcoming changes to Taylor Beasley High School?

Principal Earl Grey: First of all Skyler, I hope you don't mind me calling you Skyler, I want to thank you for interviewing with me here today. We here at Personal Education Network Institute number 1-38-12 (*there is an emphasis on the name*) are ecstatic about the upcoming changes. We see this as an opportunity to streamline expenses and effectively provide a quality education for our students who are so deserving. Even now we are embracing the P.E.N. Institute motto: Pride, Endurance, and Nonresistance these are the pillars of socially responsible education. With this new partnership, there will be new updated technology and a state of the art facility.

Skyler Jones: I'm glad that you mentioned those interesting benefits, Mr. Grey. There are rumors that the new technology is being funded by a cut in teacher pay and that the new state of the art facility will actually be in a location across town, different from school's current home. What do you know about this allegations?

Principal Earl Grey (*says clearing his throat before beginning*): Right now the board is still in negotiations with the final details. It would be unfair for me to speak on any speculation at this time.

Skyler Jones: I understand Mr. Grey. I have one final question. There are also some who say that you were brought here specifically by the district to make an accounting of the school's assets rather than serve as an educational leader. I found in my research that you have no school experience prior to becoming principal at Taylor Beasley High School. Is this correct?

Principal Earl Grey: No, I would have to say that your statement is not 100% accurate Skyler. I am here with the best intentions for the students here at the Personal Education Network number 1-38-12 (*emphasis made on the new name*). While I have not run a school before

I do come with a special set of skills that make me uniquely qualified for this position.
(Principal Earl Grey is beginning to recite a diatribe but Skyler yanks the microphone away from him and turns back to the audience.)

Skyler Jones: Thank you, Principal Grey, for your time today. I'm Skyler Jones and we will keep you updated on this developing story. Now back to you in the studio Dave. *(The overhead screen goes black. Skyler is beginning to wrap the cord of the microphone She turns as though speaking to the audience).* Jacob, did we get that? Great, I'm ready to get out of here. This is not the best neighborhood. Wait do you here chanting?

Theorizing Act 3, Scene 3 Interlude:

The Myth of a Solution

Proponents of school reformers would have everyone believe that there is a magic bullet or solution that will “fix” America’s public schools. Snake oil salesmen in the guise of “new” curriculum, charter and private school advocates have all promised a cure to what ails the body of public education.

Over time, the charter movement has grown from individual schools created by groups with innovative education ideas to chains operated by charter-management organizations, some of them for profit companies. The number of for-profit education-management companies running charter schools increased from five to 99 between 1995 and 2012, and the number of schools they operate from six to 758. These education companies exert substantial influence on US policy-making. As Education Week reported in 2013, K12 Inc., the publicly traded online-charter company in which DeVos had been an investor, deployed 39 lobbyists in 2012 “to work for state and local policies that would help expand the use of virtual learning.” (Darling-Hammond, 2017).

What once began as a grassroots alternative has now transformed into big business. Charter schools have become an industry and now with the appointment of Betsy DeVos, there is no separation between public and private educational interests. The game is rigged and students, particularly low-income and minority students are left to suffer

. “...[T]est-punish-privatize has become the modus operandi of education ‘reformers.’ Tragically, the pressure to get bogged down in how well poorly charter schools perform based on these classification tools instead of focusing on their social economic and political aims nature results and benefactors continues to intensify” (Tell, 2016). Even the head of public education, DeVos shows a lack of confidence in public schools and puts all of her emphasis on innovation. She says, “I expect there will be more public charter schools. I expect there will be more private schools. I expect there will be more virtual schools. I expect there will be more schools of any kind that haven’t even been invented yet.” There is no indicator or mention of improving the system that is already in place. Or what would happen to students who would be unable to take advantage of these “new inventions.” Or even further, what would happen if or when these “new inventions” fail?

“

Act 3, Scene 4: CompKnee (Company)

Madison Kennedy: CompKnee

Kennedy Madison: Words from our ancestors

Madison Kennedy: Wisdom from the sages

Kennedy Madison: Mama used to always tell me

Madison Kennedy: Chile be careful of the compknee you keep

Kennedy Madison: According to her,

Madison Kennedy: Every word from yo mouth, every seed u sow

Kennedy Madison: Youse gone reap!

Madison Kennedy: Don't hang your hopes on no pigeon talk! She'd say

Kennedy Madison: Youse sposed to fly wit eagles

Madison Kennedy: And eagles don't got no time for pigeons

Kennedy Madison: See pigeons fly to low and can't see what eagles see

Madison Kennedy: Pigeons eat scrapes and beg in da park

Kennedy Madison: Eagles self-made and hunt down dey prey

Madison Kennedy: Dey enterprizing like

Kennedy Madison: Dey don't wait fo permission

Madison Kennedy and Kennedy Madison: Eagles Takes!

Theorizing Act 3, Scene 4 Interlude:

Beating Out Our Own Rhythm: Self Identification and Black Women Teachers

the drum

daddy says the world

is a drum tight
and hard
and I told him
i'm gonna beat out
my own rhythm
(Giovanni, 2003)

While I am sure Giovanni has a different intended meaning for her poem, I interpret the “daddy” as what hooks refers to as the “white supremacist capitalist patriarchy” and Black women educators are the “i” who must find their own voice and agency and thus beat out their own rhythm. It is not happenstance, that the two characters who are joined together are the ones to speak and address this idea of self-identification. One wise Black women educator shared a secret with me one time, “Dawn, don’t ask for permission, ask for forgiveness.” It took me a little while in education, to understand exactly what she was trying to share with me. It is important that educators, Black women especially use the level of autonomy and power that they currently hold.

Act 3, Scene 5: The Revolution will be Streamed Live on Social Media

Kennedy Madison, Madison Kennedy, Ifeta Umar, and ~~Juanita~~ Ms. Applegate are marching across the stage with the curtains closed. They are holding protest signs with various messages:

“Hurt our Schools, Hurt our Future!” “Make America Think Again!” “I am a Proud Product of Public Schools!” “SAVE Taylor Beasley!” They are chanting the following phrase in unison:

“Hey! Hey! Ho! Ho! P.E.N has got to go! Hey Hey! Hey! Ho! Ho! P.E.N. has got to go!

The curtain opens to reveal several tents on stage. Dr. Abeni Williams is behind a long table setting up what appears to be a buffet of food. Kenya Samuels is placing cards on a dry erase board marked: Unconferencing Schedule Day 3. The cards have topics like Financial Planning 101, A Literary Analysis of 4:44, Writing You Can Use, Chemistry and Cosmetology, The Physics behind Plumbing, Meditation, and Mediation

Skyler Jones: Its Skyler Jones here reporting again at Taylor Beasley High School. Over the past three days the protest against the conversion of public school, Taylor Beasley into a public-private partnership charter school, in conjunction with Personal Education Network has evolved into a movement. What began as a few teachers and staff members protesting outside of the building has transformed into a coalition of teachers, students, parents, and the community at large. The school has been running for the past three days under protest. Despite being locked out of the building due to what the local school board officials cite as safety concerns. Teachers and staff members have arrived daily and are teaching students in makeshift outdoor classrooms. Lunch has even been provided by several local restaurant owners and vendors. Social media shows that #WeStandWithTaylorBeasley and #MakeAmeriaThinkAgain are currently trending on

Twitter. According to a statement released earlier today from Charles Younger, newly appointed Public Relations Director for the Personal Education Network:

The Personal Education Network is committed to making our partnership with the school district work. We believe that we are the victims of fake news and a hate-filled media campaign by leftist extremists. These outside agitators will not detour us from our mission to provide socially responsible education. We are driven by a core set of values of pride, endurance and nonresistance. This brief interruption will not stop us. We look forward to having a fair opportunity to work our magic here as we have done in other schools across the nation. We invite the community to discover the real facts concerning our initiatives at PENmagic.com

Despite, P.E.N.'s objections to the contrary, there have been several reports that the company has had difficulties proving long-term effectiveness in local communities even one pending lawsuit for discrimination. P.E.N. representative Charles Younger, had declined to appear on camera and has refused to comment on any ongoing litigation but continued to express P.E.N.'s commitment to providing a first-class education that prepares our students to be the workers of tomorrow. Younger insists that the curriculum StartingLine curriculum sponsored by P.E.N. is designed to prepare students for the workforce and instill a sense of hope about their prospects for the future. This is a sound bite from our earlier interview with Younger:

Charles Younger (voiceover is heard): In addition to education, we partner with captains of

industry. We have asked them: what do you need to see in your future workforce? With their responses in mind, our students graduate with a competitive edge that will help them secure jobs and a stable future not only for themselves but their families. Furthermore...

Skyler Jones: Thank you Mr. Younger, aren't you a graduate of Taylor Beasley High School?

Some would say that you were successful based on the current structure and curriculum.

Why are you advocating for a change now?

Charles Younger: The fact is things have changed drastically since I first walked the hallowed halls of Taylor Beasley however, the business of how education is done has not. Yes, Skyler me being an alumnus of Taylor Beasley is exactly why I'm invested in making sure that this school, this community is equipped with a 21st-century classroom that prepares our students to be competitive in the marketplace.

Skyler Jones: Mr. Younger thank you for your time today. We will continue to monitor this developing story. Dave back to you in the studio.

Skyler Jones runs her palm under her chin making a silent cut sign. She begins to roll up the cord of her microphone and she exits stage left. Juanita Applegate walks downstage left and looks at the audience. At this point, she is speaking to directly to an audience member sizing them up and down. up to them as Skyler is leaving. She looks Charles up and down as she is sizing him up.

~~Juanita~~ Ms. Applegate: Charles Moses fancy meeting you here.

Charles Younger: Nobody calls me that. My friends call me C. That reporter Mr. Younger. The kids call me Lil Youngin.

~~Juanita~~ Ms. Applegate: Exactly the kids. So do you really think this institution of yours, this "P.E.N." is really the best thing for Taylor Beasley?

Charles Younger: Yes, yes I do. Let me ask you a question: don't you think this school needs some upgrades?

Juanita Ms. Applegate: Of course we do! We're a public school. Needing upgrades is par for the course but, at what cost? There are certain things that money can't teach. Education, real education is not about money.

Charles Younger: (*scoffs*) like what?

Juanita Ms. Applegate: Lived experience. Experience is the greatest teacher. And I am experienced enough to know that for you this is bigger than wanting the "best" for Taylor Beasley. What is this really all about, son?

Charles Younger: (*the voice becoming more agitated*) What do you mean?

Juanita Ms. Applegate: What do you have to gain from your partnership with P.E.N.? What's in it for you? Why are you letting this big faceless organization use you as their mouthpiece? I taught you to think better than that. I know you. This isn't you, not the real you anyway.

Charles Younger: What do you know really? Stop all that Black Mama semantics and bullshit. Fuck you know bout me?

Juanita Ms. Applegate: There it is, I was waiting for the real you to show up. You never liked to conform. You never liked the status quo. It's a trait we share. It is more than ironic that you pushing down our throats now. When you were running these halls, learning was the furthest thing from yo mind. If it wasn't bout money, power and respect you weren't interested.

Flashback: Stage goes dark and a spotlight appears on the upper stage left with Ms. A (a younger Juanita Ms. Applegate standing behind a canvas staring down at a young man in

silhouette. Just like the older Charles, the Younger Younger is never physically seen by the audience.

Ms. A: Charles Moses I think you've got something real here but you gonna have to put more time into it to make that vision come to life.

Younger Younger: Ms. A, I just don't think this art thing is for me.

Ms. A: Bullshit.

Younger Younger: Excuse me?

Ms. A: I said B-U-L-L-SHIT! Art isn't a thing for you. It is something that you are. It's a part of you. Not every student that I teach is a natural artist but, you. You've got something special.

Younger Younger: We'll special won't pay the bills. Ms. A I've got real problems. My mom just got lost her job at the plant. I don't have extra time after school I've got to pick up extra hours so I can help out at home. Art is a luxury that I can't afford.

Ms. A: What about the art show? We could still enter your work? It's well brilliant.

Younger Younger: I'm sorry Ms. A but I just can't. That's what I came to tell you. I just can't.

Younger Younger runs off stage exiting right running past the present day Juanita Applegate and the present day Charles Younger.

Ms. A: (yells) Charles! Charles Moses!

The lights dim on Ms. A and she exits stage left. The lights are now still on Juanita Applegate and Charles Younger.

Charles Younger: Life is never filled with easy choices.

~~Juanita~~ Ms. Applegate: You can sell that to someone else cause I ain't buying. Charles Moses, you had a gift, a rare gift, and you choose not to use it. Do you know how you were awarded that art scholarship you rejected your senior year?

Charles Younger: (puzzled) No, I don't. I didn't even apply.

~~Juanita~~ Ms. Applegate: No *you* didn't. For you to be so bright you can be real stupid. You never came back to get that last art piece. And I knew you had a gift even if you couldn't see it. I just knew that when you had a choice between scholarships at an art school and that business college that you would make the decision with your heart and not your head.

Charles Younger: I was young and I wasn't just thinking about me. I might not do art anymore but, I make enough money to take care of my family too. I know this might not have been the future either of us dreamed but know that I have good intentions.

~~Juanita~~ Ms. Applegate: Good intentions pave the road to Hell.

Theorizing Act 3, Scene 5 Interlude:

Chickens Coming Home to Roost: Teachers and Protest

According to the old proverb, curses are like chickens, they always come home to roost. In a similar manner, the attack on public school teachers has consequences. There is a teacher shortage and Black women educators are leaving at a higher rate than their counterparts, despite their effectiveness in the classroom (Ingersoll, *Who Controls Teacher's Work? Power and Accountability in America's Schools*, 2003). The teachers that remain in the classroom are surrounded by increased surveillance, mistrust coupled with an increase in responsibility and expectations. In addition to educational duties, teachers are asked to be counselors, mediators, first responders, and most recently weapon wielding security. All under the attack of accusations of being derelict in our primary responsibility of teaching.

“Attacks on teachers are also attacks on the ideas, not only the symbolic ones but literal ideas concerning the purpose of education in a pluralistic democracy. If schools are forced to compete for students, if students and families are forced to choose, and if teachers are forced to teach to the curriculum that is prescribed to them, not only will education suffer, but so, in turn, will ideas. Historically it is this social space that is provided in the public sphere, the location for idea generation that has moved mountains. Ideas, emergent in the public school, have been contested, struggled over, fought for, implemented and ultimately enacted upon...and we dare not let them slip away unexamined and unchallenged” (Giordani, 2013).

Teachers have remained silent for far too long. And it is only a matter of time before the teachers who have remained loyal to public education begin to fight for our place. The preceding scene is a small example of how one form of protest might manifest. It mimics the revolutionary acts that took place in *Standing Rock* and *Freedom Square*. In both protest sites, there were forms of schooling taking place to educate the young people that were present during the protest. Standing Rock’s school grew out of growing concerns to educate the community on tribal rituals and practices. “The goal at first was to ‘gather all these knowledge keepers and let them share their knowledge,’ but as the protests lingered on into the fall the camp created a makeshift school of its own. Called the Defenders (or Protectors) of the Water School, it aims to provide education for students from kindergarten to eighth grade” (Mundhl, 2016). The schooling options during the Freedom Square protest, an eight-day occupation of Homan Square in Chicago, IL adopted a more organic and informal model. “At the site, they have built a makeshift library for the local community, serve free food with a grill they try to have burning “around the clock” and provide tents for anyone who wants to join the demonstration to stay the night” (Staord, 2016). Both

examples should the power of schooling in times of protest. They stretched the definition of who, what, where, when and how schooling can take place. There were no formal certifications, no one asked permission of a higher monitoring authority, there was no prescribed curriculum only a need for education and a willingness of those involved to share what they knew.

The continual attacks on public school educators will not go unanswered.

Policy-makers from both parties have asked teachers to support stricter checks on their autonomy, even though they've cut the professional development and support services that help teachers teach. It is remarkable that teachers don't protest more—but that probably has to do with how busy most of them are doing one of the toughest jobs in America (Goldstein, 2012).

What will be remarkable is not that teachers don't protest more but that when we do mobilize and have a national protest the impact and change that we will make for ourselves and the students we serve will be truly extraordinary.

Act 3, Scene 6: Concessions and Confessions

The scene opens with Kennedy Madison, Madison Kennedy, Ifeta Umar, Dr. Abeni Williams, Kenya Samuels and Juanita Applegate standing in a single file line in front of a metal detector. Each educator is pushing the same metal office chair. There is a security guard with a wand standing. Before walking through, each character removes metal articles of clothing earrings, necklaces, and shoes. The chair is pushed around the metal detector by the security guard before each character enters. During the scene, the security guard motions individual characters to walk through the metal detector. Some or even patted down as a result.

Kenya Samuels: Well at least the school is back open.

Juanita Ms. Applegate: Yeah, but at what cost?

Dr. Abeni Williams: We still have our jobs.

Juanita Ms. Applegate: For now, and what about all these new security measures? (*Ms. Applegate points to her security badge and the security guard as he pats down Madison Kennedy*)

Dr. Abeni Williams: They claim it is there to make us safer.

Juanita Ms. Applegate: I think it is just a way to monitor our movements to back us more
 “nonresistant.”

Dr. Abeni Williams: You read through that new curriculum yet?

Kenya Samuels: Read through it how can you avoid it? We have had three professional learning days spent on learning how to facilitate the texts. In all my years of teaching, I have never needed this much training on a textbook. Did you hear about the new proposal before the board?

Dr. Abeni Williams: No, I've been too busy compiling reports and data for Mr. Grey. What happened now?

Kenya Samuels: The district is considering a proposal by P.E.N. to convert our school to a multi-use facility. They claim it will save money and make the building more efficient.

Dr. Abeni Williams: I have heard of some districts doing this. What are they going to do? Rent out the building to the public after hours? Partner with a business?

Kenya Samuels: It's another partnership alright. They are talking about developing an agreement with Consolidated Corrections.

~~Juanita~~ Ms. Applegate: I beg your pardon. You talking bout the private company that runs the Youth Detention center?

Kenya Samuels: The very one. They want to divide up the building and use a portion of it for the school, a portion of it for social services (though when I reviewed the plan online it looked like it the facility would only house probation officers), and for work release prisoners.

Dr. Abeni Williams: Now I believe that our district is capable of a great many things but this goes above and beyond anything I could have ever dreamed or imagined.

Kenya Samuels: There's a board meeting concerning the proposal next week. I'm going. What say you?

~~Juanita~~ Ms. Applegate: I'll go.

Theorizing Act 3, Scene 6 Interlude:

School to Prison Pipeline, Literally

During this scene, the audience discovers that the former public school Taylor Beasley has now been converted to not only a private charter school but there is a proposal to turn the

school into a multi-use facility. The audience can notably see symbols of heightened security and conformity. There is a metal detector, and unlike previous scenes, all of the educators have the same exact chair. Prisons are not known for cultivating individuality or creativity thus the scene and the characters props are standardized. Regardless of who you are, you all receive a heightened level of scrutiny and oversight in the name of law and order. “The school-to-prison pipeline (STPP) refers to a path from the education system to the juvenile or adult criminal justice system“ (McCarter, 2017). Acclimation to a prison environment begins with the controlling of bodies inside of public schools. Prison culture and Public School culture share shocking similarities to movement, monitoring even lunchroom procedures and activities.

Despite this symbiotic relationship, “school districts and juvenile courts in the United States were never intended to operate in a collaborative paradigm. Unfortunately, over the past 30 years, a partnership between schools and courts has developed through a punitive and harmful framework, to the detriment of many vulnerable children and adolescents” (Mallett, 2016). Students are conditioned to accept this level of oversight as children and unfortunately many make a seamless transition over to prison culture. There is no room in public education for making mistakes.

a nationwide phenomenon that criminalizes student misbehaviors and then uses punitive consequences that tend to push children into the prison systems. Zero tolerance policies—regulations that require specific punishments for outlined student misbehaviors, many times without accounting for the unique circumstances of an incident—are one of the school-to-prison pipeline’s main contributors (Ruiz, 2017).

Standardized prescriptive responses to behavior versus individualized care are condemning students before they are even fully developed. Students are not the only ones anesthetized in this process, we as educators, have become willing participants in this system as well.

Act 3, Scene 7: Lee Manuel's Chair

Ifeta Umar enters from stage left to find Juanita Applegate staring at an intricate golden stool on center stage.

Ifeta Umar: Oh my that's absolutely beautiful. Where did you get this from?

Juanita Ms. Applegate: Do you know Lee Manuel Daniels?

Ifeta Umar: Yes, he was a student of mine last semester.

Juanita Ms. Applegate: Well, he submitted this as his entry for this year's art show. He called it Golden: the soul of the people.

Ifeta Umar: For real? This is inspiring.

Juanita Ms. Applegate: We still should have the audacity to hope.

Lights fade. End scene.

Theorizing Act 3, Scene 7 Interlude:

I'm Not Your Friend, I'm Your Teacher: Self-Actualization and Engaged Pedagogy

During my first year as a high school English teacher, I taught a student named Marvin. His passing of my class was certainly a joint effort. Despite his repeated attempts to procrastinate, disengage and disrupt the learning process. Needless to say, we had several public and private conversations about engagement and arriving to class with a readiness to learn. As closing and reflecting activity, I asked all of my students to write me a letter. They could discuss anything they wanted concerning my teaching or the class structure in general. I vowed that I

would not read the letters until after I had posted their final grades and that they would receive credit for simply turning in the assignment. A few days after posting grades and enjoying my winter break, I began to read the letters from my students. The one from Marvin stood out. His letter was short and direct: *Ms. Whipple, you were out three days this semester and you really shouldn't miss class. It is not the same when you are not here.* I had no idea how Marvin felt about my presence in class. I assumed by his lack of response and changed behavior that I had simply become background noise to him. His words to me changed my entire perspective on how I work with students who do not readily respond to me. I have made a resolute effort to remain committed to engaged pedagogy even if the results are not instantly apparent.

bell hooks describes the circular nature of engaged pedagogy saying, “I journey with students as they progress in their lives beyond our classroom experience. In many ways, I continue to teach them, even as they become more capable of teaching me. The important lesson is that we learn together, the lesson that allows us to move together within and beyond the classroom, is one of mutual engagement” (hooks b. , *Teaching to Transgress*, 1994). However, she notes that the results of engaged pedagogy may not happen within an actual class but, the impact may sometimes be seen long after the course is over.

This continued cycle of learning is what happens between Ifeta Umar and Lee Manuel. The audience might infer from her lesson in Act 2, Scene 2: *The Soul of a People* that Umar’s intended message was lost in translation or not fully understood. Lee Manuel’s creation of his own golden stool demonstrates that he not only understood but is now creating and commanding his own seat of power. As teachers, our greatest hope is that students not only learn lessons but are able to take those lessons and use them to empower themselves with their own voice and their own agency.

Act 3, Scene 8: This Too Shall Pass

This scene opens with Skyler Jones standing downstage center and staring directly at the audience. All of the teachers are standing upstage left in a single file line staring dejectedly at the audience. Each one of them is dressed in some form of black or grey. They have the appearance of mourners. There is a ribbon being held by two posts directly placed center stage. Mr. Earl Grey and Mr. Charles Moses Younger are standing on either side of the ribbon.

Skyler Jones: Today marks a significant change for Personal Education Network number 1-12-

38. This will be the first multi-facility of its kind in the country. The building will house a school, probation office, and a work-release program. According to P.E.N representatives, the newly renovated facility marks a new partnership between government and business all while saving the school district millions of dollars. You can see the official ribbon cutting ceremony right behind me. *(Skyler steps to the stage left and the audience can now see Mr. Earl Grey smiling broadly and cutting the ribbon with an oversized pair of scissors. Mr. Charles Younger pulls on a string and the new name of the school is revealed PEN Institute with the words Pride, Endurance and Nonresistance printed boldly underneath. The women solemnly exit the stage and place flowers in front of a memorial black of Mathilda Taylor Beasley before leaving).* The school board has confirmed the new official name of this facility will be the PEN Institute. We will keep you updated as this story develops.

Theorizing Act 3, Scene 8 Interlude:

Blurred Boundaries: Pipeline to Penitentiary

This scene is a short glimpse into the complete collapse of the school to prison pipeline. The institution has morphed into a total exchange between school and prison. Both institutions have been monetized through the curriculum, food vendors, and outsourcing of staff services like janitorial and food providers. It is the next logical step in the evolution of punitive pedagogy.

harsh and inflexible discipline on the basis of zero-tolerance policies does not incorporate mitigating information, historical context, or other family or student factors in determining the decisions of the school administration or school resource officers. These decisions are, for most incidents, predetermined, and for many disadvantaged and at-risk students, they only make their school experiences and chances for graduation more difficult (Mallett, 2016).

While this is a fictionalized scenario in Scene 8, the concept of money being the determining factors for public education and the industrial prison complex is undeniable. More importantly, the adverse results on students who become adults within these two systems are in many cases irreversible.

Act 3, Scene 9: The Electric Chair

This scene opens with each women standing by their original chair from the opening scene.

Kenya Samuels: The changes were subtle.

Dr. Abeni Williams: The shift in control was incremental.

Ifeta Umar: And what was the most genius invention of this scheme is that I was made an implicit partner within my own demise.

Juanita Ms. Applegate: You made me the judge, jury, and executioner.

Madison Kennedy: I am the oppressed

Kennedy Madison: And the oppressor.

Ifeta Umar: You convince yourself that things will get better.

Dr. Abeni Williams: I just need to try harder in order to perfect.

Kenya Samuels: It won't happen again.

Juanita Ms. Applegate: There are promises that changes will be made and it will get better.

Ifeta Umar: And you naively believe until the inevitable slap in the face.

Dr. Abeni Williams: Promise broken.

Kenya Samuels: Trust destroyed.

Madison Kennedy: Control taken.

Kennedy Madison: No, not taken control given.

Dr. Abeni Williams: Power freely given like a cheap transaction completely devalued.

Skyler Jones (Skyler Jones enters the stage and stands downstage left. She faces the audience

and begins to speak.): We have breaking news tonight at PEN Institute. In a shocking

turn of events, the institute will conduct its first execution tonight. A few may remember

that after a contentious public battle Taylor Beasley High school was converted into a multi-facility that housed a school, probation services, and a work-release program. Over the years, the school has since increased its multi-use capacity to housing a full detention center for youth offenders. As many of our long-time viewers know. LeeManuel Daniels, a graduate of PEN Institute and the local artist was involved in the fatal shooting of Officer Pete O'Malley. Critics of the case claim that Daniels was an innocent victim who was simply in the wrong place at the wrong time. According to reports, Daniels was approached by O'Malley after leaving the Ellen Gallagher Art Exhibit. O'Malley was conducting an undercover investigation of a local drug ring. Unfortunately, the altercation soon turned deadly. Daniels maintains that he shot O'Malley in self-defense and that he never identified himself as an officer. After several months, the appeals made by Daniels defense attorney have been denied.

The curtains open to a black stage. A spotlight emerges and shines on a small wooden chair with a high back. In the background, "Redbone" by Childish Gambino plays. Starting low at first and then becoming louder. Behind the chair is a row of each chair presented during the prologue. Each teacher is standing beside her respective chair. Each character removes an item from her chair which becomes additional contraptions to the center chair. As the assembly is happening in almost a ritualistic fashion. Where each person seems to be bowing towards the chair before adding her additional offering. In the end, the chair is visually seen to the audience as an electric chair. The electric chair voice is a deep tenor female voice. That speaks in a decidedly slow and methodical tone. The voice should feel devious and motherly at the same time.

The Electric Chair: There is a spotlight above me. I know you think the light is for you but, it is all for me. It has always been for me. See how they stare at me with awe and reverence. Your every waking existence has led you to this point, this time, the here and now. You always thought you were the hero only to be revealed as the villain. Upon reflection, you see how each of them made offerings and contributed to your demise. Never fear, you're not alone. I've been waiting for you. The choices were subtle and you were convinced made of your own volition. I know you think you're in prison now but in actuality, you have been imprisoned all of your life. Taylor Beasley was nearly the training ground. It started off simple enough. A detention here, a suspension there, a bully there, a racist prison guard here. One restriction here and another one there. One misstep and then another. I knew if I was patient that this day would come and so I waited.

Freedom for you is but a mere vapor. I thought of what you once had. You even believed that you could become the protagonist of the play that is your life. Some sort of tragic hero turned good. What life? You left the land of the living the moment you crossed the threshold into Brigham Young Prison. Happy is not how this tale is going to end.

The pursuit of happiness is for me alone. Oh, Happy Day! You are here. Surprisingly, I am the only one who rejoices in your presence. Your back trembles against me. I smell your fear; it is thick and heavy in the air. Your arms and legs rest in my restraints. The feeling you have is well for lack of better words, electric.

“You can't see it/It's electric!/You gotta feel it/It's electric!/Ooh, its shocking/ It's electric!.../ You gotta know it/ It's electric/...Now you can't hold it/It's electric...but you

know it's there, yeah here there everywhere.” (Livingston, 1990) You will come to the light. Peace be still, you will be filled with my light, my fire and embraced by my darkness. *(The stage goes dark and then light fills the stage. Each woman is positioned around Ifeta Umar who is holding LeeManuel's limp body in her arms. These two should be positioned like Mary and Jesus from the sculpture from the La Pieta created by Michelangelo Buonarroti. The women are all draped in African prints. The faces of everyone is somber and the lights fade to black and the curtain closes).*



The End.

Theorizing Act 3, Scene 9 Interlude

It Takes a Village

The Old African adage says, “it takes a village to raise a child.” What happens when the village is dysfunctional and the women of the village are too busy focusing on their own survival to raise any of the children? This is the case in this final scene. While each of the women in this school continues to create a self-identity, build relationships with one another, struggle against forces of oppression their students are doing the same. And sometimes the oppression wins.

What is striking in this scene is that the women do not enter with clean hands, as much as they are oppressed they are also part of the oppression. Each of their chairs is a part of the electric chair that is used to ultimately sentence and kill Lee Manuel. In a larger sense, the school to prison pipeline has become an assembly line where oppression is handed down like an inheritance.

Criminalization of Young Black Scholars

The criminalization of young Black scholars begins with formal schooling. “black children make up 18 percent of preschoolers, but makeup nearly half of all out-of-school suspensions. (We're talking mostly four-year-olds, people.)” (NPR Code Switch Podcast, 2014). One should question what type of offenses are four-year-old people committing that would be suspension worthy? The study found that the infractions in question were minor and typical of the social behavior of four-year-olds like hitting, biting and throwing items. Unfortunately, this focus on Black bodies begins a downward trajectory. “[K]ids who are suspended or expelled from school are more likely to drop out, and those dropouts are more likely to end up with criminal records. In many places, school discipline pushes kids directly into the juvenile justice system” (NPR Code Switch Podcast, 2014). Observations of “suspicious behavior” demonstrate a bias towards punishing and policing students of color.

“Disproportionately, Black males are caught in the criminal justice system at rates higher than other racial and ethnic groups. The number of Black males completing high school has been on a steady decline. The number of Black males entering college and completing baccalaureate degrees has been in free fall for the past quarter of a century. Increasingly, Black males have become the one group ill-equipped to participate in professional occupations requiring the ability to demonstrate higher order thinking” (Hill & Lee, 2010). Black girls are not exempt from their

own experiences of being filtered from public education to the prison industrial complex. “...[N]early 48 percent of Black girls who are expelled nationwide do not have access to educational services. Black girls are 16 percent of the female student population, but nearly one-third of all girls referred to law enforcement and more than one-third of all female school-based arrests. The criminalization of Black girls is much more than a street phenomenon. It has extended into our schools, disrupting one of the most important protective factors in a girl’s life: her education” (Morris, 2018). This leads to a cannibalistic relationship where the prison system feeding off of what the public education system produces. No matter the individual power of Black women educators the system asserts more with dire and deadly consequences.

CHAPTER FIVE: VIP SEATING: REFLECTIONS ON MY INQUIRY

In my dissertation inquiry, I explore the seats of power held by Black women educators in secondary education public schools in Georgia. Theoretically building upon such works as Black feminist thought (Hill Collins, 2000, e.g., hooks, 1981;), womanism (Walker, 2004; Phillips, 2006), critical race theory (Bell, 1992; Delgado, 1989), and engaged pedagogy (hooks, 1994), I create a play to explore the oppression experienced by Black women educators who empower themselves for the benefit of students, in some cases abdicate their power, and in a few instances use their power to oppress others (Freire, 1970). The play is crafted based upon government legislations, public meeting notes, newspaper articles, textbooks and other artifacts. I also use reflective notes, daily conversations, journal entries, and other artifacts to fictionalize the counterstories of the Black women educators in public schools. I challenge the metanarrative of “failing public schools” filled with “ineffective” teachers. Playwriting enables me to answer August Wilson’s call for: honesty, purpose, and Black aesthetics (Bryer & Hartig, 2006) in all playwrights.

In this chapter, I explore nine meanings that emerged from my dissertation inquiry: (1) Black feminist thought empowers Black women educators and their students. (2) “White supremacist capitalist patriarchy” (hooks, 1981) suppresses both students and teachers and provokes Black women educators into acts of liberation and protest (3) Black mothering in the classroom represents both power and weakness for Black women educators. (4) Black women educators, who “talk back” (hooks, 1989), battle White resistance and White fatigue that leads to Black exhaustion. (5) Self-definition (Hill Collins, 2000) and self-actualization (hooks, 1994) empower Black women educators to transgress all form of oppressions to engage in pedagogical praxis (Freire, 1970). (6) The *assault on public schools* (Watkins, 2011) *deskills* (Apple, 1982)

teachers and disempowers Black women educators. (7) The school to prison pipeline is changing drastically into the school prison complex, where schools become prisons and students become parolees. (8) Oppositional knowledge (Hill Collins, 2000) and Afrofuturism (Dery, 1993) empower Black women educators to reexamine a complicated past, create a better present, and invent a brighter future for all. (9) I transgress traditional research inquiries to create a play to tell “hidden” and “silenced narratives” of Black women educators by engaging in *personal~passionate~participatory* inquiry for social justice (He & Phillion, 2008).

Black feminist thought empowers Black women educators and their students (**Meaning 1**). This is evidenced in Act 2, Scene 2: The Soul of a People, where Ifeta Umar goes beyond the prescribed curriculum to give her students an engaging and historically relevant lesson. Umar uses the legend of the Ashanti people to share information on history, culture and spirituality. Black feminists, “point out, the distortions and omissions of traditional curricula [that] damage not only Black people...[but] all people” (Watkins, 2011). The subject of the lesson is of particular importance given the level of ignorance concerning the continent of Africa. Recently the 45th president was cited as referring to Haiti and African nations as “shithole countries” (Vitali, Hunt, & Thorp, 2018). While this extreme level of ignorance is shocking and appalling from the president of the United States, what is even more shocking are the American citizens who accept this uniformed opinion as fact. Black feminism seeks to directly combat this level of ignorance. The liberating practices of Black feminist educators serves as counter narratives to resist and dismantle sexist, racist and classicist beliefs (Watkins, 2011). This liberating practice is a benefit for everyone.

“White supremacist capitalist patriarchy” (hooks, 1981) suppresses both students and teachers and provokes Black women educators into acts of liberation and protest (**Meaning 2**).

The *white supremacist capitalist patriarchy* is embedded both inside and outside of the classroom. Black students are targeted and disciplined beginning in pre-school. “Black children make up 18 percent of preschoolers, but make up nearly half of all out-of-school suspensions” (NPR Code Switch Podcast, 2014). Black students are targeted and disciplined consistently from pre-K to 12th grade. Public schools represent an indoctrination and reinforcement of the power and oppression of the white supremacist capitalist patriarchy.

Students are not the only ones who suffer under this oppressive force. Black women educators suffer under this oppressive weight and an alarming number are choosing to leave the classroom entirely (Ingersoll & Henry, 2011). For Black women educators who choose to stay, their teaching has become a political act. As evidenced by the aforementioned, Ifeta Umar in act 2, scene 2: *The Soul of a People*. But also demonstrated in Juanita Applegate’s struggle for art materials and demands for respect in act 2, scene 7. Applegate is told that her budget for the upcoming art show is being eliminated with no options for redress. In addition, Applegate demands that Principal Earl Grey call her “Ms. Applegate” after her tries calling her “Dear”. Grey is visually shaken by the demand but complies. Applegate’s insistence on mutual respect shifts the structure of the entire play. For the remaining of the work she is referred to as ~~Juanita~~ Ms. Applegate. This is a metaphor for how the needs and demands of Black women educators are begrudgingly addressed. At times, the system acquiesces to our demands for respect and support but there is an undercurrent of resentment. Nevertheless, Ms. Applegate demands to be addressed with respect. This demand for respect is a defining and liberating act. My mother said it this way, “It’s not what you are called, but what you answer to.” It is important that Black women educators liberate themselves. We cannot be in control of what we are called, but we can liberate ourselves by what calls we answer.

These political acts, both small and great, will eventually spill out of the classroom and into the community. The fictionalized three day school protest described in the play was modeled from two non-school related protests at Standing Rock and Freedom Square. Recently West Virginia teachers, walked out of their classrooms with demands for better pay and health care benefits, and nine school days later teachers, “wangled a 5 percent pay increase from their elected leaders. Their victory came after walking off the job in all 55 counties of this poor Appalachian mountain state to protest some of the lowest pay for their profession in the country” (Ra, 2018). The gains made through this mini-rebellion could very well serve as an inspirational model for teachers around the country. It is only a matter of time as the oppression of the white supremacist capitalist patriarchy grows within public schools and provokes more acts of liberation and protest.

Black mothering in the classroom represents both power and weakness for Black women educators (**Meaning 3**). It represents both a blessing and a curse. The pedagogy of Black mothering is praised in public schools but it is not respected. It is viewed more as a phenomena and not an actual cultivated practice. Similar to the social media hashtag, #BlackGirlMagic, if it is magic, then it is not real. It is merely a manifestation that doesn’t involve mindfulness, intellect or commitment. Black mothering becomes a fetish that others can marvel at but not an expectation or standard that teachers, all teachers can be held accountable for enacting in classrooms.

In the recent Alabama special election the hashtag, #ThankYouBlackWomen began trending on Twitter. In the Senate race between Roy Moore and Doug Jones, Black women played a significant role in Doug Jones’s election to the Senate seat. When we work together Black women’s power is more than magic it has a political power that should be welded and

cultivated to push an agenda that promotes our concerns and the concerns of our community. Our political agenda must extend further than our own classrooms because the challenges that permeate our classrooms are much larger than the individual students that we teach. “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” (King, Jr. , 1963). As Black women educators we should seek to not only fight for causes that are important to us personally but continuously support other issues that seek to lessen the impact of oppression and contribute to the cause of social justice for all. In doing so, we may experience academic lynching or worse but we will also build alliances.

Black women educators understand that Black mothering is an intentional action not a performance. Black mothering in many ways represents a form of “Black Tax.” This accepted urban myth that postulates that Black folks have to work twice as hard to get half as much. In this manner, Black women educators are using Black mothering to embrace culturally relevant pedagogy, make and build relationship with all students, and combat power structures of race, class and gender. This goes above and beyond the call of duty of teaching standards. However, this relentless practice is praised but unrewarded.

Dr. Abeni Williams is a character that embodies Black mothering. Williams is a consummate professional, with a proven record of supporting students and teachers however she is not “rewarded” with a position as an assistant principal. Williams represents one of many Black women educators who desire to be recognized and rewarded for their consistent hard work and dedication to public education. Due to the ever present *white supremacists capitalist patriarchy* (hooks b. , *Ain't I a woman*, 1981), the legitimacy of Black women educators is still questioned by students, colleagues, administrators, and the community at large.

Black mothering is a consistent thread running throughout the play. Ms. Applegate's relationship with Charles Moses Younger is another example of Black mothering at work. Applegate seeks to hold Younger accountable for high expectations long after he leaves the walls of Taylor Beasley High School. Applegate does this in the same manner that a mother would continuously hold her children to standards long after they have grown up and left home. Here Black mothering is demonstrated as a continuous and life-long commitment. Kenya Samuels' letter written during the Wishing Chair scene is yet another example of black mothering. Samuel is still committed to teaching even after her student is incarcerated. The women demonstrate their black mothering skills to students and to each other. However, this commitment to our adopted family is not always reciprocated.

Black women educators, who "talk back" (hooks, 1989), battle White resistance and White fatigue that leads to Black exhaustion (**Meaning 4**). Dr. Abeni Williams engages several times throughout the play by "talking back" to Charles Whitman, a Professional Learning Community Leader and English Teacher at Taylor Beasley and the administration Principal Earl Grey. As an Academic Coach, Dr. Williams' responsibility is to aid and give feedback to teachers to help with their individual instruction in the classroom. Even with the backing of her job description behind her, Williams knows the system well enough to know that how she says something is just as important if not more important than the content of what she says. Hence the conversation between Williams and Samuels in Act 2, Scene 1: A Complicated Conversation. Both women discuss the importance of perception of how one miscommunication can lead to you being labeled as "petty," "unprofessional," or "Dat Bitch." All of these descriptors seek to stifle and silence Black women educators' voices. Even after critical analysis and carefully crafting her message, Dr. Williams receives a negative and resistant response from Charles

Whitman. Whitman's white resistance comes in several ways: he negates William's critique by stating the provided resources are mere suggestions, he issues a personal attack by citing William's newness as an academic coach and finally he scapegoats his actions by blaming the students. According to Whitman, the students already listen to music with racially charged language so that makes it acceptable for him to use it in the classroom for instruction. Williams seeks to combat this resistance with facts and logic.

Williams first addresses Whitman as a leader, citing the fact that he is the PLC lead so his choices would unduly influence the other 9th Grade Literature teachers. Secondly, she justifies her own position by reciting her resume. According to Williams, "I have taught for ten years, earned a Bachelor's in English, a Masters in Secondary English Education and an Education Doctorate in Curriculum Studies and Instruction. My education alongside my experience allows me to bring a wealth of knowledge and experiences to the classroom." Williams ends by acknowledging that she doesn't have the power or authority to make Whitman change but to simply bring him alternatives and "urge [him] to reconsider." Williams is rewarded for doing her job as an Academic Coach with a visit to the assistant principal's office where Charles Whitman accuses her of creating a hostile work environment. While "talking back" can be a liberating experience it is often times met with White resistance and White fatigue that leave Black women educators, not just tired but exhausted.

Self-definition (Hill Collins, 2000) and self-actualization (hooks b. , 1994) empower Black women educators to transgress all form of oppressions to engage in pedagogical praxis (Freire, 1970) (**Meaning 5**). Self-definition is a practice that elevates Black women educators, individually and collectively. Hill-Collins advocates that self-definition is a "sphere of freedom" (Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment, 2000).

There is power in Black women educators developing their own academic voice and their own pedagogy inside of the classroom.

Black women educators use othermothering as an extension of self-definition to work through challenges, strategize opportunities to “talk back” and celebrate successes. The protagonists from the play represent a circle of “othermothers.” They consistently support, question, commensurate and challenge one another. Through their collective interactions they realize their own power and use it to fight for social justice and against oppressive forces of the *white supremacist capitalist patriarchy* (hooks b. , *Understanding patriarchy*, 2004) that have overtaken the halls of Taylor Beasley High School.

Ultimately, the Black women educators in the play are overtaken by the system. This should serve as a cautionary warning not an acceptance of a pending doom. A wise supervisor once told me, that a good leader always cultivates their replacement. Black women educators who actively engage in self-definition should seek to empower others. No one teaches forever. There are not enough Black women educators grooming their replacements.

My silences had not protected me. Your silence will not protect you. But for every real word spoken, for every attempt I had ever made to speak those truths for which I am still seeking, I had made contact with other women while we examined the words to fit a world in which we all believed, bridging our differences. And it was the concern and caring of all those women which gave me strength and enabled me to scrutinize the essentials of my living (Lorde, *The Cancer Journals: Special Edition*, 2013)

I echo the call of Audre Lorde, Black women educators will not be served by suffering in silence. We push past our fear and speak truth to power and support and mentor our fellow Black

women educators in doing the same. Our silence will not save us. We are not anomalies and if we are, it's our own fault.

The ongoing process of self-definition can become tiresome for Black women educators. However, a regular integration of engaged pedagogy (hooks b. , 1994) will encourage us to engage in self-care habits that will renew and strengthen us in our mission and purpose. Patrisse Cullors, one of the co-founders of the Black Lives Movement, pontificated on the importance of what she calls social justice restorative practices calling for social justice workers to engage in healing themselves first. "I was feeling incredibly demoralized and really challenged by the infighting in our movement, ...our inability of finding ways to hold people accountable and also be loving, and generous and graceful and have an abolitionist framework" Cullors laments (Toure, 2018). However, she was able to find a renewed sense of hope and purpose when she traveled the world and visited the BLM chapter's impact in other countries. Additionally, Cullors advocates for a "health and wellness and healing justice" using practical measures of therapy, exercise, and meditation. These two strategies can apply to Black women educators as well.

First, we must engage outside of our classrooms and individual campuses and explore what is going on not only in other states but globally inside of classrooms. With the increase of technology, this process can be facilitated even more with technology where a connection or conversation can be made via Skype or an email. According to the motto of Assata's Daughters, an organization of young African American women and girls in Chicago, protesting against police violence, "It is our duty to fight for freedom. It is our duty to win. We must love and support each other. And we have nothing to lose but our chains." Increased communication will

help us to fight against the oppression of isolation. We are not alone and this fight can only be won together.

Secondly, health is wealth. It is one of the main factors within our control as Black women educators. We have the knowledge (whether inherent or sought out through research) to develop a practical health regimen. We must commit that prioritizing our own health is not only saving ourselves but preserving us for the work that we do to save others.

The tasks before Black women educators can appear daunting and insurmountable. But if we commit to recognizing our own power, developing and honing that power, and collaborating and using that power to fight for social justice we will transgress.

.We cannot address this crisis if progressive critical thinkers and social critics act as though teaching is not a subject worthy of our regard...[hooks urges] us to open our minds and hearts so that we can know beyond the boundaries of what is acceptable so that we can think and rethink, so that we can create new visions, I celebrate teaching that enables transgressions—a movement against and beyond boundaries. It is that movement which makes education the practice of freedom

(hooks b. , Teaching to Transgress, 1994).

By engaging in self-definition and self-actualization, Black women educators will transgress and be liberated to reject the “domestication of oppression” and adopt a pedagogical praxis that empowers us to reflect and act up the world in order to transform it (Freire, 1970).

The assault on public schools (Watkins W. H., 2011) *deskills* (Apple, 1982) teachers and disempowers Black women educators (**Meaning 6**).

“Teacher bashing and teacher deskilling are terms often used in radical critiques of contemporary school reform, which has led to teachers and schools being evaluated based

on test scores and conformity to externally imposed standards. If students do not achieve uniform measures of accountability, teachers are bashed for alleged incompetence or noncompliance” (Nuñez, 2015).

The deskilling of teachers impacts and disempowers Black women educators because we tend to work with the most venerable student populations including students at-risk and students with disabilities. When our credibility and ability to teach is questioned and hindered there is a direct impact on students. The school reform movement has discredited teacher voices and expertise, leaving “underperforming” schools open prey to corporate interests. The fictional Taylor Beasley High School is a prime example of how distorted the school space can become when the experience and professional expertise of teachers are devalued. Through the course of the play the school transitions from being a public neighborhood high school, to a public private partnership to finally a multi-use facility that I am calling the school prison complex. While the educators are stripped of power, the students are sentenced to suffer.

The school to prison pipeline is changing drastically into the school prison complex, where schools become prisons and students become parolees (**Meaning 7**). As previously mentioned, Taylor Beasley High School slowly morphs into a school prison complex, where students not only attend school and prisoners are not only incarcerated but also executed. There are small clues left for the audience to interpret throughout the work and foreshadow the play ending. For instance, the active shooter training announced in Act 1, Scene 1: Pre-Planning and the name of the charter partner the Personal Education Network or “P.E.N.” for short. Secondly, the opening of Act 3, Scene 6: Concessions and Confessions shows how the security level of the school has increased to include metal detectors and random searches.

The lines between schools and prisons are now blurred. Teachers police and discipline student bodies like wardens. The criminalization of black students is particularly, disturbing.

Schools particularly in poor communities, poor communities of color

Schools look like jails. And they use the same technologies of detection.

Has found its way into the educational system, and thus also of the way education and incarceration have been linked under the sign of capitalist profit. This example also demonstrates that the reach of the prison-industrial complex is far beyond the reach of the prison (Davis A. Y., 2015).

With the new public and government outcry to weaponized teachers (Bandlamudi & Mccammon, 2018) the idea of schools physically becoming real prisons is not a fanciful musing but a feasibly terrifying possibility. For this Black woman educator, the suggesting of arming any teacher leaves me full of questions: What happens if during an active shooter situation, a teacher shoots the wrong person? Will the school board and the state stand behind this teacher? What happens if an active shooter steals his or her weapon from the ones stored on campus and uses it? Who is liable? What happens when a teacher “perceives” a threat from a young student of color and shoots them out of fear? What happens if a teacher of color shoots a White student? Will he or she receive the same support as a White teacher that shoots a student of color?

The list of questions are exhaustive and my experience and knowledge of oppression tells me that any initiative to arm teacher will be at the fatal detriment for teachers and students of color. Black women educators need to act with a strategy – yes protest is important, Black Lives Matter. Now, what are we going to do with those lives? Instead of worrying about how to help students avoid the school to prison pipeline, Black women educators should evaluate the notion of getting rid of prisons all together.

The prison abolitionist movement:

is accelerating at a time when the prison stands as one of the central structures in American society. The statistics of mass incarceration are staggering: one in every 108 adults was in prison or jail in 2012, one in 28 American children has an imprisoned parent, and 65 million Americans have a criminal record. The United States imprisons a larger proportion of its black population than Apartheid South Africa did, and the American government put more of its citizens in prisons than the Soviet Union put in its gulags (Yadin, 2017).

We should begin to ask ourselves, what would a world look like without prisons? What are other countries, with a lower incarceration rate doing that America is not? Has this increase in incarceration made America safer? More importantly, what populations have been negatively impacted by our development of prison culture? By attempting to answer some of these questions Black women educators can help to fight the evolution of the school to prison pipeline that threatens to turn schools into actual prisons.

Oppositional knowledge (Hill Collins, 2000) and Afrofuturism (Dery, 1993) empower Black women educators to reexamine a complicated past, create a better present, and invent brighter future for all (**Meaning 8**). The story of the soul of a people, represents *oppositional knowledge* (Hill Collins, 2000) a counter-narrative that combats the myth of Black people being selfish, greedy and without a moral compass. Oppositional knowledge is necessary to help Black women educators fight the destructive narratives and beliefs of white supremacist capitalist patriarchy (hooks b. , *Ain't I a woman*, 1981). Black women educators serve a role as the “perpetual outsiders” giving us the ability to “foster new angles of vision on oppression” (Hill Collins, 2000). We carry this vision into every aspect of teaching from lesson planning, teaching,

parent conferences, discipline, and collaborative meetings and beyond. As Black women educators we know oppression because it is a “lived experience” (Hill Collins, 2000) that shapes our very existence. As my mother would say, “it ain’t something I heard, it’s something I know.”

Erika Alexander, actress, and writer, stated that during a pitch meeting for a new comic book the producer stated, “Black people are not into science fiction because they don’t see themselves in the future.” Her response, along with her husband Tony Puryear was to create the Black science fiction cartoon, *Concrete Park*. According to the comic, “the past is painful, the present, precarious but the future is free” (Puryear & Alexander, 2015).

The opening weekend, for the movie, *Black Panther* has broken records for ticket sales both nationally and internationally. While the ticket sales are historical, what is most impressive to me is the message of the film. The movie unapologetically addresses race and gender politics and has resonated with Black moviegoers worldwide. “Race matters in ‘Black Panther’ and it matters deeply, not in terms of Manichean good guys and bad but as a means to explore larger human concerns about the past, the present and the uses and abuses of power... Yet in its emphasis on black imagination, creation, and liberation, the movie becomes an emblem of a past that was denied and a future that feels very present” (Dargis, 2018).

What both of these examples demonstrate to me is that Black people still want, crave and need a vision. “Without a vision, the people perish” Proverbs 29:18. At this point, Black women educators need a vision without one, we will perish. Black people need to reimagine a brighter future but before we can, we must be able to revisit and rediscover the hidden stories of our past.

Afro-surrealism is a kin to Afro-Futurism but slightly different. “Afro-Futurism is a diaspora intellectual and artistic movement that turns to science, technology, and science fiction to speculate on black possibilities in the future. Afro-Surrealism is about the present. There is no

need for tomorrow's-tongue speculation about the future. Concentration camps, bombed-out cities, famines, and enforced sterilization have already happened.” (Miller, 2009). Toni Morrison's *Beloved* is an important representation of Afro surrealist work. *Beloved* (1987), inspired by the real life story of escaped slave Margaret Garner who flees from Kentucky to Ohio. Garner's life inspires the 1865 newspaper article, “A Visit to the Slave Mother Who Killed Her Child.” In the novel, Morrison makes the past the present when the character *Beloved*, appears to the protagonist, Sethe with the scars of slavery, both literally and figuratively.

Afrofuturism (Dery, 1993) is a concept that encourages African Americans to envision their future.

Afrofuturism can be broadly defined as “African American voices” with “other stories to tell about culture, technology and things to come.” The term was chosen as the best umbrella for the concerns of “the list” – as it has come to be known by its members – “sci-fi imagery, futurist themes, and technological innovation in the African diaspora (Dean & Andrews, 2016)

The road to transgressing is not an easy one. Black women educators must use oppositional knowledge to help students reframe the present and Afrofuturism to help them invent a brighter tomorrow.

Afrofuturism 2.0 is the beginning of both a move away and an answer to the Eurocentric perspective of the twentieth century's early formulation of Afrofuturism that wondered if the history of African peoples, especially in North America, had been deliberately erased. Or to put it more plainly, future-looking Black scholars, artists, and activists are not only reclaiming their right to tell their own stories, but also to critique the European/American digerati class of their narratives about cultural others, past, present and future and,

challenging their presumed authority to be the sole interpreters of Black lives and Black futures (Anderson, 2016).

The responsibilities for Black women educators is immense. Speaking truth to power and engaging in social justice work brings its own set of challenges, consequences and conquests. Shirley Chisholm said, “If they don’t give you a seat at the table, bring a folding chair.” Black women educators are equipped for the task and we should not wait to be asked to the V.I.P. section of public education we must move the red rope and demand our rightful place at the table. Only then will those waiting in line behind us, other teachers, our students and the community at large, be able to move forward.

By engaging in *personal~passionate~participatory* inquiry for social justice (He & Phillion, 2008), I transgress traditional research inquiries and create a play to tell “hidden” and “silenced narratives” of Black women educators (**Meaning 9**). Teachers are an unrepresented group within the conversation of public education. There has been “advocacy of curriculum change without democratic debate” and “the mugging of public education is engineered by ‘reformers’ deeply committed to the market vision” (Watkins W. H., 2011). Outside of actual public and legislative debate, laws and educational appointments are being made sans any regards towards supporting educators. Public education for a lack of better terms, has been hijacked and teachers and students are the ones being held hostage.

Sadly, qualitative research, in many if not all of its forms (observation, participation, interviewing, ethnography), serves as a metaphor for colonial knowledge, for power, and for truth. The metaphor works this way. Research, quantitative and qualitative, is scientific. Research provides the foundation for reports about and representations of “the

Other.” In the colonial context, research becomes an objective way of representing the dark-skinned Other to the white world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

My research inquiry is a subversive act. I rebel against traditional qualitative research methodology in order to reclaim my voice and empower the voices of other Black women educators. This inquiry empowers me to reject the colonial process of “othering” and engage in a more participatory process. Adopting a transgressive inquiry empowers me as a researcher to define how I engage in the attack against public education. Through this process I have emancipated myself, actively engaged in the research, and contributed to call for social justice in public education (He & Phillion, 2008).

EPILOGUE

“The most disrespected woman in America is the black woman. The most unprotected person in America is the black woman. The most neglected person in America is the black woman” (X, 1962).

While I do believe that the statement made by Brother Malcolm nearly 60 years ago still rings true, I do feel that engaging in this process has allowed me to develop several tools and recognize my own seat of power. Writing this dissertation, was both challenging and cathartic. What I am left with is an identity far beyond the one that I entered this process with. I began as a daughter, a sister, a friend and a teacher. I’m left identifying as an othermother, a Black feminist, a womanist, a scholar and an educator. My renewed self-identification has invigorated me to continue the fight for basic ideals of public education. Public education should be used to cultivate critical thinkers who are ready to make contributions as citizens, both nationally and internationally. By studying the messages of my foremothers, I feel empowered with the tools to continue the journey and as Mama and other mothers would say “see what they end gone be.”

While I dream and work towards a better future, both in and outside the classroom, I will leave you with the words of the song Heavenly (Burrell, Clinton, & Carey, 2014) performed and co-written by Mariah Carey.

There will be mountains that I will have to climb

And there will be battles that I will have to fight

But victory or defeat, it's up to me to decide

But how can I expect to win if I never try?

I just can't give up now

Come too far from where I started from

Nobody told me the road would be easy
And I don't believe He brought me this far to leave me
Never said there wouldn't be trials
Never said I wouldn't fall
Never said that everything would go
The way I want it to go
But when my back is against the wall
And I feel all hope is gone
I'll just lift my head up to the sky
And say, "Help me to be strong"
I just can't give up now
I've come too far from where I started from
Nobody told me the road would be easy
He's brought me this far to leave me

The song is a mixture of old and new. It borrows lyrics from James Cleveland's "I Just Can't Give Up Now" along with newer lyrics from Carey and her co-writers. Moving forward that is exactly what I intend to follow this same process. I will continue to self-identify, I will continue to seek out allies, and learn from the lessons of those who have journeyed before me. All with the understanding, that I am powerless and I am powerful, I am weak and I am strong, I am ignorant and knowledgeable, I am here and I can't stop.

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