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Taylor A. Russell

Hollins University, [taylorrussell49@gmail.com](mailto:taylorrussell49@gmail.com)

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# HEALING THROUGH MOTHER EARTH

by

Taylor Russell

B.F.A. in Dance, Jacksonville University  
2019

Presented in  
partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of Master of Fine Arts in Dance

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Director of Thesis: \_\_\_\_\_  
Desiree Parkman

Director of MFA: \_\_\_\_\_  
Jefferey Bullock

Department: Dance



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## Introduction

*“Rarely, if ever, are any of us healed in isolation. Healing is an act of communion.”*<sup>1</sup>

By: bell hooks

This is for all the Black women dealing with inner demons. The fight for identity, even agency, within this country put a significant toll on Black bodies and lives. Black female self-worth has been devalued, dehumanized, and objectified, channeling inherent trauma. This trauma can reflect the behaviors and norms of Black communities that were called deviant, now considered social issues.<sup>2</sup> Issues that plagued inner-city communities, for example, used to be blamed on the victims of these problems. These social concerns can link to a trauma developed during slavery that has implications in the present day. The historically marginalized position of Black people in America has caused considerable trauma.

This thesis attempts to foster an understanding of these variables: trauma, objectification, and dehumanization. It deals specifically with The Women's Sacrifice or the process of women sacrificing their bodies for something other than themselves. This sacrifice is central to this exploration because unpacking many women's silent suffering can assist in the general healing process from both physical and mental pain. What causes the suffering? How can lives be saved, and more women becoming attune to their health and needs? Racial disparities in healthcare have been researched, and studies are ever-present on the internet and in medical journals. But an added element to these disparities is the reluctance of some women to seek treatment or simply go to the doctor.

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<sup>1</sup> bell hooks, *All About Love: New Visions* (New York: William Morrow, an imprint of Harper Collins Publishers, 2018), 215.

<sup>2</sup> Stephanie Camp, "The Pleasures of Resistance: Enslaved Women and Body Politics in the Plantation South 1830-1861," *The Journal of Southern History* 68, no. 3 (2002): 536, doi:10.2307/30701.

The Black woman has been the subject of false narratives that describes and explains behavior and relies on stereotypes guided by images of what others perceive the Black woman to be. As bell hooks stated, society and history have perpetuated myths causing many Black women to believe these degrading constructs of the Black identity. These constructs became truths for many, especially hegemonic powers. So, the Black woman has had to rise above falsehood and create a better path, a more positive and rewarding existence. They did not do so without a struggle. More is at stake than changing a narrative; it is also about saving lives.

The Healing Through Mother Earth/creative manifestation section explains the process of the final product and the overall development of the whole project. It creates a progression, from the beginning of this creative process to the last video, explaining the inspiration that followed, the process of detailing my personal experience, and producing a relevant story. Throughout this process, my mental struggles become exposed. The production of this manifestation aligns my understanding of The Sacrifice with the other obstacles Black women like me face each day. Trauma, objectification, and dehumanization all make a presence in this piece.

For the creative manifestation, the final product focuses closely on the womb. Since healing is broad and complex, I narrowed the topic down and thought about the essential functions of the female body. The womb is a part of a woman's anatomy, and it has multiple purposes. Since healing is the ultimate goal, my creative manifestation covers healing the womb. Having one central point allows me to reflect on the healing process. I use my artistic license to develop a story of the womb, the importance of the womb inside the body, and ultimately, healing the womb. In the final video, two different

worlds are present, representing a dualism between The Natural World vs. The Trashy World. These two separate worlds are symbolic, but the dichotomy can help determine the subject's health, the value placed on positive and healthy choices, and how to live life better.

This narrative suggests that Black women must focus on health, including healing. My grandmother was the main inspiration for this thesis due to the circumstances surrounding her death. This is for my mother, sister, grandmothers, aunts, cousins, friends, and all the Black women who are a part of me. Only through recognition can somebody accomplish the first steps to healing. Recognizing trauma, objectification, and dehumanization can lead to a radical rebirth and a whole new way of thinking about life and health.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Joy DeGruy, *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome*, (Milwaukie, Uptone Press 2005), 158.

## **The Woman's Sacrifice**

*Vomit endless vomit (Omg! Do you remember the time when we were at her house watching the Lion King all cuddled together!)*

*Vomit endless vomit (I remember the time she took me to North Carolina and went on a tour bus, and I got to ride it! Such great memories.)*

*Vomit endless vomit. (Always kept us together. She told us we were family, and we were her number one priority.)*

*Vomit endless vomit. (Was always taking care of everyone else because of the trouble our family decided to get into.)*

*Vomit endless vomit. The light of our family the rock of our foundation (She is not okay; there is something not right!)*

*Vomit endless vomit. It started small (Did you hear she is diagnosed with cancer!!)*

*Vomit endless vomit. It metastasized (She is not okay, everyone would say!!! I did not understand what was happening!!!!)*

*Then you were gone (I lost a great woman in my life.) To this vomit endless vomit*



Illustration 1: Grandma

Why do so many women sacrifice themselves for others? Specifically, why do some African American women take care of the needs of others before they take care of their own? Is there a historical pattern of Black women who endure hardship and pain to make others better? Watching my grandmother go through this and hearing the stories of the trials and tribulations suffered during her fifty-six years on this earth led to research on health and healing. My grandmother's story is an important staging ground for discussing the myriad of Black women with similar narratives who put others ahead of themselves. It seems to point to a pattern of women who ignore the benefits of modern medicine and forsake healthy choices due to many different obstacles. From caring for children to living up to society's expectations, many Black women eschew the advice of

medical professionals and ignore the signs of illness because of issues of access, affordability, and time constraints. If Black women were to concentrate solely on themselves, it would heal more women, which would be beneficial to the Black community.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, there are many more reasons, including medical racism, which has led to suspicions among Black Americans when it concerns the medical community. It is crucial to understand the root behind where these struggles come from and the catalyst of why they happen. The battles inherited from the slave condition and historically forced African American women to heal independently.

Slavery was detrimental to African American women's mental and physical health. The anguish endured by generations of women was driven by a false set of identities by a colonizing force. Science became the framework in which Black bodies were regularly observed and inspected. Through science, Black bodies were classified as abnormal, and behaviors were linked to physical traits.<sup>5</sup> This is the context that African Americans, particularly women, faced for hundreds of years. The trauma of subjugation and dehumanization made African Americans vulnerable to the slaveholder's whim which determined their lives.

Nevertheless, many Blacks brought over practices and theories from Africa that would sustain them in the hot fields of the Americas. As a challenge to the colonizers' influence, these practices became a form of resistance to the position as chattel. These African practices of healing were a symbol of what was left behind. For example, African women knew that healing could come from Mother Earth. In an attempt to thwart the colonizer's influence, Black women used earthly concoctions to heal and make

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<sup>4</sup> Tamara Winfrey Harris, *The Sisters Are Alright Changing the Broken Narrative of Black Women in America* (Oakland, California: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc, 2021), 106-107.

<sup>5</sup> DeGruy, *Slave Syndrome*, 61.

themselves and their communities feel better from a myriad of ailments.<sup>6</sup> The resistance rejected European standards and gave Africans living in America some agency. However, was it detrimental or beneficial to the Black female condition? The answer to this question lies in the role women played in society.

Historically women were seen as nurturers, and society saw them as the ones who took care of the household while the husband worked and provided for the family. Even though things have changed drastically, this role of caregiver and sacrificer remains with all women but particularly with Black women today.<sup>7</sup> After the era of slavery, many Black women, found themselves working in domestic roles for white families. Similar to slavery, they cooked, cleaned, and were at the whims of their white boss. This was a sacrifice because Black women toiled in white kitchens, taking time away from their children.<sup>8</sup> However, during slavery and after slavery, the Black women's gift, everything she had to offer, was taken for granted and underappreciated due to the simple factor of the color of her skin.

As nurturers, women often sacrifice themselves for what they feel is the greater good, their society, family, and even in their careers. This is a historical trend as it is based on traditional gender roles that cemented the position of women as subordinate nurturers. For Black women, the legacy of slavery and the subsequent marginalization did not reject the sacrificial behavior; it did not lessen the nurturing role of women. Women became objects, scorned by the process of dehumanization; something was lost.

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<sup>6</sup> Donte Davis, "Post Traumatic Slave Diet," YouTube video, 6:28, posted by Donte Davis, March 2, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I-GQYK-UrRQ>.

<sup>7</sup> Stephanie Evans, Y., Kanika Bell, and Nsenga K. Burton, *Black Women's Mental Health: Balancing Strength and Vulnerability*, (Albany: SUNY Press, 2017), 45.

<sup>8</sup> Camp, *Pleasures of Resistance*, 543.

## Trauma

*"What you lookin' at?"*<sup>9</sup>

Behavior shaped by trauma can cause a ubiquitous feeling of anguish that manifests in fear, doubt, and insecurities leading to troubling or problematic behavior. The historical conditions of slavery and segregation have shaped the trauma witnessed each day throughout communities of color. Since trauma shapes behavior, even the little things people do are related to a traumatic experience. For example, in specific inner-city communities where gang violence is prevalent, understanding the violence in terms of trauma rather than biology is a useful way to pin down what causes this violence. Moreover, social deviance or behavior that fits outside the norm can link to generational, life-altering experiences of slavery and segregation. Trauma plays out in everyday behavior in many different contexts, on basketball courts, in dance studios, throughout academia, and especially on the streets.

Confronting a young man while playing basketball alone, a group of Black youth spouted these words prompting an exchange that echoes in communities. Yet, specifically, in Black communities, the phrase "What you lookin' at?" demonstrates deep-seated issues between individuals often of the same race. According to Joyce DeGruy, when Black individuals see each other, they reflect themselves. This gaze taps into an inherent trauma leading to tension and rage.<sup>10</sup>

DeGruy asserts this type of confrontation is rare in Africa. She sets up a dichotomy between "What you lookin' at" and a similar phrase when strangers meet, "I see you."

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<sup>9</sup> DeGruy, *Slave Syndrome*, 5-6.

<sup>10</sup> DeGruy, *Slave Syndrome*, 4.



The aggression implied in the statement "What you lookin at" reflects a wave of anger, if not resentment, of a status instituted by slavery and segregation.<sup>11</sup> This dualism between words and approach is essential since it develops representation and identity at the center of the Black experience and suggests causation directly connected to trauma. The directness of this statement relates to tension once one or both individuals see themselves on a level playing field due to their skin color. Seeing eye to eye, they have many things in common, but the phrase allows for separation, a divide. Here, "What you lookin' at" becomes "I'm not like you," therefore distancing the two even further. Because of this, there is an immense amount of anger and pain, leading to confrontation and violence.<sup>12</sup> This is how trauma, or distress from experience, plays out, and scholars like DeGruy can help explain rooted tensions in Black communities in this country.

In Black communities overseas, it is a different story. For example, DeGruy observed that when Black strangers meet in South Africa, they often say, "I see you."<sup>13</sup> Seeing someone has an entirely different meaning than looking at a person; with seeing someone, the speaker levels the playing field, which is contrasted to looking, which requires observation and quite possibly judgment and is much more confrontational. Once two Black individuals say they see each other, it acknowledges the importance of lifting each other and having their backs.<sup>14</sup> The complex reality of trauma due to slavery in America has caused many Black Americans to confront the past facts. DeGruy, in *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome*, acknowledges the importance of why Black individuals are

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<sup>11</sup> DeGruy, *Slave Syndrome*, 4.

<sup>12</sup> DeGruy, *Slave Syndrome*, 5.

<sup>13</sup> DeGruy, *Slave Syndrome*, 5-6.

<sup>14</sup> DeGruy, *Slave Syndrome*, 5-6.

the way they are and act the way they do. Understanding this ideology helps to know the why behind our trauma and the trauma that follows our skin color.

Antiracist theorists like Ibram X. Kendi have countered DeGruy's "Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome" as narrow and rooted in a "legacy of defeat" that makes "Black people biologically, psychologically, culturally, or morally inferior."<sup>15</sup> Essential works like *Stamped from the Beginning* demonstrate the dangers of assessing and generalizing the Black community or even blaming the "Trauma" of individuals on slavery. "Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome" can be a useful lens to understand behavior along with discrimination. Kendi's anti-racist thesis traces modern issues to practices of the government and racists who thwarted any efforts of Black people gaining access in American society. Even with this scrutiny, there must be credence in what scientists like DeGruy observe in Black-on-Black violence and tensions within the community.

DeGruy's work assesses the role that slavery played in African Americans' recent experiences and lives. Although Kendi warns that rooting the issues of the community might suggest there is something inherently wrong within that community, the difference between the two scholars is based on causality; DeGruy situates the legacy of slavery at the root of trauma. Kendi blames the system and contends that racist policies created inequities in opportunities.<sup>16</sup>

Nevertheless, whether the tension within Black communities is based on slavery or the system, trauma does exist, and its relevance is crucial in understanding not only the

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<sup>15</sup> Ibram X. Kendi, *Stamped From the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America* (New York: Nation Books, 2016), 492.

<sup>16</sup> Kendi, *Stamped*, 9.

strength of modern women but also how the historical circumstances of oppression led to behaviors linked to traumatic experiences. Outward and inward strength play crucial roles in character development and identity formation. The constant pressure to wear a mask to be accepted in society has led to a complicated relationship with how Black woman become their true identity. The “strong Black woman,” although hard to live up to, is a sequela of trauma.<sup>17</sup>

“Strong Black women” can be traced back to the “Mammy” role and the caretaker who was expected to be the nurturer, no matter what mental or physical concerns she had.<sup>18</sup> This in itself is traumatic; the position these women played added to the rejection of their humanness and identity traumatized many and led to behavior passed down through generations of women. It may be called resiliency, but this unfortunately led to many women sacrificing themselves for others.<sup>19</sup>

What this demonstrates is a link between history and the lived experience. Trauma does not only manifest itself as rage (“What you lookin at?”). It also serves as a source of strength, but it can be misleading and lead to problems, precisely health concerns. Yet, communal recognition of the trauma that answers the question “Why do we do what we do?” can lead to the direction of healing the self and, most importantly, self-care.

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<sup>17</sup> Harris, *Sisters Are Alright*, 93- 94.

<sup>18</sup> Kelly Yu-Hsin Laio, Meifen Wei, Mengxi Yin, “The Misunderstood Schema of the Strong Black Woman: Exploring Its Mental Health Consequences and Coping Responses among African American Women,” *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 44, no. 1 (2019): 86, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0361684319883198>.

<sup>19</sup> Laio, *Misunderstood Schema*, 87.

## Objectification

After the Atlantic Slave passage and the enslavement of Black women, the objectification of their bodies led to scrutiny by enslavers who considered them to be property. John Berger brilliantly explains the objectification of a woman's body by defining the difference between naked and nude.

“To be naked is to be oneself. To be nude is to be seen naked by others and yet not recognized for oneself.” A naked body has to be seen as an object in order to become nude. Nakedness reveals itself. Nudity is placed on display. To be naked is to be without disguise. The nude is condemned too never being naked. Nudity is a form of dress.”<sup>20</sup>

Black women were put on display, nude, as they were seen as objects and just a body to their oppressors. Since the Black body was seen as abnormal and lesser than whites, the Black body was used for experimentation as it was poked and prodded in the name of science. For example, during the time gynecological studies were initiated these women were used and subjected to treatment that caused ill health. These exams led Black women to develop abnormalities in their vaginal area which caused foul smells and stymied their sex life and reproductive system. Their vaginas were dissected to the point where working in a field was not optional, or the objectification of their bodies (sex) was of no use.<sup>21</sup>

James Marion Sims, the Father of Modern gynecology, used Black women as experimentation tools. His research led to women obtaining horrific diseases and terminal damage in their bodies.

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<sup>20</sup> DeGruy, *Slave Syndrome*, 61-62.

<sup>21</sup> DeGruy, *Slave Syndrome*, 61-62.

One of the many diseases, Obstetric Fistula, a hole between the birth canal and the rectum, was a common result of these gruesome experiments. Sims gynecological trial was not only disturbing but made Black women's bodies objects with without care or concern.<sup>22</sup>

This cruelty led to severe repercussions for Black women, which are still being dealt with today. Sim's actions are likened to modern doctors' misdiagnosis and mistreatment of Black woman or those who give them no voice in their own healing. Part of the reason why Black woman are reluctant to seek out medical attention is because of the legacy of these terrible practices. This is objectification because the body is devalued and used as a means to an end.<sup>23</sup>

Objectification is defined in the article "Sexual Objectification of Women: Advances to Theory and Research," as stated: "When a women's body is singled out and separated from her as a person, and she is viewed as a single object."<sup>24</sup> The object loses a bit of humanness, as it is used for a specific purpose rather than given its own agency. According to this article, objectification can lead to severe mental illness that disproportionately affects women, causing eating disorders, depression, and sometimes sexual dysfunction.<sup>25</sup> The section Sexual Objectification Theory is rather enlightening as it explains how once women are objectified, they begin to self-objectify themselves.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> DeGruy, *Slave Syndrome*, 62.

<sup>23</sup> DeGruy, *Slave Syndrome*, 62.

<sup>24</sup> Dawn M. Szymanski, Lauren B. Moffitt, and Erika R. Carr, "Sexual Objectification of Women: Advances to Theory and Research," *The Counseling Psychologist* 39 no. 1, (2011): 8 <https://www.apa.org/education-career/ce/sexual-objectification.pdf>.

<sup>25</sup> Szymanski, "Sexual Objectification," 7.

<sup>26</sup> Szymanski, "Sexual Objectification," 8-9.

Self-objectification occurs when women internalize the outsider's point of view, which causes significant anxiety and can lead to other mental illnesses and affect how they view their outward appearance.<sup>27</sup> Often, they are left feeling unworthy, not good enough, or they take it out on themselves with self-harm. Objectification is a significant factor in delayed healing, and it has caused Black women to see themselves as worthless or considered nothing due to how their bodies are perceived.<sup>28</sup>

An article titled *Hyper-sexualization of Black Women in the Media* suggests that many Black women who are a part of the entertainment industry are objectified and sexualized, i.e., and turned into sexual objects.<sup>29</sup> It explains through first-person accounts the perspective of being objectified and how it feels to be a Black woman in the media today. For example, model Tyra Banks asks, "Black women have always been these vixens, these animalistic erotic women. Why can't we be the sexy American girl next door?"<sup>30</sup> What Banks dismisses here is that even that "American girl next door" is an object to be used for the "all American boy next door." Nevertheless, at the root of objectification is dehumanization, which takes away the human aspects of the individual, making them an object like a pencil or desk. Perception is critical here; a woman cannot thrive and become whole if perceived as mere objects, dehumanized, left bare.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Szymanski, "Sexual Objectification," 9.

<sup>28</sup> bell hooks, *Feminism is For Everybody*, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2015), 34-35.

<sup>29</sup> Tayana L. Hardin, "Josephine Baker and the Shadow of Spectacle," *Dance Chronicle* 38, no. 2 (2015): 181, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01472526.2015.1043797>.

<sup>30</sup> Annalycia D. Matthews, "Hyper-Sexualization of Black Women in the Media," *Gender & Sexuality Studies Student Work Collection* Winter 3 (2018): 3, [https://digitalcommons.tacoma.uw.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1026&context=gender\\_studies](https://digitalcommons.tacoma.uw.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1026&context=gender_studies).

<sup>31</sup> Matthews, "Hyper-sexualization," 3-4.

## Dehumanization

Looking back at history and the trauma of African American people, Black women were enslaved, raped, beaten, and forced to toil while trying to survive and persevere through one of the most challenging times in history. Black women's enslavement led to resistance to the oppressor's orders and demands that are still being fought for today.<sup>32</sup>

For example:

Not calling yourself an enslaved person is the resistance.

Not claiming you are a victim is resistance.

Not claiming Westernized Medicine is resistance (lesson learned from Dr. Sims and the Tuskegee Experiment).

Not claiming the labels that are put on us by society (White People) is resistance. Labels that we are known for: Hoe, Nigger, Exotic, Nothing, Aggressive a.k.a Angry Black Woman, Animalistic, Promiscuous<sup>33</sup>

Black women battled dehumanization from their oppressors. Resisting these labels forced upon Black women has led to a revival in taking back ownership. Black women during the time of slavery were perceived as other or not human beings. Science was used to justify the enslavement of people, and in doing so, they made them less human.

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<sup>32</sup> hooks, *Feminism is for Everybody*, 3.

<sup>33</sup> Jioni A. Lewis, Ruby Mendenhall, Stacy A. Harwood, and Margaret Browne Huntt, "'Ain't I a Woman?' 'Perceived Gendered Racial Microaggressions,'" *The Counseling Psychologist* 44, no. 5 (2016): 767, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011000016641193>.

Dehumanization during the slave era, beginning in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, was marked by a deprivation of human rights and a denial of qualities, attributes, notions such as individuality, compassion, or civility.<sup>34</sup>

Along with this, the Africans being forced to work in the Americas became society's "other."<sup>35</sup> To be an "other" creates distance; it is a reminder of the distance between "us" and "them." African Americans became the countries' outcasts, caste systems, and untouchables. Looking at the history behind dehumanization, no other group has had their identity socialized out of existence and dehumanized to this degree other than Native Americans.<sup>36</sup> Yet, Native Americans were indigenous to this region and not used as chattel slaves, so even if their story is similar, it does not share the same implications as African Americans.

Dehumanizing the Black being, the focus was on physical differences, which established the European aesthetic as the standard and anything else as different. Black women looked different and were perceived as more animalistic than human beings.<sup>37</sup> Not only were women subjected to inspection, but some women were also put on display in museums and art exhibitions to showcase the difference between these women and Europeans. Sarah Baartman known as Hottentot Venus is an example of highlighting a Black woman on display.

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<sup>34</sup> Kimetta R. Hairston, "Dehumanization of the Black American Female: An American/Hawaiian Experience," *Spaces for Difference: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 1 no.1 (2008): 65, [https://escholarship.org/content/qt72m382mk/qt72m382mk\\_noSplash\\_761149e916e9d86b6f99cf7fa571f65f.pdf?t=krnhfg](https://escholarship.org/content/qt72m382mk/qt72m382mk_noSplash_761149e916e9d86b6f99cf7fa571f65f.pdf?t=krnhfg).

<sup>35</sup> Hairston, "Dehumanization," 70.

<sup>36</sup> Hairston, "Dehumanization," 69.

<sup>37</sup> Hairston, "Dehumanization," 69.



As the gaze turned toward her body, her human characteristics were overlooked as people only saw her for her difference and for her so-called abnormalities.<sup>38</sup> “See how different they are?”

This process had devastating results, as more and more women came to accept their difference as it was being ideologically forced upon them—difference questions self-worth, difference outcasts the self, difference questions the worthiness of the human being. Simply, trauma, objectification, and dehumanization are the causation for feeling less than, different, “othered,” and more. This led to a negation of the self, a rejection of worthiness, and a move toward sacrifice.

Dehumanization still exists, and sometimes it is so subtle that it takes time to understand its impact on the person. I was thinking about my Dehumanization story and decided to write the following narrative which incorporates the history and process of examples in my life. Was I considered the “other” in my audition and some of my other college auditions? Doing this research led me to this question. “I didn’t have to do much” because the main words stuck out to me when speaking with the Director of the program at SMU. I was one of the only Black females in the room, and I was attuned to the dehumanizing process occurring right in front of me. Dehumanizing acts are insidious, but they are ever-present, as my story will attest to it. Learning about Dehumanization helped me understand right and wrong, and seeing it played out in front of my eyes reminded me of the contemporary presence and purpose of continual subjugation.

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<sup>38</sup> “I.D. Mothoagae, “Reclaiming Our Black Bodies: Reflections on a Portrait of Sarah (Saartjie) Baartman and the Deconstruction of Black Bodies By The State,” *Acta Theological*, Accessed March 27, 2022, 7 3 , <http://www.scielo.org.za/pdf/at/v36s24/05.pdf>.

## **Taylor's Dehumanization Story**

As a young Black dancer in a predominantly all-white studio, I did not understand why I left until years later. I started dancing at the tender age of three, and I remained at this studio until my first year of high school. The experience, in the beginning, was excellent. I was inspired. I wanted to dance and felt safe. Even though I was only one of a few Black dancers, the environment was friendly, home-like, and supportive. After a while, this environment began to change, a dramatic shift that caused a change in dynamics. These changes challenged me; I lost my drive to keep dancing, I lost the desire to go to that establishment. I was one of the only Black homeschoolers in the studio aspiring to become the next professional Black dancer in the world. I would come to class ready and prepared to suffer through the pain, through the blood, sweat, and tears. In her *Bronx Gothic* film, I would leave with sweat puddles and my body quaking like Okwui Okpokwasili.<sup>39</sup> All the other dancers would look at me and say she is sweating so much. Eww, Taylor, clean up your sweat.

In my head, it was because I suffered through the pain. I was a strong dancer who had power in my bones and through the history of my Black skin. I was not the best dancer, but I worked arduously to pick up the steps and obtain the information and corrections. Because of this, I was made fun of, laughed at, and bullied throughout my dance career. I never really realized I was until I decided to pursue a master's degree.

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<sup>39</sup> *Bronx Gothic*, written by Okwui Okpokwasili, (San Francisco, CA: Grasshopper Films, 2017), DVD, 17:10.

Hollins University's Masters in Fine Arts program really has a radical approach to presenting and teaching Black history. This was my first time in my academic education that I was able to connect and feel what my ancestors went through in a raw and explicit approach. My knowledge of Black history was limited but now intellectually I have a better grasp of the hardships Black women endured during that time. After realizing this, I began, to analyze my bullying experiences from the studio until my college auditions.

There was one time I messed up on stage or did not know the step. Once I exited the wing, a white dancer began to copy the action the way I did it and laughed at me with her other friends. I burst into tears, and one of the backstage crew helpers stated that they were just words, do not listen to them. But were they? The copying, the laughing led me back to history and the tormenting that follows Black bodies. This instance and its meaning did not come about until this moment. Is this dehumanizing? This is what I began to ask myself and contemplate.

Another instance that occurred when I was older was when I auditioned for SMU-Southern Methodist University BFA program. I went and auditioned for an undergraduate program in Texas. This school was a predominantly white institution that resided in the South. Walking on that campus was a very uncomfortable experience, and the looks and stares that were given caused a lot of discomfort. Even though this occurred, I still was very excited to audition and pursue my dream as a dancer at this prestigious institution. Since I had a lot of questions about the program, I decided to speak with the dance director, asking her basic questions about the audition and program in general. One of my main questions was asking about attire and what was appropriate to wear. She stated you do not have to wear much because your skin is Black.

I was looking at the history of this school and understanding the comment that was made led to more profound research in understanding the racist background this school has. In 2015, some racist encounters and allegations of racism at SMU went viral. There was a situation with Greek life and not accepting Black women into their organization. Reading this and seeing this situation unfold a couple of years ago led to understanding more about this predominately white institution. The looks and discomfort felt when walking on campus made me feel like a complete outsider. Even though this occurred in 2015, the history that followed in my blood was felt on the Southern Methodist University campus.

After hearing the statement, you do not have to wear much because your skin is Black went over my head at the age of eighteen. I did not realize what this statement meant until I pulled it apart in my master's program and understood more about Black history and the dehumanizing acts and words geared towards Black bodies. Sitting with this white woman after she stated this statement led me to chuckle because I innocently thought I would be the star of the room everyone would be looking at, the one everyone is looking at.

Looking at the stories brings to light the dehumanizing acts of our oppressors. The statements and accusations thrown towards us lead to the realization of history repeating itself in the present moment. These actions might seem minuscule and unrelated but are the foundation for the blatant dehumanizing acts today. Dehumanization still occurs and needs to be ended and abolished. It is dehumanizing acts like this that cause a delay and affect a potential rebirth.

## Rebirth

How did African American women heal during the three-hundred-year history of slavery in the United States? From pregnancy to other female concerns, Black women recovered from illness and healed in a myriad of ways.<sup>40</sup> The Atlantic Slave Passage stymied traditional practices. It was during the first moments of capture that the nascent forms of resistance were shaped. One of the ways this resistance was asserted was in the form of rejecting nonchemical based sources and continuing to use Mother Earth for what she provided: tools for recovery and well-being.<sup>41</sup>

Before forced enslavement, healing methods in Africa were organically developed, and remedies were often naturally based.<sup>42</sup> Natural herbs facilitated the healing process, and roots were found locally. As they were transplanted to the New World, the local resources were no longer available, and alternative healing methods were introduced. For example, modern medicine contained elixirs and potions concocted in archaic facilities, a treatment that was becoming more synthetic, antithetical to naturally based options. Writing on healing during the period of African slavery, Megan Jordan suggests, “As movements that center Black lives increase, many have yearned to go back to the original traditions of their culture.”<sup>43</sup> As a rejection of their newfound life and the loss of autonomy and humanity, African Americans turned toward historical, cultural practices or things learned in Africa. Instead of relying on the suspicious remedies of the oppressor that were chemically based and unnaturally processed, they

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<sup>40</sup> Megan Jordan, “As the State Increasingly Regulates Our Health, Black Women Are Finding Freedom in Herbal Medicine,” *The Black Youth Project*, May 29, 2019, 1, <http://blackyouthproject.com/as-the-state-increasingly-regulates-our-health-black-women-are-finding-freedom-in-herbal-medicine/>.

<sup>41</sup> Davis, *Slave Diet*, 2:01:12.

<sup>42</sup> Davis, *Slave Diet*, 11:07.

<sup>43</sup> Jordan, “Freedom in Herbal Medicine,” 3.

turned back to African methods of healing, which included using Mother Earth as a healer.

For some Black people, that path to plant-based healing traces back, from the Civil Rights Era to the plantation, all the way back to Africa, well before many of our ancestors were forcibly brought over to this country.<sup>44</sup> Plant-based healing was oppositional to Western-based medical practices. The mere act of refusal towards Western practices caused Black women to lean toward botanical practices since the Western approach was not what they were used to.<sup>45</sup> Practicing alternative healing methods became an act of resistance to Western medical practices and the slave condition.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Davis, *Slave Diet*, 3:30.

<sup>45</sup> Carolyn Roberts, “Carolyn Roberts Talks About The Hidden Histories of African American Medical Practitioners” YouTube video, 17:28, posted by VPM Science Matters, May 8, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z3fOcbhyXUU&t=1585s>.

<sup>46</sup> Jordan, “Freedom in Herbal Medicine,” 2.

## The Womb

A woman's bodily functions include menstruation, the miracle of life, and sustaining that life as a mother if she so chooses. Yet, as another example of the objectification and dehumanization of women, the womb became part of an occupational model in early Americas. In other words, a woman's place was in the home and producing children was her role. Mother Earth is akin to the womb. Like a mother, earth sustains life and is our nurturer. She is the caregiver who feeds life by providing and creating an environment where people can thrive and live life to its fullest. Turning the womb into an object that produces goods both literally and figuratively challenges nature because it debases the birth process and devalues the product, which is a human baby. Like Mother Earth, a mother maintains and supports life, yet this natural relationship is attenuated. Simply put, a challenge to a mother is a challenge to earth and nature, making it unnatural.

Equally challenging to nature, the Western-based approach to healing puts a temporary fix on the patient's condition. In contrast, the natural-based process intends to heal the body as a whole. The difference is between treating specific sections of the body and holistically as a whole. Natural-based healing is rooted in the idea that everything in the body is connected. Western-based medicine is based on a bottom line and profit. The natural sources to heal our bodies lay right before us, which will help reclaim what was lost and allow for more healing nutrition and better well-being.<sup>47</sup> In all, Mother Earth provides a world of natural resources and other things to help sustain our health and well-being while living.

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<sup>47</sup> Davis, *Slave Diet*, 2:07:51.

Black women during the era of slavery struggled to be in resistance towards their oppressors, who challenged dominance over them. Black women had different methods and medical treatments that contrasted with western medicine.<sup>48</sup> Since this was the case, many Black slaves used the knowledge of their oppressors and integrated that with their traditional beliefs. This was an act of resistance towards the system. Black women “worked cures” and were able to establish “a relational view of healing” giving them a more holistic approach to treating themselves.<sup>49</sup> Some remedies the midwives used were cloves to ease the pain of childbirth and allow for a more effortless birthing experience by using this method and remedy.

By doing this, Black women resisted their oppressor’s orders and performed healing methods with which they were familiar. bell hooks seems to suggest this resistance towards Western practices is commonplace amongst Black women. She wrote, “When it comes to the issue of medical care, of taking our bodies seriously, women continue to challenge and confront the medical industry.”<sup>50</sup> By challenging the system, Black women have gained control over their bodies by rejecting their oppressor’s method of medicine. The African way of healing, using the earth's natural resources to heal their bodies, became an alternative to western medical practices.<sup>51</sup>

*Twas mercy brought me from my Pagan land, Taught my benighted soul to understand That there's a God, that there's a Saviour too: Once I redemption neither sought nor knew. Some view our sable race with scornful eye, "Their colour is a diabolic die." Remember, Christians, Negros, Black as Cain, May be refin'd, and join th' angelic train.*<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Cooper Deirdre Owens, “Black Women’s Experience in Slavery and Medicine.” In *Medical Bondage: Race, Gender, and the Origins of American Gynecology* (Athens; University of Georgia Press, 2017), 51-53, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1pwt69x.7>.

<sup>49</sup> Owens, “Black Women’s Experience,” 52.

<sup>50</sup> hooks, *Feminism is for Everybody*, 33.

<sup>51</sup> Owens, “Black Women’s Experience,” 53.

<sup>52</sup> Phillis Wheatley, *Being Brought from Africa to America*, (New York: Ragged Hand, 2020), 31.



This poem expresses the reality of a slave in bondage. Phillis Wheatley explains in her words the act of being in resistance to the oppressor. The first half of this paper deals with the trauma that follows Black women and the causes such as objectification, dehumanization ect. that led to a domination over Black women. Yet, it is also important to follow the acts of resistance against western medical practices in the form of holding on to traditional or natural based methods. Wheatley conveys in her poem the feeling of bondage and being left of emptiness and humanness. The second half of the paper brings to light healing and natural remedies as an alternative. This poem is situated here because it allows for a transition to understand the raw history in the first half to understanding the natural based approach that Black women created and have evolved over time. Wheatley's words become a metaphor for resistance as just a mere act of writing was revolutionary. Through her words we transition into the second section which brings to light my story and the creative process.

## **Healing Through Mother Earth/Creative Manifestation**

### **Drafts Work Inspiration: Convalescence**

I created this piece during my spring semester at Hollins University. I always wanted to work with nature and connect it to a radical approach to healing. When I first began this process, I began to contemplate my mental health journey culminating with a healing process. One thing that helped me with ideas was to create an outline of this story. I started by asking myself detailed questions:

Where will this take place?

What is the meaning behind this work?

Will there be specific colors involved, such as a color theory or a meaning behind it?

Is there a religious component?

Is it baptism?

Will my voice be included?

These are just a few of the questions I began to ask myself and viewers of my initial project. I also tried to prepare my project for the Spring semester, and this concept of mental health became central to what I wanted to do. During this process, especially after the video was created, something did not add up; my mental health was not being represented in the final product. Because of this, I decided to post it on social media, and although I was scared of the responses that might come up, I was surprised and shocked by the love and support from fellow followers and fans. These are some of the responses verbatim from my Instagram page from my fellow followers who are all anonymous:

*Anonymous 1- OMGeezus Taylor! This was amazing. I took this as meaning you were being mudded and mucked up by the world and also being cleansed by the world through your own transformation and growth. It was amazing. I loved it.*

*Anonymous 2- Reminds me of my people's connection to Mother Earth and then being ripped from it.....But always returning to that connection.*

*Anonymous 3- Being rejuvenated by becoming one with Mother Earth.*

*Anonymous 4- Hi Taylor...so maybe you had to take on a trial, persevere through it and then were able to be cleansed and washed free of the burden.*

The responses were very eye-opening and even shocking. After hearing these positive accolades, I knew how to approach my thesis from a creative perspective and from a written perspective. I also figured out the shape and focus of the actual assignment. This was the beginning, the developing stages of my research, and the beginning of narrowing down my topic. Through this creation, I focused on healing Through Mother Earth and understanding the history and where it came from by creating this work at Hollins University.

I decided to collaborate with a videographer since I was performing in the film. My videographer Caleb Bussie was a local Roanoke native who was able to bring this idea to life. We filmed this piece at a park in Roanoke, Virginia, which had a beautiful river making the scenery perfect for my project. The natural nature sounds of this film were my music which enhanced the work and allowed for the animals and water sounds to bring life and attention to the piece. To represent the costuming for the final video, I related to a nude color since I did not want anything to ultimately take away from the visceral moments occurring in the final video. When it came to the green paint, it represented mental health and the concept of all of the trauma and negative things in my life. Sometimes we forget and become so consumed by all of the awful things that have occurred over time, making us fail to remember we can let go of what happened in the past and focus on the future. The green paint represented my trauma, illnesses, and

everything I felt like I could not relieve myself of or I felt like I could not heal from. When the water is presented, and I begin to wash the green paint off, which makes me realize and understand that I can recover I can heal from my past and heal through a natural-based approach. This is when I decided and knew that Healing Through Mother Earth would be the topic for my thesis.



Illustration 2: Convalescence Green Water



Illustration 3: Convalescence Green Paint in Mud



Illustration 4: Convalescence- Struggle Scene

**Family inspiration:**

After reminiscing and seeing pictures of my family from both sides on dropbox and photo albums, I began to remember my blood and the lineage that follows through me. I have Black women in my family who have endured mental illness and lack of self-care on both sides of my family, which has affected me and how I proceed with taking care of myself and others. Seeing these pictures was another major inspiration for this piece. Sifting through images in my house led to the memories of so many family members who could have survived from mental illness or just considered a little more self-care. As a Black woman and taking on this topic, my family is extremely important. I desire to help the Black women in my family realize the importance of health and healing and change the narrative in our family and society. Below is a collage of some of the strong Black women I admire and completing this topic for.



Illustration 5: Lysandra Russell



Illustration 6: 2<sup>nd</sup> Fletcher Cousins



Illustration 7: Russell Cousins



Illustration 8: Taylor Russell



Illustration 9: Russell Cousins



Illustration 10: Joy Salmon



Illustration 11: Woodard Family

## **Process**

### **Personal Experience/Taylor's Healing Story**

My voice is central to my story. Yet, the fear of people knowing what I have been through ate me up inside, making it a little challenging to open up and tell my story so publicly. I remember presenting my thesis topic, and one of the main critiques I received suggested that I let people hear my voice as the catalyst for this topic. After having a freakout moment, I told myself to treat this as a journal or a letter to myself. It became a love letter demonstrating what I have been through and the adversity I overcame. It represents the ups and downs of medical issues and the physical ailments that challenged me. In essence, this is the story of how I healed my body and how this process influenced my research.

To heal, one has to find what works best for the body making healing, in a sense, a relative process. With Covid-19 as an example, the world learned that not everyone shows the same symptoms of an illness; not everyone heals the same way. Something important regarding my creative manifestation was understanding my history, including my medical story. Writing in detail about this helped me to further formulate my topic and create my process and final product.

*It was 2012, my freshman year of high school. I remember a numbness filling my wholebody; it was Christmas Eve. I began to feel a race in my heart, and due to the confusion of what my body was feeling and exerting externally, I went to the hospital the next day, terrified of what could potentially be wrong with me. The doctors began asking me questions about my symptoms and what I was experiencing. I was then informed by medical doctors that I might have Multiple Sclerosis or Lupus, all without running any*



*tests or further examination. I was terrified. I sat in tears as my father began to pray and console me next to me. He wanted to prevent me from breaking down mentally.*

*The diagnostic process crushed my spirit. After having this experience, I decided to try a different approach to healing since this approach to care jarred me. I decided to go to a holistic doctor and began my natural healing journey. Walking into this new doctor's office, I could feel the transformation. The smell of his office, the design of his office, felt homey and comfortable. Walking into his main office for a consultation, the therapeutic element that was created helped relieve his patients' anxiety and stress. I was used to the distant Western-based approach to healing prescriptions and temporary fixes. The personalized attention that was offered by my new doctor made me feel at ease and able to express my concerns over my health and overall well-being.*

*I remember him sitting down with his notebook and began asking me questions about what was wrong. I was more than a name and number to him. I told him in detail how I was feeling, the numbness through my whole body, racing heart, and shortness of breath. He began to tell me that blood work would be drawn to figure out what was happening. When my results came in, I was diagnosed with hypothyroidism, an autoimmune disorder. I was not shocked or stunned by the news; in a sense, I felt I was with a caring doctor who would guide me through the healing process. Also, since thyroid diseases run in my family, having this, as a result, seemed accurate.*

*Once the results were in, the encouragement and comfort that was felt made me feel at ease that I would be okay in the end. I was also secure in knowing I would be able to function with his help and treatment options. Shortly after the results came in, he prescribed supplements designated for the thyroid, which helped with my overall health*

*in general as well. The amount of detail the doctor put in when describing what I had and the medical terminology in the bloodwork was significant. I was not only getting my diagnosis, but I was being educated on what was happening inside of my body, internally and externally. When I was going to a non-holistic, Western-trained doctor, they would look at the results on a computer and explain your results often without detail and often without concern.*

*To conclude our session together, he prescribed the supplements Kelp and Selenium, which helped ease my thyroid symptoms. He told me to wait three months and come back to see them hoping that my condition would improve. Most people who have thyroid deficiencies take levothyroxine which is a man-made version of the thyroid hormone thyroxine. Levothyroxine might work on me, but my allergies to many medicines made me a skeptic, so I liked the idea of going with natural products.*

*The natural route was the best way to avoid any abnormal reactions. This is not the first time I went natural with my medicine. When I was diagnosed with Mononucleosis, my immune system shut down completely. So, I relied on Myers cocktail to regain strength and get my immune system back. I used an IV drip that injected different forms of vitamins, which helped boost my immunity. Using these natural treatments and approaches to healing not only healed my body but stopped it from ailing. Natural treatments are an alternative to Western medical practices, which rely on remedies that might work, but at the expense of other parts of the body. For example, a surgeon treats a knee issue, but surgery leads to a knee patient's heart problem. Holistic medicine, on the other hand, tries to fix the problem and doesn't just put a temporary fix that could lead to other issues.*

*If I were to compare the Westernized approach to the natural based, they are drastically different. The Westernized based approach to healing puts a Band-Aid, and a temporary fix on the diagnosis presented. Capitalism is very apparent in the western approach since money is a large factor in medicine. If medicine could do away with the capitalist approach to healing, would things be different concerning this temporary fix to treatment? Looking at the natural-based approach, the goal is to heal your body wholly. Using supplements properly and understanding the importance of how they work will drastically change the way people take care of themselves and their approach to medicine. Westernized medicine is not wrong it is just different as is natural or alternative approaches to medicine.*

*It is essential to understand the history that follows the natural-based approach to healing and the benefits that have long been proven and have helped many women heal their bodies in general. The natural-based method was stripped and taken from Black individuals due to the Atlantic Slave Passage, which caused many people to not truly understand the history behind natural healing and where it comes from.*

Once I began to dive deep into creating and filming, I started by narrowing my focus and asking myself what I wanted to heal. Healing is so broad and can be confusing if not narrowed down properly. After reading *Feminism is For Everybody* and understanding reproduction rights,<sup>53</sup> the question asked was: What is the function of a women's body, and how does the functionality of that come to play with this topic? In the diagram below, I listed a bunch of herbs used during slavery or in Africa that helped

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<sup>53</sup> hooks, *Feminism is For Everybody*, 5

Black women with a myriad of issues regarding their wombs. This short diagram helped me understand the purpose of specific herbs and how they function in healing and easing a woman’s body from menstruation and helping with the birthing process.

**Helpful Herbs**

<b>Name of Herb</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>What it is used for</b>
Rhus longipes	South Africa	Infertility in women, dilate birth canal
Diospyros lycioides	Central and Southern Africa	Infertility in women
sparagus africanus	Nigeria	Aid in childbirth
Gymnosporia buxifolia	Southern Africa	Remedy for painful Menstruation
terocarpus angolensis	Southern Africa	Infertility in women
Dicerocaryum zanguebarium	Mozambique	To dilate birth canal and expulsion of placenta
ouzolzia mixta Solms	Central and Eastern Africa	extract instilled into the vagina to dilate birth canal
Sweet potato leaves	West Africa	Quicken Labor

Illustration 12: Helpful Herbs

This research helped me understand historically different herbs that healed women’s bodies during slavery and led me to create my creative manifestation into two different worlds. The first world is considered the Natural World. In contrast, the second world is considered the Trashy World. These two worlds were created to describe from a metaphorical point of view what it feels like to heal your body naturally and the difference between putting garbage in you and not taking care of yourself.

## Natural World and Trashy World



Illustration 13: Natural World

In my creative manifestation, I set up two alternatives, refuse and natural-based. In the natural-based alternative, I am focusing on myself and trying to heal my body from past trauma that has affected my mental health and well-being. In the natural-based approach, this represents putting yourself before others and being proactive in taking care of your internal health while having a happy balance of taking care of others.<sup>54</sup> The feeling of self-care and being mindful of the simple things eating correctly, yearly check-ups, and doing what works for your body is the metaphorical approach to what this alternative world is getting towards. In contrast, the Refuse/Trashy is where many women sit and live because they do not have the resources, do not know where to begin or how to put themselves first.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> bell hooks, *Sisters of the Yam Black Women and Self-Recovery*, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2015), 125-126.

<sup>55</sup> bell hooks, *Ain't i a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*, (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group), 2015, 1-2.

## The Natural World

The natural world represented a metaphorical utopic environment that felt refreshing and healing. I begin by massaging my womb due to the environment and healing remedies around me. Me being in a field on the Hollins campus allows for the symbolic approach to herbs and natural remedies that can heal my womb or prepare it for childbirth or overall womb health in general. My thesis mentor and I constantly spoke about preparation for the womb, healing, and how neglected and vital this part of the body is.

Even though I am focusing on one part of the body, this helps Black women understand being whole and happy overall. Fueling your body mentally and emotionally with self-care is imperative for Black women, specifically with the stereotypes that are put upon us. *In Sisters are Alright*, Tamara Winfrey Harris explains how many Black women would have been saved if they had gone to get a checkup sooner.<sup>56</sup> So many Black women are constantly carrying the weight on their shoulders, which causes women to direct their focus in a completely different direction when neglecting their mental health. Bringing to light what healing feels like and the natural-based approach that was stripped away from Black women is essential. So many Black women are going back to what they were used to before the Atlantic Slave passage occurred.<sup>57</sup>

My thesis mentor is a herbalist who helps women become in tune and one with their bodies by using natural things of the earth to heal women's wombs and prepare for further complications. This is my thesis mentor and a snippet of her story, her healing

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<sup>56</sup> Harris, *Sisters Are Alright*, 106-107.

<sup>57</sup> *High on the Hog*, directed by Roger Ross Williams, (Los Gatos, CA: Netflix Originals, 2021), Netflix, Episode 2.

mission is for women to rebuild their bodies the natural way:

*Preeclampsia is a horror diagnosis; even in these modern times, there is still nothing to be done to alter the course once it has set in. In that famous pregnancy book, it says that only four percent of women would have this, but in the world, four percent becomes quite a lot through my struggles and complications with my pregnancy. After going through this tribulation, I was able to find a way to help women, regardless of whether they want to have kids or not, prepare their wombs from preventative diseases and pregnancy through a natural-based approach. I am a herbalist who provides informative information on specific herbs to help you heal from a myriad of things regarding women's health. I also provide yoni steaming sessions which uses herbs to cleanse and purify the inside of the vagina, allowing for regulation of menstruation and ease of period cramps and bloating.*

*Doing this work has helped me to become in tune with my body as a woman and help other women have informative information that I did not know about when I was going through my challenging pregnancy. This work that is being done is imperative for women because there are so many things regarding women's health that are not discussed. This is only the beginning for women to regain their health and understand the power they hold as Black women.*

*-Desiree Parkman, Thesis Mentor<sup>58</sup>*

The natural world means healed, happy, and whole. Black women deserve this!

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<sup>58</sup> Taylor Russell, Interview with Desiree Parkman, Personal, October 28, 2021.



Illustration 14: Trashy World

## Trashy World

This world is the complete opposite of the natural-based approach. It is entirely distasteful and shows a metaphorical way of neglecting your health and self-care on many levels. When trying to figure out my approach to this different world, I wanted to push past my limitations and generate something unexpected. My videographer Devonn McKenna, a Hollins one-year graduate student, helped me push the boundaries in finding a location representing a dump or landfill, a place that had literal waste or debris. In the Roanoke area, we found a literal garbage dump over a train track. In the picture above, you can see the garbage dump and where I created my second world, known as the Trashy world. For costuming, I decided to wear a long black dress that represented the color of darkness or nothing. I decided to use red paint in this section that helps signify the womb, menstruation, and the pain that is felt when putting things in your body that feed on the problem and create a larger problem in the end. This is a symbolic way of describing the feeling of consuming and holding negative things into your body. It comes to a point where healing is imperative to be whole and oneself and not have to hide behind the pain feeling like trash.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> bell hooks, *Sister of the Yam Black Women and Self-Recovery*, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2015), 62.



## Resources

Camille A. Brown, Okwui Okpokwasili, and Blondell Cummings were the primary influences for my creative manifestation. I wanted to use artists that propelled my imagination and allowed me to think beyond my vision regarding the creative manifestation aspect. Even though these artists are drastically different in approaching their work, they all provided a revolutionary approach to creating artwork and film. These artists inspired me because they are all prominent Black women in the industry and generating work that is their own. They are taking their stories and going against the normative approach to thinking, moving, and doing. Coming to Hollins and beginning to create work was extremely challenging since they go against the norm of the traditional approach to art making. Having this structure helped to form this creative lens. Here are a few pictures from the final product of my creative manifestation:



Illustration 15: Trashy World-Dilapidated Building Scene



Illustration 16: Natural World-Womb

## Conclusion

My grandmother's story influenced me to choose this topic. Through her struggle, many Black women faced similar hardships during her time and today. She was a woman who loved others more than herself, which caused her to become very sick and ill, leading to her death. The trauma that follows Black women has affected how we maneuver in this world due to the objectification and dehumanization of Black women's bodies. The stereotypical Black woman is taught to be a caregiver and sacrifice her whole well-being to take care of everyone else instead of herself. This leaves the self-care of her well-being at the end of the line. This traumatic approach to living life has caused many women to become ill and shorten their lives due to simply not caring for themselves. In bell hooks book *All about Love*, she states, "If you do not love yourself, you will be unable to love anyone else."<sup>60</sup> If more women lessened their love towards people, places, and things and used love as an action towards themselves, this would help to alleviate what my grandmother went through, and many women like her.

The body is constantly shutting down and unable to function because the simple

factors of life are not being met taking a shower, eating a substantial meal, getting a certain amount of sleep on time; because you are worried and focused on loving others and neglecting yourself. This causes anger and frustration and potentially leads to deep depression and sickness. Black women regaining their health and taking back their bodies will allow for a change and a shift in the ways things have been approached. The historical oppression that led to a rejection of natural-based healing can be overcome with action and a recognition of the importance of health and body. This is only a starting point to change and rebirth the way an approach to healing has been affected by society and history. It is time for Black women to regain their health. It is time for Black women to reclaim their identity. It is time.

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<sup>60</sup> hooks, *All About Love*, 53.

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