

Spring 5-2-2018

Black Matter: Re-Evaluating Representations Of Blackness Through Theatre Arts

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**BLACK MATTER: RE-EVALUATING REPRESENTATIONS OF BLACKNESS
THROUGH THEATRE ARTS**

by

AUBREY S. WILLIAMS

Under the Direction of DR. MAKUNGU AKINYELA/PhD

ABSTRACT

There are many studies that detail the misrepresentation of Black people or lack thereof in classic media (visual art, literature and theatre). This study seeks to explore how Blackness is represented in classic media: film, television, visual art and theatre and how these representations shape the consciousness of young Black and African American adults ages 18-25. Using a narrative research approach, this study explores the arc of Black representation in classic media beginning in the late 1800's and ending with the Black Arts Movement. This study utilized an original stage play as a creative component to mirror the content of the plays from the Black Arts Movement. The latter is followed by discussion with the audience members where I hope to find answers to the following questions: "How do you feel you are represented as a Black person

through classic media?” and “Is this theatre intervention an effective tool for understanding Black consciousness?”

INDEX WORDS: Black Consciousness, African American Theatre, African American Youth, Black Representation, Black Arts Movement, Harlem Renaissance, African American Literature, African American Visual Art.

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts
in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2018

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May 2018

DEDICATION

I dedicate this study to my parents, who have been undoubtedly supportive and dedicated to my personal and professional growth. They are from whom I get my wit, creativity, and undying sense of dedication. This work is also dedicated to my siblings, both of which have undeniable creative spirits and talent – hopefully this study may inspire them to use their creativity to uplift the community and uphold a sense of pride and self-love within themselves and others. Lastly, this work is dedicated to the countless African American youth who consider themselves artists, creatives, and artist-activists – I can only hope that this work inspires them to keep further develop their creative genius, and use it to uplift, empower, and preserve our culture.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to give a special thanks to the participants in this study for dedicating their time and their thoughts – their contributions to the development of this research is invaluable. I would also like to extend my gratitude to my chair and my committee members for guiding me and being a helping hand throughout this process.

PROLOGUE

“The Revolutionary Theatre Must Accuse and Attack anything that can be accused and attacked. It must Accuse and Attack because it is a theatre of Victims. It looks at the sky with the victims’ eyes, and moves the victims to look at the strength in their minds and their bodies.” –Amiri Baraka

(1965)

The latter is a quote from Amir Baraka’s essay, *The Revolutionary Theatre* and encompasses the values on which I place on the art of theatre. During the early summer of 2017, I saw a production that reminded me of this very quote. The production was entitled “*The Fall: All Rhodes Lead to Decolonization*” – a play I attended in Cape Town, SA. *The Fall* details the University of Cape Town student protests that happened during the year 2015 and was very reminiscent of the University of Missouri protests that happened after the death of Michael Brown in 2015. The University of Missouri protest sparked nationwide protests that led to collegiate policy changes. Both protests mirrored the racism and unequal treatment of Black students on collegiate campuses and the apathy of the administrators refusing to acknowledge their concerns. *The Fall* highlighted the many aspects of race and racism within the economic and collegiate system in Cape Town, South Africa. The characters within the play talked about how their involvement in the Black organizations on campus helped initiate student protest for causes such as lower tuition rates for Blacks, an Afrocentric curriculum, and the violent treatment of South African students, and the removal of the Rhodes Monument. The performance was sophisticated and powerful. Elements of South African dance and song were also included to help ease the transitions and accompany dialogue. This play was revolutionary, informative and transformative, and very much reminded me of why I decided to study theatre in the first place.

Theatre, from its very inception in my life has always been eye opening. I was introduced to theatre at the tender age of 11 years old where I played the lead role in my first play about social/ political issues: *Juvie* by Jerome McDonough. *Juvie* is a show about the incarceration of minorities ages ten through sixteen – a show that I am now doing with my students as a 6th, 7th, and 8th grade drama teacher. As a young Black girl, I was very fortunate to have a theatre program at my disposal. The first school I attended had an amazing theatre program, equipped with a luxurious theatre facility that had a costume shop for storage and sewing, a light and sound booth, and a set shop that was so clean you could eat off the floor. There were posters and pictures of shows they had done previously which included *Gone with the Wind*, *Oklahoma*, *Annie*, and many others. I scoured the photos to find students who looked like me and was lucky enough to find three or four Black students amongst the white faces. However, during the year I attended, I was the only Black student in that theatre program. While I was there I experienced some racism, especially from other students in the program who felt that I would be “taking their roles from them” unless I played a Black role. Unable to deal with my environment, I transferred to another school.

This new school was predominantly African American, and it too had a theatre program. Their theatre program didn't have a fancy facility with a light and sound booth, nor did it have a costume shop. The sets, costumes, props, lighting equipment and scripts were all situated in a trailer that sat behind the school's gymnasium. They did have cast photos though, like the other school did. Except this time, I saw a lot more people who looked like me in plays that I had only ever heard about, but never saw. I would later find out that most of those plays had either been written by or about African Americans including *A Raisin in the Sun* by Lorraine Hansberry, *The Piano Lesson* by August Wilson and *The Octoroon* by Dion Boucicault. I

remained in this new drama program, despite the fact that it wasn't as fancy or recognized as my old one had been. I stayed because through this drama program, where students were encouraged to explore works that about their cultural history, was where I found myself and where I began to discover and interpret my Blackness and what being Black meant to me. Through playing characters such as Beneatha from *A Raisin in the Sun*, I was able to explore my experience as a Black woman, what it meant to assimilate, and what African traditions were still carried on through my contemporary Black culture. Through characters such as the wax museum figures in George C. Wolfe's *The Colored Museum*, I was able to learn about the negative stereotypes that are placed on Black people and from that point on I was able to make a conscious decision to eradicate those stereotypes in my own personal life. Through playwriting, I learned to present Black people as they are, as August Wilson does in his century cycle of plays. And finally, I learned through playwright Amiri Baraka that theatre is powerful and revolutionary and that we as theatre people could use this powerful tool to our advantage – to present the injustices that Black people are facing, and to encourage and confront them through performance to get up and do something about it. I then began to pursue theatre in college, where I slowly began to solidify my career as a theatre professional and solidify my purpose. In certain spaces, the racism continued, but my purpose remained the same: to free Black people through the use of theatre and to create a safe space for Black artists to create and perform raw material that is honest and unapologetically Black.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This study is a qualitative narrative study that explores the role of theatre as a form of self-expression and self-worth amongst Black and African American youth. This study uses an original piece modeled after those of the Black Arts Movement of the 1960's and 70's as an intervention to assist Black and African American youth in making sense of how they are currently being portrayed in the eyes of the masses, and how they wish to see themselves represented in the American society moving forward. This study takes a contemporary look at age-old issues in attempt to revive the conversation and gather new insight, and hopefully new ideas on how African Americans can help shape positive images of themselves moving forward. This study involves Black African American youths ages 18-25, and will take place on the campus of Georgia State University.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

For years, Black people have been falsely created and misrepresented in theatre and film. Negative stereotypes of Black people were created and ingrained in the American society, which projected Black people as lazy, ignorant, wild, sexually aggressive and bestial – a stigma that still haunts and defines Black people today. Literature, visual art, and minstrelsy has helped perpetuate these stigmas and for centuries, Black artists such as Winold Reiss, W.E.B Dubois, Sonia Sanchez, Aaron Douglass, Amiri Baraka, Larry Neal, Ron Milner and Nikki Giovanni have all tried to break the cycle. How can Black people surpass the negative stereotypes that have been placed on them? Can these century old stereotypes be eliminated in a white dominated society?

A review of the literature stereotypes were developed about Black people over time and through which mediums they were developed and promoted (Morrison, 1990), (Levine, 2007), (Nadell, 2004). There is also media and literature that address how Black people feel about the way they are being presented and represented in classical media and film today (Brown, 1996) (Harrison, 1997) (Nadell, 2004), (Knight, 2002) and (Massood, 2011), but there is not a lot of literature that speaks to the way Black people wish to see themselves using the art of theatre – outside of the narratives of the Black Arts Movement that took place in the late 60's and early 70's. This study explores the narratives of contemporary young Black people in regard to how they see themselves being presented. This study mimics the theatre of the Black arts movement as an intervention to most accurately present and portray young Black and African Americans lives and to develop or increase one's understanding of Black Consciousness.

SIGNIFICANCE

Throughout my career as a theatre and film student and instructor, I've always wondered how my Blackness "fit". Although there are many plays and films written by Black authors about Black people, a focus on non-Black work still dominates the film and theatrical sphere, focusing very little – if at all, on a positive or honest depiction of Black people and Black lives. The latter is still an imperative issue. Although there are many studies that look at the representation of Black people in media – classic and contemporary, this research will be the first of its kind that uses an original creative component to encourage dialogue about Black consciousness, Black representation as a response to the misrepresentation of Blackness that exists across literature and media spheres. As opposed to simply evaluating the representation of Black people through

literature, theatre, and film, this study, while utilizing the theatre intervention, allows the participants to take part in the shaping of their representation, rather than be mere subjects.

NATURE OF THE STUDY

This study is a qualitative experimental design and utilized individual and focus group interviews via a narrative approach. The narrative approach to qualitative studies is defined by Creswell as: “a specific type of qualitative design” in which “narrative is understood as spoken or written text giving an account of an event/action or series of events/actions chronologically connected.” (Creswell, 2007). A narrative research study consists of collecting and analyzing stories and documents about an individual or a group of individual’s lived experience. Types of narrative studies include: a biographical study (researcher records the experiences of someone else’s life), an auto-ethnography (research that is written and recorded by subjects of the study), a life history (researcher portrays subject’s life), and an oral history (a gathering of personal reflections from the study). A narrative study works with the current research by utilizing an “oral history” approach, which is defined by Creswell as “personal reflections of events and their causes and effects from one individual or several individuals.” (Creswell, 2007) Narrative research is best for this research because I was strictly interested in knowing in great detail how the *participants* interpret and perceive Black representation prior to and after a theatre activity or intervention. I’ve also contributed to the research by reflecting on my own experience as a Black theatre student and professional. As a researcher, there are certain challenges I face with a narrative approach in that I should be careful not to disrupt the stories or make them my own.

RESEARCH QUESTION:

How do young Black/African American adults ages 18-25 want to be portrayed as it relates to theatre?

Supplemental Questions:

1. *How is Blackness in classic media (visual art, literature and theatre) interpreted by young Black/African American adults ages 18 – 25?*
2. *What is Black consciousness?*
3. *In what ways has Black consciousness revealed itself in the content of the theatre intervention?*
4. *Is theatre an effective tool for enhancing one's understanding of Black consciousness?*

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: NARRATIVE THEORY

“Narratives assume many forms. They are heard, seen, and read; they are told, performed, painted and sculpted and written. They are international, trans-historical, and trans-cultural: ‘simply there, like life itself.’” – (Margarete Sandelowski, 1990)

This qualitative study used the narrative framework to shape interview questions as well as to analyze and interpret data. The narrative approach to the study of lives, “reveal the extent to which these problems have been conditioned by empirical rather than narrative or biographical standards of truth and by a preoccupation of obtaining information at the expense of understanding expression.” (Sandelowski, 1990). In other words, narrative research has been pushed to the side in pursuit of more empirical or “scientific” research. A narrative analysis forces scholars to deal with the raw material that is set forth in front of them: the story. Scholars then are encouraged to take the studies and make meaning from them.

The narrative framework was used in this research to understand the participant as a subject of “nursing inquiry”, to conceptualize the interview, and to interpret and analyze interview data. There are two types of narrative approaches: descriptive and explanatory. The

explanatory narrative approach explores a narrative about why something happened, much like cause and effect. Because I did not look for a cause and effect relationship, but rather the narratives from the participants in regard to a particular phenomenon. The study used a descriptive narrative approach which seeks to explain: “ a) individual and group narratives of life stories or particular life episodes, b) the condition under which one storyline or emplotment and signification of events prevails over, coheres with or conflicts with other storylines, c) the relationship between individual stories and the available cultural stock of stories, and d) the function that certain life episodes serves in individuals emplotment of their lives.” (Sandelowski, 1990)

DEFINITIONS

1. Classic Media: for the purpose of this study, classic media is limited to *literature, visual art, and theatre*.
2. African American Theatre: Theatre performed and/or written about African American peoples.
3. Black Consciousness: This term will be used as “awareness of one’s identity and stature as a Black person.”
4. African American Youth: This study defines the term African American Youth as any African American female or male ages *18 to 25 years*.

ASSUMPTIONS

Due to my past and present experience as a theatre scholar, performer, director, producer and stage manager – I have an un-dying assumption that theatre is inherently political and needs to serve as a raw presentation of the population it is attempting to mirror. My knowledge of the theatre field has shown me thus far that Black people are

misrepresented and underrepresented – especially in the American academic and performing arts curriculum. As a researcher I have to be careful not to assume that the participants share my same views and that I do not impose my bias on the study. (See more in researcher bias.)

LIMITATIONS AND DELIMITATIONS

The scope of this study was to gather stories of participants in regard to how they wished to be represented through the arts, as well as their views on Black consciousness following a theatrical intervention created by the researcher. One of the limitations is that the findings cannot be generalized. This study only proposed a sample of ten to fifteen African American youth ages 18-25, which is not a large enough sample to be generalized. This research prioritized an intimate group of participants in order to focus on the participant's stories and how these stories contribute to the larger questions within the research. This research did not focus on participants who did not identify themselves as Black or African American and were not between the ages of 18-25 due to the fact that this research specifically serves and delivers the stories of African American youths in respect to how they see themselves and how they wish to be seen. This research did not use outside surveys or questionnaires (outside as in the participants have to complete a survey or questionnaire outside of the research site.) The reason for the latter because this research seeks to gather the participant's *most honest* and impromptu answers and interpretations on sight. However, other outside factors may affect the current research including school, home and work life. As a result, I considered these factors when asking the participants questions in regard to how they see themselves represented in their communities. Time was a factor in the study, being that this research and intervention is

scheduled to take place over the course of nearly four hours – this may limit the amount of information the researcher is given by the participant. Time constraint was a concern due to the fact that I wanted the participants to fully express their thoughts and interpretations. The theoretical and interpretive perspectives in this research were chosen as opposed to other perspectives because they best fit the cause (to provide a narrative) and they situate the intervention (a play). This research looks at Black representation through the arts in its most contemporary form as opposed to re-iterating prior research in an effort to gather the most recent stories.

CHAPTER 1 SUMMARY

Chapter 1 covers the problem statement which alludes to the years of the misrepresentation of African Americans, what this study seeks to accomplish, how significant this research is to the field, and the nature of the study. This chapter also covers the research questions, the conceptual framework used, definitions of terms frequently used throughout the study, the researcher's assumptions, limitations and delimitations of the current research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature Searches

The keywords used to find literature for the current study were: African American Theatre, Black Consciousness, Harlem Renaissance, Black Arts Movement, African American Literature, African American Visual Art, African American Representation, Black Art, and Theatre. The databases used for the search were JSTOR, Ebsco Host, Proquest, and Atlanta Daily World. The Journals used in this search include the African American Review and the Theatre Journal. There was also an abundance of literature used in this study, which are included in the bibliography.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Background

For decades, Black teens have found various ways to recognize and express their interpretation of oppression through music, (Haycock, 2015), The Civil Rights movements, radical movements such as the Black Panther Party and The Black Arts Movement, (Raines, 1983) sports, literature, news media and most recently, social media (Velasquez 2015 and Karamat 2016). Some empirical research has found that Forum Theatre or theatrical interventions have also had a hand in helping people recognize oppression, increasing social awareness, and fostering a motivation for political activism in peoples of all ages. Although the research supports the current study, gaps in the literature which include the sample, geographic regions and lack of appropriate methodologies must be discussed.

For decades, Black scholars have looked into the ways Blackness was introduced, shaped and eventually welded into stereotypes by Western ideology, which left them with the questions: What is Blackness, and can we define Blackness without the longstanding stereotypes? In likeness to DuBois's quote, there is a long-standing controversy in terms of how Black persons should be portrayed and unfortunately it continues to this day. This research seeks to identify how Black youth ages 18-25 would like to see themselves portrayed as it relates to classical media - however, first it is important to understand the how Blackness is represented in earlier forms of media including literature and visual art.

Historical Background:

Representations of Blackness – How Should the Negro Be Portrayed?

“There has been a long controversy within and without the Negro race as to just how the Negro should be treated in art – how he should be pictured by writers and portrayed by artists.”

– W.E.B. DuBois

Black Representations and Stereotypes through Visual Art:

Martha Jane Nadell's work, *Enter the New Negroes: Images of Race In American Culture* gives a brilliant chronology of the representation of Blackness in visual art, literature and publications from the late 1800's towards the end of the Harlem Renaissance. Depictions of Black persons were predominantly negative and were often generated by white artists and novelists including Joel Chandler Harris, George Washington Cable, Thomas Dixon E.W. Kemble, A.B. Frost and Thomas Nelson Page – all artists Nadell states were “literary heirs to Stowe – white authors of problematic African American characters”. (Nadell, p. 13) The forming of Black stereotypes (physical characteristics, and the like), began as early as the 1800's with works such as Uncle Tom's Cabin by Harriet Beecher Stowe, Harris' “old darky Uncle Remus”, Thomas Nelson Page's “old time darkies and Uncle Sam”, Kemble and Frost's strange class of negro creatures who “aped the actions of white people”. (Nadell, p.18) The subservient, old-time darky was “lazy and sexually aggressive in the wake of white female innocence and socially aggressive.” While the “post-reconstruction darkies” were “pre-disposed to loafing, stealing and effrontery” (Nadell, p. 13). Blacks were also depicted as bestial – often referred to in literature or depicted in art as “wild beasts”, “apes”, “impudent dogs”, and visual representations depicted Black persons with exaggerated features, i.e. extremely large noses and lips, making them look animal-like. The prominent white artists of the late 1800's and early 1900's all had one thing in common in that they refused to see Blacks as real persons. According to these famous white artists and writers, “the Negro was not a real person; he had neither depth nor character.” (Nadell, p.16).

These images created by prominent white writers and circulated by white-run media forged negative stereotypes of Black people that have failed to vanish over time. In fact, some of these stereotypes perpetuated by white authors still exists today. Martha Nadell, Larry Neal and Toni Morrison all discuss how literature and visual art play an extensive role in the perpetuation of stereotypes in the Black community. Nadell uses Sander Gillman's definition of a stereotype from the text, *Art and Illusion*: "a stereotype is a crude set of mental representations of the world...that perpetuate a needed sense of difference between the 'self' and the 'object' which becomes the Other." (Nadell, p. 25) from which Nadell states, "thus while a stereotype may seem to depict 'accurately' racial, ethnic, religious, national, or other groups, it in fact denies complexity and heterogeneity through its formulaic and uniform expressions." (Nadell p.25). Literature, paired with illustration are powerful conveyers that often solidify these stereotypes and make them even stronger, often construing them as fact – i.e. Black people are have big lips and noses, are inherently evil, etc.

After years of misrepresentation, Black artists and activists – i.e. one Alain Locke decided that Negroes should "be accurately portrayed and painted". The year 1920 marked the Harlem Renaissance also known as "The New Negro Movement" – a multi-disciplinary and multi-genre arts movement that gave Black artists and writers a national platform. The Harlem Renaissance consisted of a multitude of Black poets, artists and literati including Langston Hughes, James Weldon Johnson, Zora Neale Hurston, Alain Locke, August Wilson, Claude McKay and W.E.B. Dubois - just to name a few. The movement focused on the evolution of the "New Negro", which was an image of a Black person who was "keenly, naturally at times bitterly aware of himself and his place in our civilization." (Nadell, p.35) Locke stated that this New Negro community was in the process of "developing a new mentality, a new psychology and a

new spirit” (Nadell, p.38) in contrast to the old Negro who was more of a “myth” than a “man”. In other words, the Harlem Renaissance called for a new, self - determined Negro who wanted to dispel negative racial stereotypes. Nadell discusses at least two major publications that were critical in attempting to shape the Black aesthetic and dispel negative stereotypes with Black writing and visual art, The Survey Graphic’s 1925 issue entitled “Harlem Mecca of the New Negro” and Fire!! Both of these publications were used in an attempt to portray naturalistic images of African Americans as opposed to the caricaturist images that were placed on them by white artists and writers, these publications used more photos rather than illustrations to create a more realistic and serious portrayal that promoted communal representations of Blackness and uniqueness and individuality separate from that of the white phenotype – painting Negroes “as they are”. For Alaine Locke, the answer for dispelling stereotypes was through visual arts because visual representations serve to be very powerful interpretations of social conventions. The Harlem Renaissance artists sought to denounce negative stereotypes, however this movement will be later criticized for its appeal to white people rather than its purpose to use the arts to serve Black communities.

Images of Blackness Shaped Through American Literature:

Toni Morrison goes into further detail with her text, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* where she discusses extensively the role of the Negro in classic American literature and its contribution to modern day stereotypes. In *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, Morrison discusses literary whiteness and representations of Blackness in American literature. One of the major themes throughout the book is that American Literature and American History cannot exist without the Black population and discourse. She introduces the term "Africanism" which she refers to as a literary technique used to enforce

stereotypes about non-whites. Morrison posits that literature uses languages and propaganda of “racial superiority, cultural hegemony, and dismissive othering” (p. X). Morrison’s question then becomes: How is literary whiteness and Blackness constructed? What are its consequences?

Morrison argues that Black enslavement enriched the country’s creative possibilities and redefined what it meant or who was meant to be free. If America is often used in co-existence with the term “freedom” - “nothing highlighted freedom if it did not create it, like slavery”. (p. 38) Freedom was opposite of darkness, otherness, submission, alarm and desire that was characterized with Blackness or other Africanisms. Culture identities and stereotypes are hence formed and the American is now the new white man whereas the Black African identity was paired with rawness and savagery: “autonomy, authority, newness and difference, absolute power – not only become the major themes and presumptions of American literature, but that each one is made possible by, shaped by, activated by a complex awareness and employment of a constituted Africanism. It was this Africanism, deployed as rawness and savagery, that provided the staging ground and arena for the elaboration of the quintessential American identity.” (p.44)

Listed are the linguistic strategies Morrison argues enforces racial stereotypes:

1. Economy of stereotype
 - a. Allows the writer an easy image without the responsibility of specificity.
2. Metonymic displacement
 - a. color coding and other physical traits
3. Metaphysical condensation
 - a. allows the writer to transform social and historical differences into universal differences.
4. Fetishization

- a. Used to absolutely categorize savagery and civilization
5. Dehistoricizing Allegory
 - a. No time frame/history-less
 6. Patterns of explosive, disjointed, repetitive language

Using the provided strategies, the literary imagination acts as both a visible and invisible force – visible in that we can physically see it in the literature, and invisible in that it is shaping the subconscious of its readers, which include how they view Black people and Blackness. Morrison concluded that most times, Blackness was used to define the goals of and enhance the qualities of white characters. For example: “He was dark and full of rage as he moved toward the young girl whose skin was as pure and as white as snow...” – The latter example perfectly draws on the negative Black characteristics to bring attention to, or glorify white ones with savage imagery for dark and full of rage”, juxtaposed to the description of the white young female whose skin is “pure” and “white as snow”. Many examples of like these are found in American literature and only goes to show that racism is still deeply seated in American literature, hence still promoting age old stereotypes.

In essence, Black representation in America was created and was driven by negative racial stereotypes created by the white imagination and enforced through a Eurocentric curriculum. Due to the latter, the question of “Who and what are Black folk?” arose. Attempts to answer the latter and to dispel negative stereotypes about Blackness were made during the Harlem Renaissance and again through a later, more revolutionary period deemed the Black Arts Movement.

The Black Arts Movement, Black Consciousness and The Black Aesthetic:

The Black Arts Movement was inspired partly by the politics of the late Malcolm X, and the music of John Coltrane. The Black Arts Movement or BAM for short, was the name of a group of Black political artists, dramatists and poets who emerged during the Black Power Movement in late 60's and 70's. The Black Arts Movement is known as the "single most political and artistic movement of its time" and "served as a catalyst for Asian American, Chicana/o, Puerto Rican and Native American cultural movements." (Bracey, Sanchez and Smethurst p. 13). Famous Black Arts Movement artists were abundant and included the likes of Amiri Baraka (formally LeRoi Jones), Larry Neal, Sonia Sanchez, June Jordan, Nikki Giovanni, Haki Madhubuti and Ntozake Shange. The Black Arts Movement is described by African American theatre scholar Larry Neal as "the aesthetic and spiritual sister of the Black Power concept. As such, it envisions an art that speaks directly to the needs and aspirations of Black America. In order to perform this task, the Black Arts Movement proposes a radical reordering of the Western cultural aesthetic. It proposes a separate symbolism, mythology, critique, and iconology." (Neal, p. 63) The Black artist's duty was to promote liberation, self-determination and self-definition amongst all Black persons, and to promote working within the Black communities.

Through a multi-disciplinary approach, the Black Arts Movement used poetry, drama, music, visual art and dance to abandon stereotypes created and upheld by the white majority. As with its predecessor, the Harlem Renaissance, the Black Arts Movement also sought to answer these questions through a multi-genre, multi-disciplinary approach: What is Blackness and how should Blackness be represented? There were a few distinct differences within the two movements – BAM and the Harlem Renaissance, that made an impact on its success. Although

both the Harlem Renaissance Movement and the BAM sought to define Blackness through the arts, the Harlem Renaissance was criticized by the artists of the Black Arts Movement for appealing to white crowds and patrons and being distant from their Black communities. The Black Arts Movement championed community projects created for the culture and by the culture as insinuated by the mantra coined by Dubois: “for Black people, by Black people, about Black people, and near Black people.” (Dubois). The artists of the Black Arts Movement also described the literature of the Harlem Renaissance as “protest literature” Or a literature that yearned for sympathy from whites. Floyd Gaffney (1970) would describe protests literature or integrationist literature as “presenting the Black problem in relation to white society.” The literature of the Black Arts Movement however, did not seek to appease white people, but instead “focuses on cultural communication and community involvement while utilizing raw material that rejects white ethics and standards.” (Gaffney, 1970). The stark difference in the work of BAM and the Harlem Renaissance was that the Black Arts Movement used art as politics through a Black Nationalist and Black Liberation platform. The Black Arts Movement did not use its work in order to gain praise or sympathy from whites, rather, the work of the Black Arts Movement was used to educate and empower the Black communities by trying to develop an image of self-pride, and self-determination.

Black aesthetics and Black consciousness were key terms in the Black Arts movement. although there was never a clear definition of Black aesthetics, (Bracey, Smethurst, Sanchez p.) there was a clear agreement that Black art should distinguish itself from Western art because the current aesthetic created by Western art is irrelevant and oppressive to the Black culture. Black should be the center of Black culture and life and should be judged by its own aesthetic, not the aesthetic of whites. Black consciousness had to do with taking pride in one’s self, being aware

and owning one's Blackness, and embracing one's Black culture – these aspects of Black consciousness are evident in the work of the Black Arts Movement. The Black Arts Movement upholds Leophold Sengor's three characteristics of Black art which are:

1. Functional – Black art must be functional and serve a purpose. There is no such thing as art for art's sake.
2. Collective – Black art must be for the people and it must be returned to the people.
3. Committed – Black art must be committed to revolution and change.

Visual, performing and literary art were expected to follow those Black Arts Movement standards. BAM artists wrote poems and plays with these tenets in mind as a way to engage and reach the community on a mass scale: “the most popular forms of the movement were poetry and theatre, since it was comparatively easy to present plays and poems at a political rally, on a street corner or in public housing courtyard or community room”, re-iterating a strong sense of community and promoting a sense of self-determination. (Bracey, Sanchez and Smethurst, p.6). With that being said, a theatre intervention that mirrors the content of the Black arts movement was chosen for this research in order to appeal to Black persons in the community, and for them to express their own stories of Blackness and what they believe Blackness is.

African American Theatre and Performance: A Brief History

The history of African theatre spans for millennia, dating back to primitive African tribal dance and ritual as far back as 8500 BC (Glencoe, 2017) - however the history of African American theatre begins within the last 500 years with the African slave trade. African victims “retained many of their performance traditions, such as ensemble improvisation in the New World. “Early performances were carried out on plantations and in homes and ultimately had a wide influence on American culture, first demonstrated in the creation of minstrel shows in the

1820's and 30's" (Nadler, 2006). Minstrels were one of the first public demonstrations and interpretations of Black people that was offensive and served as a staunch misrepresentation of Black people. Minstrel shows or minstrelsy was a show in which Black characters in early white plays were played by white people in Black face (Black face was either Black make-up or charcoal). The trend peaked after the Civil War in 1840 and exaggerated and perpetuated negative racial stereotypes about Black people that continued well into the 1900's with famous minstrel characters such as Mammy, Uncle Tom, and Jim Crow – for which the segregation era got its namesake.

In the midst of the minstrelsy phenomenon in 1821, a group of Black actors formed a group called the African Grove Theatre. Located in the attic of William Brown, the African Grove theatre became the first Black theatrical company in America. The African Grove was known for its Shakespeare performances, most notably *Richard III* and is known for housing the first known recorded play by an African American: *King Shotaway*. Outside of the African Grove, theatrical opportunities were limited to the degrading art of minstrelsy until the rise of Black musicals. A few years after African Grove, Black actors and writers found success on Broadway. *Clorindy: the Origin of the Cakewalk*, (1898) and *In Dahomey* (1902), both works written by Paul Lawrence Dunbar, were the first two Black musicals on Broadway.

The Harlem Renaissance (1920 – mid 1930's) became a massive platform for Black artists and writers and it contributed to a renewed interest in Black Drama. Paul Nadler describes the Harlem Renaissance as “the first major period of Black playwriting.” (Nadler, 2006). The period benefitted from the works of Angelina Weld Grimké, Garland Anderson, and Willis Richardson to name a few. The Lafayette Theatre group (1915) was a theatre group that saw its height during the Harlem Renaissance however, the Lafayette Theatre produced mainstream

white plays with Black actors. Also around this time, more Black characters were being written into white, mainstream plays and musicals as a way for whites to “examine the place of Blacks in American society.” (Nadler, 2006). In the year 1938, Langston Hughes and Louise Patterson establish the Harlem Suitcase Theatre which produced short plays that included Hughes’s poetry and white agit-prop drama. The Harlem Suitcase’s predecessor, The Negro Theatre (1935-1939) was a white owned theatre that produced Black adaptations of well-known plays, however the theatre did eventually hire infamous Black playwrights including Theodore Brown and Theodore Ward. The Harlem Renaissance proved to be a success for upcoming Black artists and writers, but theatre began to die down due to World War II.

During the wake of the Civil Rights Movement theatre was revived and found an outlet through the new set of social politics. Lorraine Hansberry’s *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959), a play about a working class Black family on the south side of Chicago striving for a “better” life that resembled their white counterparts was a major hit. *A Raisin in the Sun* discussed major themes such as religion, Africans versus African Americans, education, feminism, religion, and Jim Crow racism. *A Raisin in the Sun* was widely recognized and criticized, often times viewed as an integrationist or protest play. Nonetheless *Raisin*, along with Alice Childress’s meta-theatrical piece *Trouble in Mind* (1955), are still American classics coming out of the Civil Rights era. Towards the end of the Civil Rights movement into the mid to late 1960’s, politics and activism became synonymous for African American theatre. Leroi Jones (also known as Amiri Baraka) was a major artist activist of this era. Jones' work, *Dutchman* (1964) served as the catalyst for what is now known as the Black Arts Movement. The Black Arts Movement was a national movement that worked simultaneously with the Black Power movement. The Black Arts Movement made Black theatre immensely popular nationwide and fostered many of the field’s

most prominent artist including Sharon Sharp, Danny Glover, Woodie King, Sonia Sanchez, Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, Ishmael Reed, Nikki Giovanni, Etheridge Knight, Gwendolyn Brooks, Audre Lorde, Ed Bullins, Ronald Milner and many more. Some popular plays from the Black Arts movement include but are not limited to: *Dutchman* (Baraka, 1964), *Monster* (Milner, 1968), *The Bronx Is Next* (Sanchez, 1968), *Wine in the Wilderness* (Childress, 1969) and *Clara's Ole Man* (Bullins, 1968) "Over 600 theatres and troupes were founded" (Nadler, 2006). Some of those theatres included The National Black Theatre (New York), Baraka's Spirit House Movers in (Newark), Kumbba Theatre Company (Chicago), Concept East and Black Arts Theatre (Detroit), The Ebony Showcase and the Inner City Repertory Theatre (Los Angeles), as well as Free Southern Theatre (New Orleans), Theatre Afro (Miami) and Sudan Arts Southwest (Houston). however, due to the lack of funding, most of them only lasted briefly with the exception of the New Lafayette Theatre, the New Federal Theatre, and the National Black Theatre.

The 1970's to the 1990's also saw a significant interest in Black theatre. Artists such as Ntozake Shange received national recognition for her work, *for colored girls who considered suicide when the rainbow is enuf* (1976). Black Broadway productions such as *The Wiz* (1975), and *Dreamgirls* (1981) saw an increase in popularity. August Wilson's Century Cycle (also known as the Pittsburgh Cycle) included pieces: *Fences* (1985), *Jitney* (1982), and *Seven Guitars* (1995), which saw endless notoriety and earned him a Pulitzer Prize in Drama. George C. Wolfe's *The Colored Museum* (1993) which was a meta-theatrical piece about African American stereotypes was also a contributor that helped propel Black theatre into the American mainstream.

African American Theatre and African American Theatre Establishments:

As it stands, African American theatre as a genre and as a physical place of being is in steady decline due to a lack of financial support from the government, as well as the cultural appropriation of Black theatre in white theatre establishments. A number of Black theatre scholars discuss the role of Black theatre and Black playwrights as essential to the Black community and Black liberation initiatives.

Floyd Gaffney's article, *Black Theatre: Commitment and Communication* (Gaffney, 1970) discusses the role of Black theatre and Black expression as it relates to theatre. Black expression "refers to a synthesis of Black experience in America: protest, identity, achievement, revolt and freedom." The Black theatre and playwright "has a responsibility to reflect these unique life styles through drama that possess both literary and theatrical merit – but from a non-white perspective." In essence, interpreting the reality of our existence while rejecting white ethics and standards. Gaffney's article goes into the roles of "integrationist vs. revolutionary plays" – or, in other words: protest vs. militant plays, where the latter focuses on cultural communication and community involvement while utilizing raw material that rejects white ethics and standards. Protest plays "present the Black problem in relation to white society" – while making sure Black people are seen as human beings (Gaffney, 1970).

Gaffney also describes the role of Black playwrights as opposed to white playwrights. He writes that some whites use theatre to liberate their individual egos and bodies, but Black playwrights are about the playwright's experiences as well as the experiences of his collective group – which has carries a strong similarity to Morrison's piece. Gaffney places a strong focus on Black playwrights and writing the Black experience as a form of social justice, and believed that Black theatre should be kept in the Black community – as did Lou Bellamy, author of *The*

Colonization of Black Theatre, who describes how major theatre institutions (white institutions) have been “discovering” Black art, in other words, taking it and making it “relevant” for mainstream audiences, which results in a watered-down, skewed perception of Black people that also ensues stereotypes. Bellamy describes these white theatres as coming into the industry and taking over as “colonialist”, who are reaching for this “multi-cultural” perception. (Bellamy, 1997). In a matter similar to the article “The Colonization of Black Theatre”, Harrison discusses the role of white theatres as “paternal” and “as the adoptive parents of the Black experience” – “As Black institutions were cut off from the dole, mainstream regional theatres were funded and charged with the development of Black playwrights becoming the adoptive parents of the Black experience.” (page 570). White theatres change the feeling and the way in which Black stories are told. Genevieve Fabre’s article, *African American Theatre: A Bibliography Survey* backs this argument by discussing how whites wrote Negro plays and designed their own perception of what Black life, theatre and culture was like, i.e. the perception of Negroes through the white imagination. This began the trend of Black theatres, as described with the following quote by Woodie King: “Black artists had tried integrating the white theaters. That didn’t work. So, we started our own theatre. The reasons were very basic (more things in the theatre are basic): We did not intend to put any more time into the small, biased white community theatres, time usually spent painting sets or playing small buddy roles. We wanted to play lead roles, have a say in what plays would be done, and be directors of some plays. Whitey told us to go to hell...Again, we started our own thing.” (King, 1968).

Despite the initiatives of Black theatre artists and advocates, Black theatres did not last as projected. There were reportedly hundreds of Black Theatre and Cultural Centers established during the height of African American Theatres in 1970. (Bracey, Sanchez and Smethurst, 2014)

As of 2017, few Black Arts theatres remaining include Woodie King Jr.'s New Federal Theatre in Manhattan, New York and Lou Bellamy's Penumbra Theatre in St. Paul, Minnesota.

African American Ritual Theatre:

Larry Neal quotes Maulana Karenga's Kawaida theory in his "The Black Arts Movement" essay in stating that a culture must obtain:

1. Mythology
2. History
3. Social Organization
4. Economic Organization
5. Political Organization
6. Creative Motif
7. Ethos

Rituals evolve from a common culture and thus are formalized behaviors and performances that "attempts to alter the values of that community and culture." (Molette, 2001)

African American ritual drama's roots are derivative of ancient African ritual performance and began long ago with slavery and is perpetuated in the Black church. "The African American ritual drama aims to achieve an ideal somewhere between pure representation, which is the realistic, naturalistic ideal of Euro American theatre, and pure form" (Molette, 2001). In other words, African American ritual theatre seeks to project an ideal form of reality, focusing more so on form. Actions and events must take place in a pattern or format, and the actors must not pretend to be anyone other than themselves and cannot shut the audience out of their consciousness. The audience of African American ritual theatre is expected to participate in the

ritual as opposed to being a passive group of people who sit, listen and make connections or judgements at the conclusion via applause. “The dramatic event is not situated in a specific time and place other than its own which means the audience members are then free to participate if they wish to do so (like Boal’s theatre of the oppressed), as opposed to the Eurocentric theatre ritual that operates based on the illusion of time and space.

Because African American ritual theatre is a descendent of the Black church ritual, which consists of intense emotion and repetition in dance, speech and song, it “does not conform to the generally accepted Aristotelian format for the structuring of drama.” (Molette, 2001). In an African American church, there is no plot – thus an African American ritual drama performance does not necessarily need to have a definitive beginning, middle and end - as opposed to European American drama whose structure depends on plot and plot development. For African American ritual drama, it’s “not what you say and do, but how you say and do it.” (Molette, 2001). African American ritual drama can base its entire piece simply off of a premise. The premise should evoke emotional intensity or “soul”, which should ultimately lead to an audience reaction: $\text{Premise} + \text{Soul/Emotional Intensity} = \text{Audience Reaction}$.

Finally, there are three purposes of African American ritual drama that are very similar to some of the tenets of the Black Arts Movement: Community and Togetherness, Purposefulness and to Create a Spiritual Impact. The first purpose of African American ritual drama, Community Togetherness is “to celebrate the affirmation of s a sense of community, a feeling of togetherness” amongst the audience and the performers. African American ritual drama must also be purposeful – “the ritual drama is expected to have some future effect outside the framework of the ritual itself”. And lastly, African American ritual drama must create a spiritual involvement amongst its audience. (Molette, 2001)

Paolo Freire's' Pedagogy of the Oppressed and Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed:

Critical pedagogy was developed by Paolo Freire, a Brazilian educator and philosopher who in turn influenced “post-colonial theory, ethnic studies, cultural studies, media studies, literacy studies, and social development.” (Van Der Smit, 2007). Freire was consistently devoted to the politics of education within the existing frame of the larger society. Freire's work combines the aspects of culture, power and oppression within the context of education by reinforcing a focus on theory and practice as important components in the struggles against domination and exploitation, and promotes resistance and counter-hegemony. Branching from pedagogy of the oppressed is Brazilian practitioner Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed which is an experimental theatre that encouraged audience participation and interaction. Audience members were often invited on stage to redirect the stories to provide new suggestions for performance. As a result, Boal unexpectedly discovered an effective pedagogical form of praxis that evolved strictly from audience participation and collective reflection – the “spect-actor”. The spect-actors actively participates in theatrical performances as opposed to the spectator who is just an observer.

Boal's theatre of the oppressed is a theoretical framework that uses participatory theatre in order to address and discuss social and political issues using the following categories: 1. Recognizing when and how one is being oppressed (recognition of oppression.) 2. How the oppressed reacts to their oppression (reaction to oppression) 3. how and what methods the victim uses to respond to their oppression (response to oppression/call to action). Boal stated that, “All theatre is necessarily political, because all the activities of man are political and theatre is one of them... Theatre is a weapon. A very efficient weapon. For this reason, one must go fight for it.

For this reason, the ruling classes strive to take permanent hold of the theatre and utilize it as a tool for domination...But the theatre can also be a weapon for liberation. For that, it is necessary to create appropriate theatrical forms.” (Boal, 1979).

Ngugi Wa’Thiongo’s Theatre for Development, Political Theatre and People’s Theatre:

Ngugi Wa’Thiongo is a Kenyan writer whose works emerged as a response to what he saw as a deep disregard for African art and culture, the erection of European theatres around Kenya, and the rejection of the indigenous language (most shows were performed in English). English was taught in Kenya’s schools to help reinforce European culture and beliefs. As a result, plays were not allowed to criticize the government and its politics. Similar to the artists from the Black Arts Movement, Ngugi stressed that dramatic events should be in the indigenous languages so that the native people in the communities could relate. Ngugi wanted plays that “truly reflect Kenyan social realities and patriotic Kenyan history”. (Ngugi, 1981). In and around 1970, Ngugi developed several types of theatre reminiscent of Boal and Freire’s pedagogies that comes in many forms and structures - all of which base their storytelling within the community and uses theatre as an educational tool where social and political issues are seated in satire in order to improve the community’s quality of life. The theatre is participatory and the passive audience is discarded, as with theatre of the oppressed; Ngugi and Boal both believed that theatre is a powerful mode of expression that is used to voice the people’s concerns. Wa'Thiongo's forms include theatre for development, popular theatre, people’s theatre, protest theatre, and political theatre. This research will focus on theatre for development, people’s theatre, and political theatre. Theatre for development is structured in the style of Boal’s theatre of the oppressed and requires the audience members in the community to serve as spect-actors who

were encouraged to make suggestions during a performance using indigenous language and storytelling. Wa'Thiongo's people's theatre is not as aggressive in the spect-actor aspect, however, it aims to make the people aware of the inequalities that are present in their communities. People's theatre is "accessible to and controlled by the masses, performed in languages and addressing their issues." (Findlay, 1970). Wa'Thiongo's political theatre re-iterates the idea that theatre and politics are human activities – a reflection of the world around us. Ngugi uses theatre as a political and educational tool, not a mere source of entertainment. Political theatre is used as propaganda to instruct the audience and to advocate for a cause or to use as fuel for a social revolution as a way for the oppressed to free themselves - as Boal states, "Theatre is becoming, not being." (Boal, 1979).

Related Research -Theatre and Social Justice:

Other researchers have found Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed theory quite useful when it came to social justice. To reiterate, this theoretical framework was developed by Brazilian theatre actor, director and enthusiast Augusto Boal in order to illuminate human nature and weakness through the arts. Boal saw theatre as one of the most effective ways to communicate oppression to a mass audience, and these three guiding principles helped people conceptualize their oppression. (Boal, 1979) Nick Hammond's research utilized this theory specifically in his article, *Introducing Forum Theatre to elicit and advocate children's views* questions: "how can FT (Forum Theatre) be utilized to support the elicitation and advocating of children's views?" It was proposed that Boal's Forum Theatre can be emancipatory in nature and as such children may feel empowered, thus promoting social justice. The findings indicate that FT has some emancipatory processes which might allow participants to share their voice in a safe space. Furthermore, this voice can be advocated amongst the "oppressed" and the "oppressors" in a

non-threatening and collaborative way to support individual and social change. Other researchers have also explored Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed as a theoretical framework and methodology to explore social awareness and activism (O'Brien, C., Kroner, C., & Placier), but again these studies were amongst predominantly white youth groups in suburban settings, which does not acknowledge how oppression is recognized and effects non-white groups in urban, underprivileged areas. Both the fields of theatre and African American Studies can benefit from research of this sort done on African American youth. There were also other studies that have quite effectively shown increase in social awareness and activism, (particularly dealing with forms of oppression) That did not use Boal's theory. According to other studies led by (N. Fredland 2010), (Joronen and Kurki 2011) (Ponzetti, Selman, Munro, Esmail, Adams, 2009) (Wernick, Kulik, and Woodford, 2014) (Faigin, 2015), youths were able to conceptualize oppressive behaviors such as bullying and sexually harassment, and drug abuse through an interactive theatre intervention. Following the experiences, students indicated that they were more inclined to change their behavior and their social awareness had improved. Only two of these studies have implemented a longitudinal survey to confirm increased social awareness and behavior change after the theatre intervention (N. Fredland 2010) and (Wernick, Kulik, and Woodford, 2014). Most of these studies were done in school settings ranging from elementary to early college education, using predominantly white and suburban populations. The participants were male and female, ages ranging from six years old to seventy-two. Very little is to be said about non-white minorities in these studies, which slightly discredits the toll oppression has on non-white/non-privileged populations. Empirical studies on how theatre interventions can raise social awareness and activism amongst African American youth are rare, and the studies of how theatre interventions can shape their consciousness have not been found. This study seeks to use

a theatrical intervention to bring to the forefront the narratives of African American youth, their thoughts on the oppression they face, and how media has shaped that oppression.

GAPS IN THE LITERATURE

The literature has not fostered any narrative research that pairs theatre and Black consciousness and concepts of representation in African American youth. The literature gathered in terms of Black consciousness and theatre specifically focus on theatre's contributions to Blackness and Black liberation, but does not provide a narrative for an individual's perceptions of Black consciousness after witnessing Black theatre. As acknowledged above, many of the studies that investigate theatre, social awareness and social activism disregard non-white populations and urban areas, specifically catering to predominately white students in privileged spaces. The latter studies also fail to measure individual experiences in detail, focusing only on the group as a whole in order to generate a "general consensus." This study hopes to illuminate individual experiences and narratives of African American Youths ages 18 – 25 in regard to theatre and how it shapes their perceptions of Black consciousness. This research is significant in that unlike the latter research and literature, it provides a mix-methods approach in that it will provide intimate, individual stories of how theatre has shaped the perception of Blackness in young Black individuals. This research will not serve as a general consensus, but more as a narrative documentation of single lived experiences through theatre have helped change or discover one's perceptions about Black consciousness.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODS

Purpose

The purpose of this narrative study uses an oral history approach to discover how young Black and African American participants ages 18-25 see themselves represented in classical media and how they understand Black consciousness using an open-ended pre-questionnaire and focus group interviews. This stage of the research discusses the methodology.

Method Summary

This study utilized a qualitative methodology, defined by John W. Creswell, “begins with assumptions and the use of interpretive theoretical frameworks that inform the study of research problems addressing the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem...the final written report or presentation includes the voices of participants, the reflexivity of the researcher a complex description and interpretation of the problem, and it’s contribution to the literature and its call for change.” (Creswell, 2007 p.44) Creswell also emphasizes eight common characteristics of qualitative studies (Creswell, 2007):

1. **Natural setting.** Researchers collect data in a field site where participants experience the issue or problem under study and gather up-close information from participants in their natural setting, having face-to-face interaction over time.
2. **Researcher as key instrument.** Researcher does not rely on questionnaires that do not include open-ended questions. The qualitative researcher collects data themselves by collecting documents
3. **Multiple methods.** The qualitative researcher does not rely on a single data source. The qualitative research should gather multiple resources such as interviews, observations and

documents and review all of these data sources for common themes, or organize the information provided into common categories.

4. **Complex reasoning through inductive and deductive logic.** Inductive logic is used by the researcher to establish common themes, patterns and categories which are developed from the bottom up. Participants could be encouraged to help shape inductive logic by collaborating with the researcher. Deductive logic can be used to build themes that are constantly being checked against the data.
5. **Participants' meanings.** The researchers should not bring meaning from themselves nor from the literature used in the research. Researchers should focus on the meanings that a participant brings to an issue because it encourages a different perspective to the study.
6. **Emergent design.** Researchers should be prepared for shifts and changes in the research design upon entering the field to collect data. Questions, forms of data, and participants may be altered or modified during the study.
7. **Reflexivity.** Researchers position themselves and give their insight on the research. Researchers can use cultural, work, or personal experiences to show how it informs their interpretation of a study and what they have to gain from the study. "our readers have the right to know about us...they want to know what prompts our interests in the topics we investigate, to whom are we reporting and what we personally stand to gain from our study?" (Creswell, p.47)
8. **Holistic account.** Researchers are not looking for a cause and effect account, but rather develop complex issues or a bigger picture of the problem under the study. This involves reporting multiple perspectives.

According to Creswell, we conduct qualitative research when:

1. We want to empower individuals to share their stories, hear their voices and minimize the power relationships that often exist between a researcher and the participants in a study.
2. We want to write in a literary, flexible style that conveys stories or theatre, or poems without the restrictions of formal academic structures of writing.
3. Because we want to understand the contexts of settings in which participants in a study address a problem or issue.
4. To follow up quantitative research and help explain the mechanisms or linkages in casual theories and or models.
5. To develop theories when partial or inadequate theories exists for certain populations and samples or existing theories do not adequately capture the complexity of the problem we are examining.
6. And lastly, we use qualitative research because quantitative measures and the statistical analysis simply do not fit the problem.

(Creswell, p.48)

After reflecting on these characteristics and qualifications, I felt that qualitative research would be most appropriate for my study because my research seeks to empower African American individuals to share their experiences in regard to how they feel they are being represented in mainstream media, and to reflect on how the intervention contributed to their thoughts about Black representation and Black consciousness and how they understand these concepts and issues. This research engaged with the participants in a comfortable setting as not to enforce a researcher – participant atmosphere. Being that this study is a creative project, it

used a play (theatre) as an intervention to inspire the participants to share more of their stories in a way that is not purely academic, but rather honest and meaningful.

Sample

This study utilized a purposeful sampling approach which means that “the inquirer selects individuals and sites for the study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study.” (Creswell, p.155) “In a narrative study, the researcher reflects on whom to sample – the individual may be convenient to study because she or he is available, a politically important individual who attracts attention or who is marginalized, or a typical ordinary person. All of these individuals need to have stories to tell about their lived experiences.” (Creswell, p.155) In terms of sample size, narrative studies can have a maximum of just one participant, however this study wished to develop a collective story, hence seeking a larger pool of participants. I used the latter information to determine my sample of at least ten to fifteen participants, which is an appropriate audience size for the theatre intervention that accompanies this study. Ten to fifteen participants was also a viable number to gather a collective of stories, perceptions and interpretations in regard to the research questions. In terms of selecting participants, this research considered whether or not persons who had not seen a theatre production were allowed to participate, however it was decided that the participants selected would not have to have ever seen a theatre production or have engaged in theatre activities in order to participate, because it would provide a difference in perspective for the research analysis. The research was looking to gather the perspectives of young adults as opposed to children, who may not be able to view the content of the intervention or participate in the study without parent participation. The study also considered gender and the researcher

gathered a proportionate number of males and females to participate in the study. Henceforth, the following criteria determined the eligibility for the current research's sample:

- Black or African American male and female youth ages 18-25
- Black or African American youths 18-25 who identify as “Black” or “African American”
- Black or African American youths 18-25 who are available to participate in the research's intervention.

Some of the participants of the research were located through relationships the researcher had already made. Others had been recruited on the campus of Georgia State University through the use of flyers, and the Georgia State University graduate Facebook page. The researcher contacted *ten to fifteen* eligible participants to take part in the study. *Eligible participants are those who are able to be present for the intervention, are male or female, between the ages of 18-25, and are of Black or African American descent.*

Procedure

1. *Recruitment*
2. *Consent forms and waivers*
3. *Pre-questionnaire*
4. *Theatre intervention – One Act*
5. *focus group discussion*

Before the collection of data, a letter from the IRB (Institutional Review Board) was retrieved by the researcher. Once recruitment was complete, the date of the intervention was sent to interested participants (interested participants were those who have responded via email to either the research flyer, a phone call from the researcher, or a message via the GSU Facebook page). Participants reviewed the date and responded with the whether or not they would be able

to participate. After the participant verified that they are available for the date of the intervention, those eligible participants were contacted via phone by the researcher and a demographic survey and consent forms were emailed to their most convenient email address. The informed consent document included the title and purpose of the research, procedures, risks and benefits, compensation, contact information for the researcher, as well as a confidentiality statement. Demographic surveys and consent forms had the option to be signed and returned via email, fax, or in person twenty minutes to the start of the intervention - before participation is recorded. The participants were also notified that their identities would remain anonymous. This research uses pseudonyms to protect the anonymity of the participants. This research utilized a small sample in order to provide a detailed consensus of those who decided to participate in the research.

The study took place on the campus of Georgia State University. 10-15 eligible participants were selected to participate by the researcher based on availability and return of consent forms. These participants were asked to complete a pre-questionnaire before the theatre intervention that took no longer than 20 – 35 minutes. The participants were then asked to participate as audience members for a theatre intervention (an original play written by the researcher) that lasted no longer than one hour. The focus group interview was conducted and mediated by me. The interview was recorded using an interviewing app called Cogi that can be downloaded on the Android and iPhone platform. The Cogi app works as a tape recorder on your smartphone. It uses your phone's microphone adapter in order to record conversation and you can send, transcribe, and share the recordings once an interview is complete. I then listened to external data with a colleague, and verified coding strategies through a debriefing session.

The Production Process:

The production process took place over the course of two weeks. The recruitment of actors took place prior to the production process, which included rehearsals. I started the production process by making sure I instituted the following steps:

- Obtaining the performance space
 - Prior to obtaining the actors, I searched for a performance space – i.e. a small lecture space, proscenium theatre, a small Black box or a church with a stage.
 - After obtaining the space, I intended to pay any/all necessary fees or deposits associated with renting the space.
 - Information about the space and the production was released and advertised in conjunction with call for all available actors.
- Actors
 - Actors were recruited through personal relationships I have made with theatre colleagues during my undergraduate years. The recruitment process took place via phone call or Facebook message.
 - All actors DID NOT have to meet the sample criteria for the research, they just had to be available for rehearsals and the day of the performance. Actor criteria included:
 - Only one character could be of a different race/ethnicity (11 main characters total, some characters can double up to play ensemble roles). All other actors must be of Black or African American descent or identify as Black or African American.

- Actors had to be no younger than 18 years old. There was no maximum age.
 - Once the actors were obtained, they were notified that they would receive small compensation for the production of Black Matter and would sign a participation form (attached in the appendix).
 - Once the actors had agreed to participate in the production and had signed a participation form, they were to sign off on a rehearsal schedule (attached in the appendix) and attend all rehearsals (as described in the next section).
- Rehearsals
 - Actors were to agree to the rehearsal schedule before the rehearsal process could begin.
 - Rehearsals took place in a central location on the campus of Georgia State University, easily accessible to all actors and actresses.
 - Rehearsals were scheduled to take place twice a week: on the weekends between the evening hours of 4:00pm and 6:00pm (approximately 4 days at 2 hours per day).
 - The first rehearsal consisted of a table reading of the play, Black Matter and an introduction to actor's warm-ups.
 - The remaining rehearsals focused on the production itself, as well as techniques to help with characterization and movement techniques leading up to the performance.
- The Performance

- Actors were to arrive to the performance approximately one hour early to engage in warm-ups and to run a technical rehearsal (a rehearsal with lighting and props) while the audience waits outside of the performance area.
- After the performance, the actors were to observe the focus group discussion that took place after the show. Actors were not allowed to engage in the discussion as they were solely the means for intervention. This was also to avoid disruption in the focus group interviews.
- Following the group discussion, the actors received their compensation for participating in the intervention.

The Intervention: The Play

Black Matter is a one-act play and original work written by the researcher that will be used as a creative component and intervention for this research. The researcher chose to write an original piece that mirrors the content of the plays from the Black Arts Movement of the late 1960's and 70's. The researcher composed an original piece because this research did not want viewers of the theatrical work to be familiar with an existing piece and come into the intervention already having an opinion about the piece and how it should be played. In considering the latter, the researcher chose to avoid using a theatrical piece that was already written as a means to avoid participant's pre-conceptions before going into the intervention.

The one-act play for this research was written using the twelve principals of the Kuumba Theatre method of the Black Arts Movement. The Kuumba Theatre was one of the many hundreds of Black theatres that evolved during the Black Arts Movement. The Kuumba Theater's legacy was born in the home of Val and Francis Ward in 1968 and evolved in a space on the south side of Chicago before later moving to Michigan. The Kuumba theatre was most

famous for its street theatre and its performance in schools, churches, and recreation centers by utilizing ritual style performances and staged readings that rely heavily on audience participation and improvisation. This intervention seeks to utilize the ritual theatre method via a staged reading for its participants. As stated before, there are twelve principles of the Kuumba theatre method (Ward, 1972) that were used as guidelines for the creation of this one-act play:

1. We are an African people, bound together as a worldwide African family by race, ancestry, culture and common oppression.
2. Black art and Black life are inseparable. Our art is not a fantasy and must be rooted in the historical experiences of African people. It is the re-creation and interpretation of Black life.
3. Black art must be functional. To entertain is not enough. It must teach some valuable lessons or leave some important messages with its readers, listeners or viewers.
4. Black art must deal honestly and fully with every aspect of the Black condition past and present...Our art should not dwell narrowly or excessively on any single subject but illuminate every variation, context, mood, attitude, period and lifestyle of the Black experience.
5. Black art must present positive images of African people, and if not, say something relevant to them about their condition while presenting negative images. At no time should it ever reinforce self-hatred or white-inflicted stereotypes of ourselves.
6. Black art must clearly show the social, political, economic and cultural contexts of any realities it treats. It is not enough to simply show a particular Black reality. Our art must also tell why it exists, its effects and offer necessary alternatives.

7. Black art must relate to all Black people, not just the middle class or the intellectuals.
Kuumba believes that Black art must be returned to its African tradition as part of the lifestyle and culture of all people.
8. We reject the sterile Western concept of “art for art’s sake”. “All art reflects the value of the system from which it comes”, says Ron Karenga.
9. There is a direct and lasting relationship between Black art and politics. Black artists have a fundamental and permanent responsibility to be involved in and contribute significantly to the liberation struggle.
10. Black artists not only owe an equitable portion of their time and talent to the Black community but also their earnings.
11. Black art and artists must be fully supported and judged by Black people, the only ones to whom our artists must be held accountable.
12. Black artists must be rooted in the Black community and totally involved in its activities and struggles.

The performance of the one-act, constructed by the twelve principles of art also follows Kuumba tradition in that it was a ritual style staged reading which relies on premise, emotion, improvisation and audience involvement: $\text{Premise} + \text{Soul/Emotional Intensity} = \text{Audience Reaction}$. (A staged reading is a production that requires no sets or blocking. Actors are free to use scripts).

Play Synopsis

Black Matter is an original one-act play that takes place in no specific time and place (can be situated anywhere in the time continuum), and is a series of monologues and scenes that can be performed in any order/out of order. The scenes and monologues detail the trials and

tribulations of the Black person – man, woman and child. The dialogue takes on a poetic tone and African American ritual practices – i.e. call and response, are embedded in each piece. The characters will often call for audience response or participation during a scene and/or monologue. Audience members will either improvise a line to motivate actors to move on the next scene, or may be asked to dance or sing along with a piece. Follow the lives of these young Black men and women as they use their personal experiences to discuss colorism, education, economics, family, police brutality, racial injustices and ways in which they can seek liberation.

Data Collection

After receiving IRB approval, the process of data collection for this narrative study primarily involved written open-ended questionnaires and an in-depth discussion (post-intervention). The open-ended questionnaires and the focus group interviews allowed for this research to “collaborate with participants by actively involving them in the research.” (Creswell, p.75) and to “capture the detailed stories or the life experiences of a single individual or the lives of a small number of individuals.” (Creswell, p.74) The questionnaire and the post-intervention focus group interviews were chosen because they allowed this research to be conducted in a natural setting (natural setting being the space where the intervention is conducted), which is one of the main components of qualitative research. Aside from the previous two approaches, observation of the participants (reactions in particular) were also considered in this study to enhance the various perspectives.

Pre-Questionnaires

Pre-questionnaires for this study were open-ended questionnaires that should have been completed before the theatre intervention. This study utilized pre-questionnaires to assess what

the participants already think about Black consciousness, representation of Black people, and whether or not they had seen or participated in a theatre activity. This study chose to utilize hard-copy questionnaires so that the participants themselves may record their own responses on the sheet, as opposed to a formal individual interview. Questionnaires were evaluated in a debriefing session as described in the procedures section.

Focus Group Interviews

A focus group is a form of qualitative research in which “a group of people assembled by researchers are interviewed about their perceptions, opinions, beliefs or attitudes about a product, concept or service.” (Creswell, 2007). This research utilized a focus group to gather the opinions and perceptions in regard to the theatre intervention. The participants for the focus group of the current study were chosen based on the criteria of the sample, because they have similar social characteristics, and were within the same age-range. Focus groups are most appropriate when, according to Creswell, the researcher wants the participants to interact among themselves in a communal setting, the research has a time limit, and if the participants are similar in characteristics. Hence, the researcher’s choice to conduct a focus group interview is solidified. In regard to interview procedures, this research followed Creswell’s steps for interviewing which were as follows:

1. Decide on the research questions that will be answered by interviews.
2. Identify participants who can best answer these questions based on one of the purposeful sampling procedures.
3. Determine what type of interview is practical and will net the most useful information to answer the research questions.

4. Use adequate recording procedures when conducting one on one or focus group interviews.
5. Design and use an interview protocol or interview guide.

(Creswell, 2007 p.164)

The latter were considered when framing the interviews and choosing focus groups as a data collection method for this study. This study allowed the participants to communicate freely and comfortably in a communal setting as opposed to one on one interviews where participants may have been hesitant to provide certain information. Also the focus groups allowed people that had the same physical characteristics, social characteristics, and age range to engage in dialogue and share different perspectives. I and a colleague then participated in a debriefing session to conduct an external check of the data. Per Creswell's interview procedure, the participants in the focus group interviews were recorded through the use of an app called Cogi as described in the procedures section. The researcher also be notated the interview, writing comments in the interview guide.

The Interview Questions and the Interpretive Framework. – Narrative Theory

The interview questions (located in the appendix) were framed and structured using Creswell's interview procedure and The Narrative Theory interpretive framework as well as Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed as described in chapter 1. Each interview question was structured in such a way that the participants can respond with open-ended answers. Questions in regard to theatre and oppression were based off of the three components of Augusto Boal's theatre of the oppressed: Recognition of Oppression, Response to Oppression, and Reaction to Oppression.

Observations

Observations are identified by Creswell as “the act of noting a phenomenon in the field setting through the five senses (hearing, sight, seeing, smell and taste), often with an instrument and recording it for scientific purposes” (Creswell, 2007 p. 166) Observations were used in this study to gather information about participant’s non-verbal reactions prior to and after the theatre intervention. Having the researchers observe in the natural setting eliminates the possibility of deception in the interviews. I observed the participants prior to, and during the intervention as a complete participant, in which “the researcher is fully engaged with the people he or she is observing. This may help him or her establish a greater rapport with the people being observed” (Creswell). As a complete participant in the research, allowed the participants to be comfortable in my presence. During the focus group interviews, my role then became “participant as an observer” who “is participating in the activity in the site. The participant role is more salient in the researcher role, which may help the researcher gain insider views and subjective data.” (Creswell, 2007 p.167) Stepping into the participant as observer role after the intervention allowed me to focus on mediating the discussion, interacting just enough not to include my bias within the discussion, and allowed me to focus on recording descriptive observations and participant perceptions in my interview guide (included in appendix).

Internal Validity

Validation can be described in qualitative research as “an attempt to assess the accuracy of the findings, as best described by the researcher and the participants. This view also suggests that any report of research is a representation by the author.” (Creswell, 2007 p. 250). Validation

for qualitative research could also be described as “a distinct strength of qualitative research in that the account made through extensive time spent in the field, detailed thick description, and the closeness of the researcher to the participants in the study all add to the value or accuracy of the study” (Creswell, 2007 p. 250). Creswell lists eight types of validation strategies, however my research utilized peer review and debriefing, clarifying researcher bias, and rich thick description. Peer review and debriefing allows for an external source to review the research process. Peer review and debriefing assists in keeping the researcher honest and asks hard questions about methodology and data collection. For my peer review and debriefing, this research called on one of my colleagues to assist in validating and coding data to assist in the accuracy of the narrative. Clarifying researcher bias allows the reader to understand the researcher’s position and any biases and assumptions that affect the inquiry. Rich thick description is where the researchers “with such detailed description enables readers to transfer information to other settings and determine whether the findings can be transferred because of shared characteristics.” (Creswell, 2007 p.252)

External Validity

As described by Campbell and Stanley (1996), “External validity asks the question of generalizability: To what populations, settings, treatment variables and measurement variables can this effect be generalized?” This research did not attempt to provide a generalization or a comparison. This research was merely to discover the perceptions of a group’s experiences and perceptions of Black consciousness, and Black representation in classic media - mainly theatre.

Researcher Bias

As described earlier, it is important that the reader has an understanding of the researcher's assumption and bias. I have an abundance of theatrical experience that has most definitely shaped my interpretation and approach to the research. I have been doing theatre work for over fifteen years (actor, director, playwright, stage manager, teacher, theatre technician) and I have also had academic training in the theatre field that has shaped my assumptions and perspectives about theatre – i.e. I believe that theatre is inherently political, socially inspiring, the mecca for learning real-life skills (public speaking, leadership, responsibility and so on), as well as educational. Despite the positives I believe theatre has been deemed overwhelmingly Eurocentric in curriculum, as well as in representation. It is not often one will find representations of Blackness, or any other “other-ness” in the post-secondary or collegiate curriculum and performance. I used my chosen validation strategies as an attempt to minimize my bias in the study.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

This chapter will discuss the results and analysis collected from the data of this study and intervention. It will include a detailed analysis of pre and post interview questionnaires, as well as the focus group discussion. The answers from all three categories are broken down into quotes and categorized into themes. This chapter gives brief demographics of the subjects as well as the settings where the questionnaires, intervention and focus group took place. This chapter also describes the production process that the actors had to undertake. Certain quotes from the focus group interview was used to tie together the participant's significant statements and the analysis of the intervention as a whole. This narrative study used an oral history approach to discover how young African American participants ages 18-25 see themselves represented in classical media using an open-ended pre-questionnaire and focus group interviews, as well as to see how effective theatre is as a tool of social awareness and empowerment in regard to the ideal of Black Consciousness.

Participants

Participants were recruited via Facebook, research flyer, and personal relationships the researcher have already made. Once participants were recruited they were instructed to review the consent form and to RSVP for the theatre intervention via Evite (an invitation application that can be downloaded via iTunes or Android phone and is accessible to anybody with a smart phone). Reminders were constantly sent out to audience member participants via email as well as. The evite app. A total of 25 people originally volunteered to participate in the study. A total of 20 persons RSVP'd as audience members for the theatre intervention. The day of the

intervention, there were a total of 13 participants – 4 actors, and 9 audience members. This research called for a minimum of 10 audience members and 5 actors, however I had four participants withdraw at no less than 48 hours before the intervention due to medical or family emergencies. Implications of these withdrawals will be brought up in the implications for further research section.

Actors were also recruited via flyer, Facebook post, and also through personal relationships the researcher has made. Actors were also made to RSVP for the intervention via evite through which reminders were sent about rehearsals and the performance itself. The actors were not a part of the data collection population and merely served as a source for the intervention. The actors underwent a different process and were to attend rehearsals twice a week for two weeks for at least two hours. The first week the rehearsals were held on the campus of Georgia State University in the University Center commons and were just table readings where the actors and I sat and read the script, chose parts and discussed how the play was to be performed. The second week included the first and second rehearsal before the show. In those rehearsals we ran the entire performance and made adjustments for the space, since we would not be in a theatre. The formal rehearsal took place on the campus of Georgia State University in the Student Center meeting room on Thursday, April 5th and was our longest rehearsal, totaling close to 3 hours due to the many substitutions we had to make due to the actors who withdrew from the study.

The Intervention Site and Process

The intervention took place on the campus of Georgia State University on April 6th, 2018 in room 259 in Student Center West. The room was small, and equipped with 20 chairs and one six-foot table that situated props for the actors and food for the participants. In order to set the mood

for the staged reading, the room was dimly lit using dimmers and lamps. Soft music from the Last Poets played on the speakers. Actors arrived first, at 4:00PM and with my assistance, were instructed to run their lines and rehearse the play in the courtyard outside of the building until 5:45PM.

Most audience members arrived promptly at 5:00PM, with some arriving a little late around 5:10PM. Upon arriving, I greeted everyone at the door and handed them a consent form (if they had not already completed one), a demographic survey and two questionnaires – one regarding Black consciousness, and the other regarding theatre (located in appendix). The audience members were instructed not to put their names or any identifying information on their questionnaires, as those were to remain anonymous for the purpose of the research. After I greeted the audience members and answered all questions regarding the nature of the research, the audience members had until 5:45pm to indulge in food, complete the demographic surveys, as well as the pre-questionnaires. I was not present during the completion of these questionnaires, as I was attending to the actors and the staged reading at this time. I also wanted to allow the audience members some privacy while completing the packet.

Once the audience members completed all components of the research packet, I reiterated the information provided on the consent form (located on the appendix) which included their consent for me to record their focus group interview via “Cogi” as well as their risks, benefits and rights to withdraw from the research at any point. After obtaining everyone’s consent orally, and writing via the consent forms, I gave a brief introduction to the play and invited the actors into the space to begin the intervention.

When I began this research, I originally anticipated observing the participants during the intervention, but twice during the intervention I had to participate as an actor and say a speaking

part due to one of the actor's absences. The speaking parts were in the very beginning of the play, so I spent the rest of the time observing the interactions and reactions of the audience members to the material, which I will discuss in the observation section. At the conclusion of the play which lasted a total of 30 minutes, the actors and I briefly left the space for 3 minutes. The audience members were instructed to gather their thoughts as we prepared for the focus interview. While the audience members were in a brief break, I gave the actors who had to leave their compensation for participating in the intervention (\$10) Starbucks gift card. Two of the actors remained with me and were instructed to sit in the back and have absolutely no interaction with the audience members for the purpose of the focus group interview. I reminded the audience members once again that they would be recorded and that they are to have absolutely no interactions with the actors for the remainder of the research project. The discussion group commenced and lasted approximately 40 min. The total time commitment for the intervention on April 6th, 2018 was approximately 2hrs. and 3 minutes. The total time commitment for the actors including the table readings and the official rehearsal was a total of 11 hours and 5 minutes. of My analysis of the demographic survey, focus group interviews and the prequestionnaires are recorded in the following section. After recruiting a total of 25 participants, only 13 participants were able to participate in the intervention and consisted of 5 females and four males.

Observations

Observations were a critical part of this research. As a theatre professional, I am constantly gaging audience responses to shows that I have done or participated in. Non-verbal communication sometimes speaks louder than oral, so it would be unfair not to record my observations in conjunction with the rest of the research. Prior to intervention, I participated as a *complete participant*, I was fulling engaging with the people I was observing. I started engaging

with the participants as soon as they arrived to the research site. Engaging with the participants as soon as they walked in the door by greeting them, shaking their hand and having small talk. This helped create a warm and welcoming environment. The participants seemed relaxed and not at all intimidated by the research or research questions. After greeting and getting acquainted with the audience members, I proceeded to prepare the actors for the intervention. During the intervention, I became a *participant as observer* where I actively engaged as a participant in the research. Due to the fact that we had one actor missing the day of the show, I had to step in as one of the performers where I had to play two very small speaking roles – one in the very beginning of the play, and one line at the end of the play. I was still able to gage and focus on participant reactions to the intervention during the show. All of the participants seemed engaged with the intervention physically (judging from facial and body expressions). There was no slouching, no one was on their phones, and no one looked bored or uninterested in the intervention. There were lots of comments made during the intervention, (Lots of Amen, Mmmhmm, and ‘say that!’) which also indicated audience participation and engagement with the content. The audience members also participated in the various call and response portions of the play, and did so enthusiastically. I remained in this participant as observer role during the focus group interviews in order to initiate, record and keep with the timing of the focus group discussion. What I observed from the focus group was that at first, audience members became tense in body language and facial expressions – as if they were nervous. In the beginning (specifically with the first two questions in the focus group), some audience members were reluctant to speak. Dialogue began to pick up after the first question and was met with a good exchange of ideas – so much so that the group sometimes went off on tangents to allow for a point to get across. As the focus group went on, people became more comfortable because their

opinions were validated by others answering the questions. By the end of the focus group, everyone spoke or had commentary regarding the intervention, Black consciousness and theatre.

Participant Demographics

There were a total of 9 audience members who were able to attend the intervention.

Below includes a chart with the results from the demographic survey (further details about the results are indicated below the chart):

Table A

Do you identify as African American?	Are you between the ages of 18-25?	Are you Male or Female?	What is the level of schooling?	Have you ever participated in a theatre activity or seen a play?
Yes: 6 No: 3	18yr Olds (3) 22yr Olds (1) 23yr Olds (2) 25yr Olds (2)	5 females 4 males	6 Bachelors 3 High School	Yes: 6 No: 3

As the chart indicates, there were 6 persons who identified as African American with only 3 who identified as Black but not African American (of Caribbean descent). There were a variety of age groups available, ranging from 18-25 nearly half male/half female. There were 6 persons present who are currently receiving or who have received a bachelor's degree and are currently majors in African American Studies. There were only 3 persons there who have acquired a high school degree and are not African American Studies majors. There were 6 persons who have seen or participated in a theatre activity and there were three who have not. The diverse population allowed for some very rich responses to the intervention which will be revealed in the next section.

Table B
Pre-Intervention Questionnaire: Black Consciousness

Questions:	Answers/Significant Statements:	Code:
How are you familiar with the term, Black Consciousness?	1.Learned the term from class. 2.Unfamiliar	Black consciousness/Self-awareness and self-worth
What does Black Consciousness Mean To You?	1.familiarity with one's Blackness. 2.Being aware of one's place as a Black person in this world. 3. I don't know	Black Consciousness/ Self-awareness and self-worth
Is being Black a part of your image?	All participants answered "Yes"	Black Consciousness / Self-awareness and self-worth
How do you see Black people being represented in the media (literature, theatre, or visual art?)	1.Some positive/some negative 2.Mostly negative 3.Under-represented/misrepresented.	Media
Do you feel that the representation of Black people through media influences the way Black people are treated in society? Why?	Yes 1.Becuase media is consumed 24/7 2.Because media influences and informs. 3.Because media perpetuates the mistreatment of Black people. 4.Isolated populations uses Black images and sees them as truths. No 1.It's just entertainment.	Media
Do you believe Blacks are properly recognized as a part of the culture and History of the US? Why or Why Not?	No 1.Black people are constantly trying to control the Black Narrative 2.No Blacks are shown through history as commodities and not human.	Media
Why is it important for you to know the history and the role that Blacks play in the US?	1.For self-awareness and self-worth. 2.It is a right 3.It effects Black people directly.	Media
Did you ever, at any point, reject your Blackness to fit into mainstream/dominant society?	Yes: 5 No: 4	Black Consciousness/ Self-awareness and self-worth
How is positive Black representation key to gaining equality?	1.Having positive and truthful images of yourself to promote positive self-image. 2.Gives insight. To Black people's humanity.	Media

Table B specifically speaks to the larger research questions: "How is Blackness in classic media (visual art, literature and theatre), interpreted young African American adults ages 18-25?" and "What is Black consciousness?" Upon reviewing the pre-intervention questionnaire for Black

consciousness, I noticed that there were varying opinions regarding the definition of Black consciousness as well as Black representation in media. In regard to the question “What does Black Consciousness Mean to You?” Only five out of nine people were able to provide their own definition of what Black consciousness meant to them while four of nine people answered “I don’t know” or stated that they were unfamiliar with the term. The participants who were familiar with the term stated that they learned about the term in class or while taking some sort of African American Studies course. Of those who were familiar with the term, a lot of their definitions were very similar to the following:

Greg: *“To have an elevated awareness of the culture, history and future of Black people in order to progress Black communities.”*

Also in accordance with the first research question “What is Black Consciousness”, when asked if being Black was a part of their image, all of the participants answered Yes, but 4 out of 9 participants had discussed how at some point they had rejected or discounted their Blackness to fit into mainstream society as portrayed by the media. One out of those 4 participants questioned whether or not code-switching (turning off one’s blackness in order to accommodate to mainstream society’s standards) is counted as denying one’s Blackness – in which they described this code-switching process as “a mode of survival” and “just playing the game”. It appeared that the individuals who admitted to rejecting their Blackness did so due to the negative stereotypes of Black people perpetuated by the media. Some participants admitted to changing their “voice” and “appearance” to make themselves more appealing to non-Black employers, friends, authority figures, etc.:

Tasha: *“I rejected my Blackness my freshman and junior year of high school when I attended an all-white high school. I was trying to act white to fit in. My Blackness was considered too much or too ghetto. From time to time, my white friends would ask me to do certain things they saw Black people do on tv, like teach them the soulja boy dance, but that was the only time I felt Black was when I had to do stuff like that.”*

When asked about their interpretation of Blackness in classic media, 9 out of 9 Black and African American participants stated that Blacks were either under-represented or misrepresented in literature, theatre or visual art and 8 out of 9 participants agreed that the latter is why Blacks are misunderstood and mistreated. Only one person stated that they felt media was just another form of entertainment and should not or does not influence the way others see Black people. 6 out of 9 participants went further on to state that they interpreted images of Black people in classic media as “criminal”, “ugly” and “bad”:

Shayla: *“We aren’t represented accurately in any form of media. We are always described or depicted as having ugly characteristics, evil, bad, criminal, you name it.”*

For pre-intervention questions six and seven, the answers were unanimous. All participants agreed that Black people are not properly represented as a part of the United States culture and history and that proper representation is needed in order to boost self-awareness and self-worth, and to counter how Black persons are seen around the world. Everyone also agreed that positive Black representation was key to gaining equality. Henceforth, self-worth and self-awareness became a major theme in this research as a result of discovering one’s definition of Black consciousness.

Shayla: *“Positive representations of Black people is key to gaining equality because having a positive outlook on yourself exudes and when you fight for positivity within your culture and race*

you are. Showing others that Black people are more than what the media and history books display.”

Table C
Pre-Intervention Questionnaire – Theatre

Questions:	Answers/Significant Statements:	Key Words/Phrases:
Have you ever attended a theatre production or participated in a theatre activity before this intervention?	Yes: 6 No: 3	Theatre
Are you familiar with any plays?	Yes: 9	Theatre
Are you familiar with any plays that are written by a Black author? If so, what are they?	Yes: 5 1. Mostly Tyler Perry No: 3 N/A: 1	Theatre
Are you familiar with a play that was about Black people but not written by a Black author?	No: 5 Yes: 3 N/A: 1	Theatre
How did these theatrical experience make you conscious of your race?	Yes: 6 1. Recognized oppression No: 2 N/A: 1	Black Consciousness/theatre
What role has fine arts or classical media (literature, theatre and visual art) played in the representation of Black people?	1. Black People Misrepresented 2. Black people trying to redirect the stereotypes. 3. Others creating Blackness/false narratives.	Media/Black consciousness

The second pre-intervention questionnaire also is directly associated with the research questions: “How is Blackness in classic media interpreted young Black and African Americans ages 18-25?” and “What is Black consciousness?”. The theatre pre-intervention questionnaire assessed the audience member’s knowledge about theatre and how theatre or any fine art has shaped their opinions in regard to the representations of Black people and consciousness. Prior to my research, there were six participants who had already seen or participated in a theatre activity or have seen a theatrical production. There were only three who had not. However, out of the three who had never attended or participated in a theatrical production, two participants were at least familiar with plays. Out of the 9 participants, 5 are familiar with plays written by Black authors.

The results indicated that most of these 5 audience members who were familiar with Black playwrights and their work were familiar with Tyler Perry plays or August Wilson plays. When asked if the participants were familiar with any plays that were about Black people but were not written by Black people, 5 out of 9 participants answered yes but did not indicate what those plays were. When asked if the plays made them conscious of their race (for those to whom it applied), A couple of participants stated that these plays made them feel self-conscious or made them recognize certain aspects of their oppression. Some participants spoke on oppressions regarding being a Black person and the perspectives that are interpreted in the audience about Black people from the play. The female participants spoke specifically to their oppression as Black women and how they see Black female characters being portrayed in theatrical works:

Carla: *“The play I saw made me question my oppression, and made me think about how I was being represented”*

There was only one participant who had not participated in any theatrical activity nor were they familiar with any plays that had anything to do with or about Black people.

In terms of how the role of fine arts and classical media play in interpretations of Blackness, 8 participants suggested that classic media has for a long time portrayed a false narrative that Black people have been trying to fix. Some participants expressed concern for who was controlling the narrative, and who had access to the media which they stated would be non-Black people in positions of power. Two participants stated that isolated populations are more susceptible to negative connotations of Black people in the media, mostly because they had never seen Black people before:

Russell: *“Classic media has for long painted a false narrative that Black people have to work twice as hard to fix. “*

Table D
Focus Group Discussion

Questions:	Answers/Significant Statements:	Key Words:
<p>In what ways did Black Consciousness reveal itself in the content of the intervention?</p>	<p>“It came out in thought, it came out in internal thought and it showed in ways where the characters were not just thinking of themselves but of Black people as a collective.”</p> <p>“This play revealed characters who recognized their Blackness and understood what was going on to other Black people around them. It was very much a call to action”</p> <p>“My favorite was the Time monologue. That one in particular screamed Black consciousness.”</p>	<p>Community, collectiveness</p>
<p>Were you satisfied with the way Black people were presented in this intervention? What were some aspects of representation that stuck out/were missing to you?</p>	<p>“I think this play had a very activist and hands - on and positive approach when it came to Black images and representation. It helped to combat how Black people are seen and teaches them to be aware. Like knowing what the stereotypes are and fighting them.”</p> <p>“The scene about education talked about how Black kids are constantly painted as the enemy in schools and how that perpetuates a false narrative”</p> <p>“This play shows Black people as being knowledgeable and emotional.”</p> <p>“I liked how the play touched on Black on Black crime, because it’s such a sensitive subject in our community. As Black men and women, so much of our fight is towards each other. And that’s how people see it. They are like, you all kill each other so why do Black Lives Matter? But that is what people in power want us to do. Kill each other but we do not kill at a higher rate than white people. We are just punished worse for it.”</p> <p>“I think the representation was a good reflective of our society, but was lacking issues regarding Black sexuality/disability...But I think for what it was, it demonstrated a variety of Black perspectives.”</p>	<p>Narrative, positive and negative images, stereotypes, human, representation, perspective, awareness</p>
<p>Did you learn anything new pertaining to the history or culture of your race through the intervention?</p>	<p>“I learned a lot from the scene about mass incarceration. I didn’t know there were so many more schools built than prisons and the amount of Black people that are locked up, and what they are</p>	<p>Narratives, perspectives, representation, accessibility/relatability</p>

	<p>locked up for. And then treatment that comes during and after that. It says a lot about society and a lot about the reason why people view us the way they do.”</p> <p>“I learned about the perspective of the Black woman and how they are really under-represented.”</p> <p>“I didn’t learn anything new, but it did make me re-think a lot of what I thought I knew. The ‘Time’ monologue made me think about my time as Black and woman being wasted and how Black people in this society’s time is being wasted.”</p> <p>“Not sure if I learned anything new but I will say that for people who don’t know this stuff or haven’t studied this stuff, there is a monologue or dialogue in this play that everyone can learn something from or relate to. It will definitely help populations of people who are isolated from Black people intentionally or unintentionally – because you can’t know us just based off media.”</p>	
<p>Did you find the intervention helpful or harmful to the representation of Black people? Why or why not?</p>	<p>“I found it helpful. Things like his are timely because we are still trying to change the ways we are seen as people. Representation is more relevant now than ever.”</p> <p>“I found it helpful to the representation of Black people because it made me feel proud to be who I am. I looked at those characters and was able to relate, understand and be proud of my culture and what we have overcome.”</p> <p>“Yes. Black Panther was the only all Black superhero movie ever made, and it was the first feature film I’ve ever seen an all-Black cast in. I think plays like this could be good for Black people just like Black Panther.”</p>	<p>Representation, Relatability, Self-awareness, self-worth,</p>
<p>Did you find the theatre intervention educational?</p>	<p>“Yes (helpful) I believe that even if you are a person who is not knowledgeable about Black people or Black experience, after watching this play, you can’t say that no one ever told you.”</p> <p>“This play or stuff like this could be educational for people who don’t see race. This is for people who want to believe that racism does not exist.”</p> <p>“The content and the language allows for it to be relatable to a large age range</p>	<p>Relevance, relatability, representation, narrative</p>

	<p>from youth to old. This is a medium where everyone can enjoy it and learn something without asking 'is this for me?'"</p> <p>"A lot of people don't know how to interact or what to say to Black people. I think this play would create dialogue and would be a good place to start."</p>	
<p>On a scale from 1 to 10, how effective was this theatre intervention in terms of Black representation and consciousness?</p>	<p>9 out of 9 participants answered: "10". One participant answered "12!"</p> <p>"It was effective because if you didn't have an idea of what Black consciousness was or if you didn't really pay attention to the negative stereotypes that are being perpetuated in the media about Black people, then you definitely got a better understanding after watching this play."</p>	<p>Self-awareness, self-worth, stereotypes, negative representations</p>
<p>Do you feel that theatre could be an effective tool to raising awareness and consciousness in the Black community- especially amongst African American youth?</p>	<p>"Yes, if Black people will go. I think the reason why Black people don't typically go to show support for stuff like this is because for so long, we have not been properly represented. This definitely absolutely opened my eyes to wanting to go and experience something like this."</p> <p>"People who are older sometimes pass down ideas and ideologies that lack a lot of information. They have to know that there are systems in place that hinder our progression. Plays like this will help younger people get more information that is relevant to them."</p> <p>"Yes but Black people do not have the same time, responsibilities, privilege or access to something like this. We will spend our money on what we want to spend our money on, that was clear with Black Panther. It would depend on what the play was about."</p>	<p>The narrative, relevance, relatability</p>
<p>Was your definition of Black consciousness the same or different after watching the intervention?</p>	<p>"The same. I got more of a 'how' while watching this play. Like, it gave me an idea of how Black consciousness begins to form."</p> <p>"Different. I couldn't answer what I thought Black consciousness was in the beginning when we filled out those forms because I never heard the term before, but after watching the play, I know I at least have an idea of what I think it means."</p>	<p>Self-awareness, Black consciousness</p>

<p>What other thoughts came to mind while watching the play?</p>	<p>“In every scene, there is this question of access. So for Black men and women, it’s not having access to how they want to portray themselves whether that be for a job or whatever.”</p> <p>“The time monologue was my favorite because I feel like that every single day Why are you wasting my time, judicial system and education system? I’m glad you addressed time because a lot of people do not see systemic oppression as a waste of time.”</p> <p>“The first scene with Ty is so prevalent because you think about something as small as a name being a representation of you entirely and as a negative one at that if you are Black with a name that is hard to pronounce. The negative stigma that comes with ethnic Black names is real!”</p> <p>“This play should be shown to middle-school aged kids who are shaping their identities.”</p> <p>“This play gave me a sense of confidence and strength while watching it. That is a feeling I don’t often get watching or reading stuff about Black people.”</p> <p>“everyone should see this play because if they were more knowledgeable about our struggles, they would be less scared to do something about it.”</p>	<p>Black consciousness, representation, stereotypes, relatability, self-awareness and self-worth</p>
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The focus group interview in many ways speaks to all of the research questions, but most specifically speaks to major research questions 3 and 4: “In what ways has Black consciousness revealed itself in the content of the intervention?” and “Is theatre an effective tool for enhancing one’s understanding of Black consciousness?”. In analyzing the statements made in the focus group, interview I concluded that all of the participants now have a better or elevated understanding of the phrase Black consciousness. All of the participants also agreed post-intervention that there are not as many positive representations of Black people in classical (theatre, visual art, and literature) or mainstream media. In addition, all participants were in agreement about wanting to have the most accurate and positive representations of themselves in

classical media, and for all people (Black or otherwise) to be educated about the experiences of Black people in order to achieve equality and promote self-worth and self-awareness amongst Black communities. Lastly, there was a unanimous consensus that the theatre intervention served as an effective tool for communication issues regarding Black stereotypes and representation, as well as enhancing one's understanding of Black consciousness through use of monologue, dialogue and audience interaction, according to the participants. One participant stated that the play could benefit from including more issues regarding Black sexuality and disability (which will be further discussed in the suggestions for further research.) I used the key statements, codes and key words from the questionnaires to development the following recurring themes:

Self-Awareness and Self Worth

Many of the participants stated the need for a higher sense of self-awareness and self-worth amongst peoples in Black communities due to negative representations or lack of representation thereof, in classical media. (Tables B, C and D) Many participants recorded having felt a sense of self-awareness and self-confidence post-intervention (Table D).

Controlling the Narrative

Many of the participants also expressed concern about “who” is in control of the narrative and the negative stereotypes about Black people that are constantly perpetuated through art, literature and theatre. Participants gave examples of Black people being described or portrayed as “ugly”, “evil” and “criminal” (Table B). Participants expressed the need for Blacks to be positively and accurately portrayed in order to gain equality and fair treatment in the United States, as well as globally (Tables B and D). All of the participants felt that the play provided positive and truthful portrayals of Black people and Black life. (Table D).

Accessibility/Relatability

All of the participants found the language and the content of the intervention to be highly relatable not just to peoples 18-25, but for peoples of all age groups (Table D). Some participants expressed concern about the accessibility of a theatre show for Black audiences specifically. While some expressed concern about the representation or lack thereof of Black people in mainstream theatre productions, other participants expressed their concern for certain classes of Black people who do not have the same “time, privileges, responsibilities or money” as their white counterparts – especially considering that theatre is considered a “high-brow” art that only privileged people can afford. (Table D) This directly effects Black people’s accessibility to theatre production, and reiterates the need for more theatrical productions taking place or being held near and for communities of Black people.

Theatre as an Effective Tool for Social Awareness and Change

Post-intervention, all of the participants agreed that the theatrical intervention was very instrumental in increasing one’s awareness of the term Black consciousness, and presenting truthful and honest representations of Black people. The intervention helped certain audience members to discover what the term Black consciousness means, and helped enhance the definition for others (Table D). The participants also decided that the intervention was educational and could increase an audience member’s sense of self-worth and awareness. Some participants also described the play as a “call to action” in the focus group. One participant stated: “everyone should see this play because if they were more knowledgeable about our struggles, they would be less scared to do something about it.” (Table D)

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

This narrative study uses an oral history approach to discover how young African American participants ages 18-25 see themselves represented in classical media using an open-ended pre-questionnaire and focus group interviews, as well as to see how effective theatre is as a tool of social awareness and empowerment in regard to the ideal of Black Consciousness. The interview questions were created from the following overhead research questions:

1. *How is Blackness in classic media (visual art, literature and theatre) interpreted by young African American adults ages 18 – 25?*
2. *What is Black consciousness?*
3. *In what ways has Black consciousness revealed itself in the content of the theatre intervention?*
4. *Is theatre an effective tool for enhancing one's understanding of Black consciousness?*

The purpose of this study was generally achieved. There were some aspects of the research that fell short of my expectations and may have affected the results (this will be explained in the implications for further research section). The results in chapter four provided a specific analysis of the answers from the questionnaires and the focus group discussions. This section will discuss the results from the intervention and current literature in conjunction with the larger research questions:

How is Blackness in classic media (visual art, literature and theatre) interpreted by young African American adults ages 18 – 25?

All of the participants agreed that Blackness in classical media carries a negative connotation and that Black people are almost always misrepresented (if represented at all). The participants described these images or descriptions of Black people in classical media as evil, criminal and ugly. After the intervention, all of the participants agreed that positive and accurate representations of Black people is one key to gaining equality and had an enhanced understanding of Black consciousness. This finding speaks directly to the literature in chapter two that discusses the misrepresentation and perpetuation of Black stereotypes (Nadell, 2004) (Morrison, 2015). Existing literature surrounding this topic conclude that negative Black images and stereotypes are perpetuated in classical media (literature, visual art and theatre) through perspectives of white people who were able to propel these stereotypes (ugly, bestial, lazy, darkness, criminal, etc.) by means of paintings, minstrelsy, and novels. According to my participants, these negative Black stereotypes continue to be a detriment to young Black and African American people (Haycock, 2015), through more contemporary media such as sports, news media and social media (Velasquez, 2015), (Karamat, 2016).

What is Black consciousness?

Prior to the intervention, not all of the participants had an understanding or definition of what Black consciousness was. However, after watching the intervention, the participants stated that they had a better understanding or at least had some definition of what they felt Black consciousness meant. While everyone's personal definition of Black Consciousness varied, all of the responses and definitions were very similar in key phrases: "being aware of one's

Blackness”, and “understanding one’s Blackness.” There currently isn’t any research outside of this project that assess how Black or African American youth define Black consciousness. However there is existing research that suggests that there is a definition of Black consciousness that must include taking pride in one’s Blackness, being aware and owning one’s Blackness and proudly embracing one’s Black culture (Bracey, Sanchez, and Smethurst, 2014). Nearly all of the participants were able to include at least two of three of those specific aspects within their definitions.

In what ways has Black consciousness revealed itself in the content of the theatre intervention?

The participants stated that Black consciousness did reveal itself in the intervention, and were able to identify various parts of the play where they felt Black consciousness was the most prevalent or the loudest. The portions of the play that stood out most to the participants were Jordan’s monologue, Maya’s monologue and the Hands Up, Don’t Shoot scene that is immediately preceded by Mario’s monologue. One of the participants made a statement that Black consciousness revealed itself internally as well as externally and characters thought in terms of a collective, and not an individual. Existing research show that theatre is a viable tool as an intervention for discussing or unveiling social and political issues that are important or prevalent to one’s community (Boal,1979). The latter can help individuals have a better understanding about the issue itself. This intervention and research questions is in direct conversation with Boal and Freire’s research due to the fact that the intervention can be easily interpreted and performed via Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed techniques. Boal’s theatre of the oppressed is experimental and involves audience participation and interaction. During this intervention, audience members were very engaged and interacted thoroughly with the actors in

the play using a system of call and response. As with Boal's theatre of the oppressed, the Black Matter intervention participants were able to identify the Black consciousness in the play using the following categories:

Recognizing when one is oppressed:

- *“People who are older sometimes pass down ideas and ideologies that lack of lot of information. They have to know that there are systems in place that hinder our progression. Plays like this will help younger people get more information that is relevant to them.”*

How the oppressed reacts to their oppression

- *“This play gave me a sense of confidence and strength while watching it. That is a feeling I don't often get watching or reading stuff about Black people.”*

How the oppressed responds to their oppression – call to action.

- *“This play should be shown to middle-school aged kids who are shaping their identities.”*

This intervention also supports Ngugi Wa'Thiongo's idea that theatre and politics are human activities and mirror the world around us. Participants were able to identify and agree that theatre is a political tool for promoting social consciousness and awareness:

- *“It was effective because if you didn't have an idea of what Black consciousness was or if you didn't really pay attention to the negative stereotypes that are being perpetuated in the media about Black people, then you definitely got a better understanding after watching this play.”*

Is theatre an effective tool for enhancing one's understanding of Black consciousness?

The results indicated that theatre is an effective tool for enhancing one's understanding of Black consciousness. After the intervention, all of the participants unanimously agreed that this theatre intervention can help shape, enhance or inform groups not just between the ages of 18-25, but all age ranges about the idea of Black consciousness. The participants also agreed that the representations of Black people presented in the show were accurate and positive representations and that they would encourage other Black people to see a theatrical show such as this one. There were a plethora of studies that revealed theatre's effectiveness to raise awareness in regard to social issues: (Joronen and Kurki, 2011), (O'Brien, C. Kroner, & C. Placier, 2015), (Wernick, Kulik, and Woodford, 2014) and (Faigin, 2015). However, what these studies lack is a perspective from a minority population (minority as defined by race, not religion or sexuality). Although these studies proved valuable and successful in terms of theatre and enhancing one's social awareness, these studies lacked the perspectives of Black persons and lacked issues relevant to the Black community. This research was the first of its kind to see how theatre as an intervention can help raise social awareness and understanding amongst people of the Black community.

One of the main implications of this project is that theatre can be an effective tool for helping Black people interpret and understand Black consciousness, and that positive and accurate representations and images of Black people and Black life are necessary because the media informs people's perspectives about Black people. The results from this study will add to a very frail body of literature regarding theatre and social activism and awareness, whether that be amongst African American research or otherwise. This research can aid in the development of

theatre projects for social awareness, teachers, students, activists, and members of the Black community who are seeking an alternative to the negative images they are subjected to through classical and contemporary media.

Implications For Further Research

Until the day of the intervention, I was positive that my research would go as planned, however there were a few areas including the sample that may have had an effect on the results. With that being said, there were a few areas of my project that can be reconsidered for further research. My research involved recruiting 5 actors and 10 – 15 audience members to participate in the study. One of the consequences that I did not consider in regard to participation was reliability. After recruiting over 25 participants total, only 13 total participants (4 actors, 9 audience members) were able to attend the intervention. I was fortunate to have a variety of age ranges and a healthy balance of males and females - however for future research, I would like to explore the option of a larger recruitment pool in order to get a greater number of audience attendance.

In terms of the questionnaires, research questions regarding representations about Black images being perpetuated throughout the media could have been more specific and interactive as to achieve a very clear depiction of how the participants saw themselves – i.e. “make a word splash with all the words you see or hear when watching anything that involves black people” or “draw how you think a Black person ‘looks’ according to classical media” “draw how you feel a black person looks after watching this play”, and so on. I feel as though questions like the latter would not have only given me a clearer interpretation of the perspectives, but it could have also served as a visual aid for the current research. It could also be used as a reflection tool to measure growth or differences in responses from pre-intervention to post-intervention.

I would also seek to aim this research towards people who have not taken a course in African American studies or Black diasporic studies before, as to avoid any biases they may have before viewing the material. During the research, there were approximately 5 persons who identified as being a part of the African American studies department via questionnaire or focus-group interview. There was only 1 person who studied in a field that was not African American or Black diasporic studies and three people who did not attend university at all. The numbers of the group were nearly proportionate and still provided a vast range of perspectives, but African American studies students specifically came with their own set of ideas and biases about Black representations and Black life. Those people who did not identify as African American studies students were, in the beginning, most reluctant to speak and articulated their thoughts very differently from the African American studies majors in a way that was still valid, but un-swayed by prior knowledge of African American studies and theory. I've also had to ask myself after reviewing the data, "does this research really benefit those who are already aware or have a pretty good idea of what Black consciousness is?" Personally, I believe that focusing this research on a specific group of persons 18-25 who are not students of Black diasporic or African American Studies programs would yield more targeted results.

Another implication that may be considered is a revision of the one-act play *Black Matter* to include Black sexuality and disability because not only are those topics ignored by the media, they are also taboo in African American culture. One of the participants mentioned that the play itself could have been more inclusive to Black sexuality and Black disability -this suggestion is one that should be considered in the future when this project is re-visited because of its relativity to one's Black consciousness and identity. The revision to the play will also provide a safe space for Black or African Americans in those respective communities to have a voice which is not

otherwise thought about or recognized. Aside from the latter, this research provides a good starting point for how theatre and Black consciousness can be interpreted and measured through lived experiences such as a theatrical production.

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BLACK MATTER

A ONE ACT

BY: AUBREY WILLIAMS

BLACK
MATTER



AUTHOR'S NOTES

Black Matter - a one-act play, is a series of short scenes and monologues that can be performed in any particular order at the director's discretion. Removing or substituting dialogue in the script is strictly prohibited. If the director wishes to cut the material, entire monologues or pages may be removed.

This piece was written in accordance to the "Twelve Kuumba Theatre Principles" and is meant to be performed in the style of African American Ritual Theatre. No extravagant sets are to be used and improvisation and audience engagement are mandatory for the production of this piece. Costumes, make-up, and audio-visual equipment can be used at the director's discretion. There are a total of 11 main characters with a possibility of up to 20 cast members. Some cast members can double up to play ensemble roles or other small roles.

The Content of this play is inappropriate for persons under the age of thirteen years old unless accompanied by an adult.

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Scene 1:

[Lights up on a bare stage with minimal props and set pieces. The cast ensemble emerges from the wings and stands center stage. Music plays as the cast erupts into a West African Dance piece accompanied by drums.]

[All actors leave the stage except TYDARIUS and INTERVIEWER. The two actors sit, as if in an office at a job interview.]

Speaker: Dark matter makes up 90% of the universe, but is unable to be seen directly. Black matter. Masses of Black and bodies that make up the majority of the universe. But are not seen directly. Because we are not seen as human. For years we have strived to affirm our being within this world...Black matter. Black and brown mass that exists but is unseen.

Interviewer: So, your name is Ty- how do you pronounce your name, sir?

Ty: Tydarius, sir. But you can call me Ty.

Interviewer: Interesting. Okay, Ty, is it?

Ty: yes.

Interviewer: So Ty, do you have a resume' on hand?

Ty: Yes sir, I do. (pulls out resume and hands to interviewer)

Interviewer: Okay, you are 24 years of age, you have a bachelor in communications from –

Ty: Clark Atlanta University, sir.

Interviewer: Sounds familiar...

Ty: It's an HBCU located in Atlanta University Center, sir. Near Morehouse College.

Interviewer: Ah, yes. Where the good Martin Luther King went, is that right?

Ty: Yes, that's right.

Interviewer: And you have a Master's from –

Ty: Columbia University, sir.

Interviewer: Well, that's a good school! An Ivy! How'd you manage to pull that off?

Ty: I worked hard, got my grades and earned a full scholarship, sir.

Interviewer: Yes, Yes. What is your skill set, Ty? As in, how has your education prepared you for this position?

Ty: Well sir, I am very valuable in the areas of film and television production and broadcast journalism. I am able to....

Interviewer: And how many years of professional experience have you had, Ty?

Ty: none, sir. I was hoping you can give me my first opportunity.

Interviewer: uh huh. And how do you think you would "fit" in here? How do you think you could blend in with this atmosphere?

Ty: Sir?

Interviewer: Did you bother to take a look around you when you entered my office, son?

Ty: Yes, I did, sir.

Interviewer: And what did you see?

Ty: I saw a lot of dedicated, hard-working people doing their jobs, sir.

Interviewer: Hard-working and dedicated! (laughs) Ty, you seem like a really nice kid, and you seem to have some pretty valuable skills that could be utilized elsewhere, at another production company. Forgive me, but I hope you don't take this the wrong way – you won't "fit" here. R&R Production is not just about the content – it is also about the look. And although I think you look very professional in your suit and tie and all, I just don't think you would be

comfortable here. You seem a little to urban and I wouldn't want to make any of my staff uncomfortable. I will keep your resume' and make a referral for you.

Ty: I understand. It was nice meeting you, sir.

Interviewer: Pleasure is mine. Thanks for understanding, Ty. (gets up and gestures Ty to the door)

0[TY leaves the area where he and the INTERVIEWER were seated and crosses center stage. TY is clearly upset about this job interview. Takes a minute to think before he speaks.]

Ty: The Revolutionary - America. Land of the free. Home of the God-fearing. Or is it? How is it the land of the free when I was born into this world – still a slave? How are we supposed to be loving, God-fearing individuals when my very existence in this world is considered a sin. A SIN. MY BLACK SKIN. We are only 154 years from slavery and 53 years from Jim Crow – yet at 24 years old in 2017 I am still a slave. Still a Black man who is systematically rejected from receiving a top-notch public education. An unarmed Black man who is more at risk to be shot and killed in cold blood by police because “I LOOK like a Thug.” A Black man who will be looked over for a job at the expense of a white person no matter what Ivy League college I was fortunate enough to attend or the fancy degrees that came with it. A Black man who can't get a job based off of the stereotype that I am lazy and Black...but this country was built off the backs of my Black ancestors. A Black man who will be denied a good interest rate on a car or a house compared to that of my white counterparts. A Black man who was born into this world poor and underprivileged, undereducated, undervalued to no fault of my own. Must I go on? Now I'm not here to play victim. I'm here to state facts, and the fact is – I'm BLACK. And EVERYBODY wants to be Black until it's TIME TO BE...Black. They can wear our street clothes, talk our slang, bump our music, rock our weaves and braids, wear our gold

teeth and chain. They can whip, nae' nae', hit the quan, pipe it up and “dab” on them folks! But when WE do it. It's ghetto. But when WE do it, it's “thuggish” But when WE do it, it's ignorant. And yet you have the AUDACITY to feel comfortable enough to call me “your nigga?”. Nah bruh. We cool, but I ain't your nigga. I'll never be your boy. I'll never be the broken back under your shoe, whipped and chained, hung and burned. Not anymore. Nor will I be naïve and ignorant to your systemic oppression of my people. The systemic slavery of not just my body, but my mind. My MIND. This wonderful, more than capable, powerful, artistic, complex, innovative, educated, revolutionized, WOKE. BLACK. MIND.

Ty: [to audience] Say it with me: WOKE. BLACK. MIND.

[waits on audience response]

Ty: [to audience] AGAIN!! WOKE. BLACK. MIND!

[audience response]

[Ty exits].

Scene 2:

[The cast assembles themselves center stage, positioning themselves for a step routine. A female cast member emerges center stage as a steady stepping rhythm is heard by the rest of the cast.]

Female Cast Member: Stepping. An African tradition we still carry on to this day. A craft that only we can perfect. A rhythm in which our bodies move and snap and clap and stomp in synonymous percussion.

Cast: STEP

Female Cast Member: The S is for our SOULS, our SPIRIT, and the way we have SURVIVED through all of our STRUGGLES.

Cast: STEP

Female Cast Member: The T is because we are TOUGH. We are built strong, honey. We TOLERATED the TERRIFYING TORTURE our brothers and sisters had to go through.

Cast: STEP

Female Cast Member: The E? Oh, well the E is for our Black EXCELLENCE! How we have used our EVERLASTING strength to EXCEL despite the fact that we could never be treated EQUAL.

Cast: STEP

Female Cast Member: Last but most certainly not least is the P! How we are made of PASSION, POISE and PERSEVERANCE.

[CAST and FEMALE CAST MEMBER let out a large stomp and proceed with a step.]

[Blackout]

Scene 3:

[MAYA is constantly checking her watch, waiting on her dad to call. She is currently watching television broadcasts of the local news. The other cast members are standing in a straight line upstage, acting as NEWCASTERS.]

Newscaster 1: In today's news, we uncover the details of a local drug bust (changes channel)

Newscaster 2: And on your 3 o'clock broadcast, we have an update on a shootout that happened on –

Newscaster 3: Officer Janez found “not guilty” for the murder of Philando Castille – (changes channel)

Newscaster 4: I am currently here with a local citizen, Marshall Jordan who was present on the scene during the shooting of Philando Castille. My question to you is, at what point do you think these shootings will die down? And is there a possibility of true justice for the victim?

Marshall: Only time will tell.

[MAYA shuts off tv and positions herself closer to the audience.]

MAYA: Time. [to the audience] Does anyone here know what time means, or even the value of time?

[waits on one audience member's response]

MAYA: time is defined as the indefinite continued progress of existence and events in the past, present, and future regarded as a whole. Time is what was taken away from my ancestors when they were dragged to the United States from various countries in Africa and forced to work the fields as slaves. Time is what was taken away from my brothers and sisters who were sacrificed during the struggle for Black equality, Black rights, and Black power. Time is what is taken from Black and Brown people who are victims of “stop and frisk” on their way to work, or school or home, and are arrested for petty crimes. Why. Are. You. Wasting. My Time? My Time that I have to sit and hope and dream that my father would come home. My Time is spent researching, re-visiting, and re-minding the judicial system and its constituents that my father has no prior record. His Time is spent – 5 years behind bars off a dime bag, like many other brothers and sisters while others are being acquitted for monstrous murders. Why can't they just save us some time and admit that since he was born, his biggest crime was being Black? Time – taken away from those who need it most. Time – is lost for those who have been forced to suffer under the hands of an unjust government. Time is of the essence for the Black man trying to get home to his son or daughter but got caught up in the shuffle of this war against

Black and Brown. And for what? When. Will. We. Find. The. Time to erase this statute of hate that has been a cloud over Black and Brown people for centuries. When will it be time for us to come together and demand our justice? The Last Poets will tell you that Negroes are scared of revolution, I am here to tell you we ain't scared. We. Just. Need. More. Time.

[Blackout]

Scene 4:

[Lights up on the stage. There are chairs assembled in a single file line to represent a school classroom. bell rings to signify the start of class MARCEL enters the classroom in a uniform. The rest of the cast sits in orange jumpsuits, frozen.]

Marcel: Education – the key to Black man and woman's liberation. Every day I arrive in this institution and I am told what to wear, where to sit, how to line up, when to eat, when to speak...then those Damn BELLS. Bells dictating our time. Bells dictating our movement. We ain't got nothing in our schools. Not even books. Just pencils, papers and bells. Can you hear the bells? The bells that equate my existence to in this schoolhouse to that of a prisoner. The bells that dictate my learning – a learning in which the curriculum is filled with Eurocentric history, while my Black history is history-less. The bells- bells that remind me every day that there are 5,000 more jails and prisons in the United States than there are higher learning institutions. The bells that remind me that the US spends three times more on facilities where they can lock my Black behind up, than on schools to help me thrive. How can you not hear them? Are you deaf? You don't hear those bells? The bells, that for centuries wanted to label me incompetent. The bells that kept me enslaved in my mind because I was never allowed to learn what it meant to be free. I learned what it meant to comply. I learned what it meant to be obedient. I learned what it meant to be a part of a system. THE system. But I can't lie - the bells ain't all bad. The bells

reminded by Black sisters to push through. The bells created a generation of Black women deemed the most educated race and gender in the nation. The bells were motivation for some of my Black brothers to say damn the system and be revolutionaries fighting for our communities through activism, through music, and through literature. The bells motivated some of our Black brothers and sisters to be doctors, lawyers, teachers and artists who made it a point to make sure that niggas like ME - who didn't make it wouldn't have to succumb to the new age slavery that is perpetuated with them DAMN BELLS.

[Blackout]

Scene 5:

[Lights up on two chairs center stage. ANGEL is sitting in one of the chairs, facing what appears to be a film producer and crew members played by 3 other CAST MEMBERS.]

Angel: I gave my all to you, Jordan. It took every breath in my body to make sure you had food on your plate every night, clean laundry, a clean house –

Producer: CUT! Just, cut. Angel...what are you feeling right now?

Angel: I suppose I am feeling tired, sad, maybe a little overwhelmed?

Producer: It's not enough. Do it again, please.

Angel: [changes her volume, but not her tone] I gave my all to you, Jordan. It took every breath in my body to make sure you had food on your plate every night, clean laundry, a clean house, and I gotta also make sure that I have enough energy to lay on my back when you get good and ready. I –

Producer: CUT. No...Angel, forgive me for sounding cliché, but don't you think you need to add a little more attitude? A little neck roll, maybe put a little anger in your voice?

Angel: I mean, I don't want to play my character like a –

Producer: Like a what?

Angel: Nevermind.

Producer: Let's get David in here. Maybe that will help you give us what we are looking for.

[DAVE enters]

Producer: Dave, could you say the first two lines before Angel's monologue on page three?

Dave: I have been out all day dealing with them damn honkies only to find out that you didn't cook at the very least? What the hell are you doing in here all day long? I make a good living so you don't have to work. All I ask is that you give me what I need.

Angel: [in the same tone as before] I gave my all to you, Jordan. It took every breath in my body to make sure you had food on your plate every night, clean laundry, a clean house, and I gotta also make sure that I have enough energy to lay on my back when you get good and ready. I –

Producer: Angel. Jesus Christ, really??

Angel: Is it that bad? I'm sorry, I just-

Producer: It's not bad it's just not – [speaks calmly] Let's not sit here and pretend to be something we are not, okay? Look, I know you don't want your character to come off as this angry Black woman, rah, rah, rah, but look honey: I know that when "you women" get cheated on you have a little more fire under your ass than that. Give me bitter, angry, Black woman! Give me Moesha' LaQuinta, or whoever the hell! This role wasn't written for a meek, subservient housewife because for one - no one gives a damn about those, and for two, if we wanted that type of character we would have casted someone...else. So, with that being

said...loose the “I don’t want to play another angry Black woman, I want to keep my dignity”
bull – and give me the stuff that will sale. Please!!...and ACTION!

[Blackout]

Scene 6:

[Lights up on NATALIE who is sitting down center stage]

Natalie: Light Skin vs. Dark Skin Vs. White Skin. Caught up in this battle of complexion when MY battle with complexion is so complex and the idea of my white mother and Black father is as incriminating as my begotten soul. Even more so, what am I? Not too long ago, I wanted nothing more my whole life than to look like my mother, to be treated like my mother. I hated my father for being Black because when the idea of being Black Is less than, and when “close to white is right” – I wanted to choose white. But the hint of melanin in my complexion and my soft coily hair gives me away every time. I look “Black” therefore I have to be “Black”. So now here I stand: Stuck with having to choose my entire life because I’m not white enough for my white kin and not Black enough for my Black ones. The feeling of being too dark and having bad hair to one side of the family, and the feeling of being too light and having good hair to the other. A Mulatto. A House Nigga. Still an abomination 100 years later. But then, there’s this: Black men and women alike will look at me and say that I’m gorgeous, pretty or exotic because of my mixed complexion. They all want babies that look like me, when I didn’t even want to look like ME. You see girls like me who can almost make “real” white friends because my shade of “Black” is “safe”. My shade of Black is close to white – and with white friends comes the benefit of white privilege. You see girls like me whose accomplishments are accepted with little to no question. But these advantages that I have compared to my darker counterparts

do not suffice. Because at the end of the day, I am still half-Black. It's still there, and it won't go away. I ain't letting it. They can still see it and because you can see it, just faintly, they USE IT. How? They use it when you see girls like ME as a representation of Black women in international movies and tv shows because the world doesn't want anybody who looks like YOU. You, who is drenched with melanin. You whose dark complexion is NOT *BEAUTIFUL*. You, whose complexion is compared to that of beasts. And me, who is stuck in between. Me, who is stuck is this skin. Forever on the fence. But I can end forever today by accepting and LOVING my MELANIN. IMPSOING my melanin on YOU because to be Black is to be BEAUTIFUL and I will no longer try to prove how Black I am to anyone anymore, NO. not to even myself. I have learned to love ALL parts of Natalie. Light Skin Vs. Dark Skin Vs. White skin. Caught up in this battle of complexion when My battle of complexion is so complex...I no longer care to "fit in" with my white kin and I will FIGHT the imposed negative consequences of the melanin in my skin.

[Blackout]

Scene 6.5

Jordan: When I was a little girl I was told that my largest fight in life will be that I am Black and Woman. That no man, Black or white was going to respect the woman that I am or the woman that I was to become because being Black and woman was at the bottom of the totem pole. I was told that my Blackness, my woman-ness, and my sexuality cannot intersect because both race and sexuality can only really be identities of those who are not Black. While white is woman and Black is female, one more considered more desired and more precious than the other. Does being "female" make me "non-human"? This society drives their constituents to think it so. Dubois says we all experience a twoness of being. A twoness of being "Black" and

“American” but I experience a tri-fold- “Black. American. And Woman”. I experience a pain, a hurt, a love, a strength and an identity so strong that not even the strongest of beings can tear me down. Lemme tell you something: Everybody wants to be a strong, Black woman. The strong Black woman who is Steadfast. Opinionated. Motivated. Charismatic. Resilient. Unbendable. Unbreakable. Godly. Desired. Inspired. Ambitious. Pure. Royal. Melanin drenched sun-kissed coco butter queen whose strides are graceful and passionate in motion. Whose poise is unmistakable and confident. Whose smile is radiant and pure. Whose body is fine and delicate as silk with curves as deep as the waves in the ocean. Whose gift is the strength she exhibits in her three-ness of being Black. Woman. And American because when she is told she cannot succeed in being two out of three. Black Woman. Black American Woman. BLACK. AMERICAN. AND WOMAN, I am...and WE are the most beautiful and most resilient of them all.

Scene 7:

[CAST MEMBERS are assembled onstage. Some are out in the audience passing out church fans. JONATHAN AND CASSIDY come center stage and asks five audience members to join them on stage. This scene resembles a Black church service. Church music plays in the background.]

[Video or sound clip about the history of Black church is displayed.]

Cast Member: The Black Church is an embodiment of the struggle and strengths of the African American community. The shookin’, the jiving, the soul is imperative to our survival are derivative of our African roots. The Black church is a ritual. Our ritual. Using our roots, we remixed their religion! The Black church is the center of the African American community and the cradle of the Black faith. The home of the sanctified and the secular! An institutional establishment for Black faith, Black mobilization, and Black power.

Jonathan: [to audience] If you feeling good in the house right now, let me get an amen!

[awaits audience response]

Jonathan: amen amen. Now, I am feeling good tonight. [to audience] are ya'll feeling good?

[awaits audience response]

Jonathan: Now, me and Cassidy have a little song for you. Can we share that with ya'll today?

[awaits audience response]

Jonathan: Good, good.

[The song starts and Jonathan and Cassidy are prepared to sing.]

Jonathan and Cassidy:

EVERYDAY I WAKE UP AND PRAY AND WONDER IS THIS LIFE WORTH
LIVING?

HOW CAN I BE A BLESSING TO OTHERS AND GIVE MY PEOPLE SOME
HEALING?

WE ARE CRYING OUT ALMOST EVERY DAY, CAN WE EVER BE FREE?

WHEN IS IT SAFE TO WEAR MY SKIN AND BE PROUD TO BE ME?

OUR SONS ARE DYING, OUR CHILDREN ARE CRYING, LORD – IS THERE
EVER AN END?

WITH YOUR UN-DYING MERCY, COULD OUR CLIMB TO FREEDOM BEGIN?

MERCY IS OUR LORD

FOR HE DOES GIVE US MERCY

MERCY IS OUR LORD

FOR HE DOES GIVE US STRENGTH

MERCY IS OUR LORD

FOR HE DOES GIVE US COURAGE

MERCY IS OUR LORD

FOR HE WILL NOT DISCOURAGE

MERCY MERCY MERCY

MERCY ON OUR SOULS

MERCY MERCY MERCY

GIVE US STRENGTH AND HOPE.

Jonathan: Can the church say amen?

[Blackout as the music continues to play.]

Scene 8:

[Lights up on the entire CAST as they are assembled on stage. Police sirens can be heard.

Ensemble is assembled center stage, chanting the word “Nigga” they begin to whisper it following TAYE’s first line.]

Ensemble: Nigga Nigga Nigga Nigga Nigga Nigga Nigga!

Ty: Who are you Nigga?!

Maya: What business you got here, Nigga?

Ty: Look me in my eyes, Nigga!

Maya: Nigga is you deaf, blind or both?

Ty: Did I tell you to move, Nigga? What you reaching for?

Maya: Hands where I can see, ‘em Nigga!

Ty: Hands up Nigga!!

Ensemble: [changes the temp and inflection of the word Nigga]

Maya: Put your goddamn hands up where I can see ‘em Nigga!

Ty: that Niggas got a gun!

[MAYA and TY withdraw fake guns from behind their backs – ensemble freezes. A loud pop is heard from backstage. The pop signifies a gun has been shot. Ensemble holds up hands to signify “hands up don’t shoot”]

Ensemble member: Trayvon Martin, Philando Castille, Jamarion Robinson, Sandra Bland, Oscar Grant, Dontre Hamilton, Eric Garner, John Crawford, Michael Brown Jr., Ezell Ford, Dante Parker, Tanisha Anderson, Tamir Rice, Romain Brisbon, Jerame Reid, Tony Robinson, Phillip White, Eric Harris, Walter Scott, Freddie Gray, Stephon Clark...

[Still on stage, ENSEMBLES MEMBERS position themselves as if they were at a rally, surrounding MARIO.]

Mario: Black Lives Matter. BLACK LIVES MATTER. EXCEPT for when it comes to Black on Black crime.

Student 2: What?

Mario: You heard me. I said, BLACK LIVES MATTER EXCEPT for when it comes to Black on Black crime. WHY DO WE HATE EACH OTHER? Do. We. HATE each. Other? Niggas is SCARED. Niggas is SCARED! But BLACK. LIVES. MATTER. Are we a culture that was built to be destructive? Are we a people that got so used to the beatings that we started beating each other? When will we forgive? When will we be as one not fighting each other, but fighting the system? Niggas is scared! Niggas is scared! But I ain't scared a'you, Nigga. You scared a'you. Pick up your faith, boy. Young. BLACK. Man, pick up your faith! Put down the ignorance. Pick up your FAITH, and direct your anger where it belongs – where it belongs – to a system that was designed to keep you in the slums. To a system that was designed to keep you mentally enslaved. To a system that was DESIGNED TO MAKE YOU HATE YOUR OWN, MY BROTHER. Pick up your faith. Niggas is scared, Niggas is SCARED! Don't be scared, Nigga. Be free. Free in your mind, free in your heart, and free in your faith. And whatever you do, don't be no Nigga.

Ensemble: Keep the faith, you gotta free ya' mind. 'Cause the racists and injustice workin' overtime, you gotta fight the fight until we all are free and FIGHT THE EVILS THAT BE! AND DON'T FORGET TO FIGHT THE POWER.

Student 1: ASHE!

Ensemble: POWER!

Student 1: ASHE!

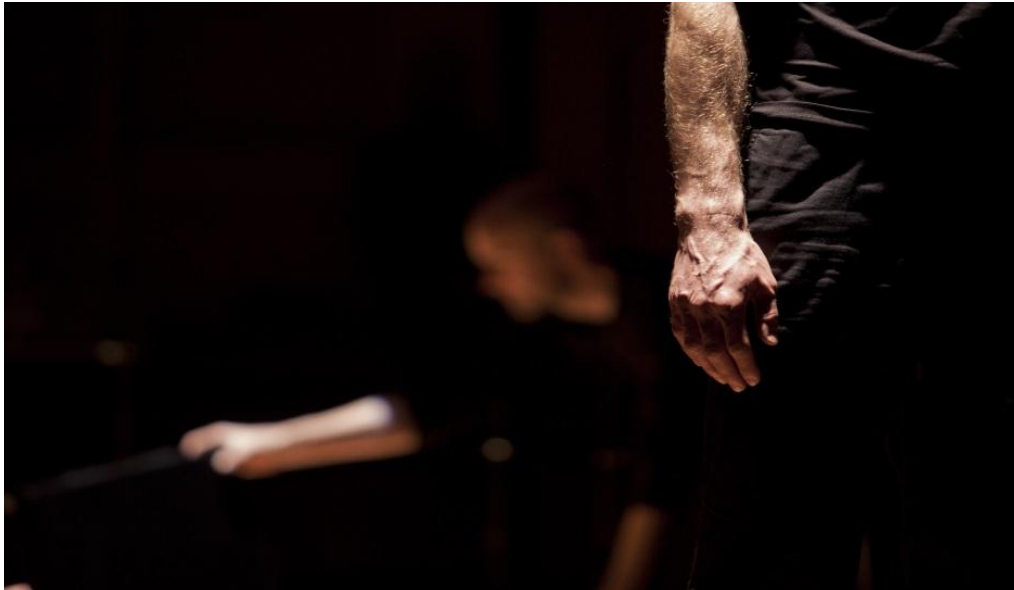
Ensemble: POWER!

Student 1: ASHE!

Ensemble: Power!

[Chant continues with the audience. With their Black power fists still in the air, two ENSEMBLE MEMBERS lead the rest of the cast in the Negro National Anthem: *Life Every Voice and Sing.*]

END OF PLAY



ARE YOU IN BETWEEN THE AGES OF 18 AND 25??

Are you interested in the representation of African Americans within the Arts?

We are trying to understand how theatre arts can aid in promoting an honest interpretation of Black life. This activity involves research at Georgia State University.

So who can participate, and what do you have to do?

Participants must identify as Black or African American and who are willing

to:

- Participate in a pre-questionnaire
- Attend a theatrical production hosted by the researcher at Georgia State University
- Participate in a focus group discussion led by the researcher
- Total time commitment for this research is **1 hour and 50 minutes**

What do you get?

- Free food and drinks!

Aubrey Williams Researcher

404-464-6173

Aubrey Williams Researcher

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Aubrey Williams Researcher

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404-464-6173

Give us a call today!

Georgia State University
Department of African American Studies
Informed Consent

Title: Black Matter: Re-evaluating Representations of Blackness through the Arts

Principal Investigator: Dr. Makungu Akinyela

Student Principal Investigator: Aubrey Williams

Purpose

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is for the researcher to collect opinions about Black people's representation in classical media. (Classical media includes film, visual art and theatre). You are invited to participate because you are 18 years of age or older, you identify as Black or African American, and you are able to participate as an audience member for the play intervention. 15 participants will be recruited for this portion study. This research will require 1 hour and 50 minutes of your time over the course of 1 day.

Procedures

If you decide to participate, you will:

- Fill out two questionnaires before viewing the play. One of the questionnaires will be in regard to social attitudes, beliefs, and issues and the other questionnaire will be about your experience with theatre. You will also be asked to fill out a demographic survey.
- After you have filled out the questionnaires, you will participate as an audience member for the play.

- After you watch the play, you will participate in a focus group discussion. The researcher will ask questions to the group. The researcher will use an interview guide. Your answers will be recorded using an app called “Cogi.”

You will interact with the researcher Aubrey Williams. You might also interact with some of the other participants during the focus group. The research will be done on the campus of Georgia State University. This research will only be done once and will only take 1 hour and 50 hours of your time.

Risks

In this study, you will not have any more risks than you would in a normal day of life.

Benefits

Your participation in this study may benefit you personally by increasing your awareness of social issues. Overall, we hope to learn more about how useful theatre is as a tool for social awareness.

Alternatives

The alternative to taking part in this study is to not take part in the study.

Compensation

You will receive a free food item and drink for participating in this study.

Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal:

Participation in research is voluntary. You do not have to be in this study. If you decide to be in the study and change your mind, you have the right to drop out at any time. You may

skip questions or stop participating at any time. Whatever you decide, you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Confidentiality

We will keep your records private to the extent allowed by law. The following people and entities will have access to the information you provide:

- Dr. Makungu Akinyela and Aubrey S. Williams
- GSU Institutional Review Board
- Office for Human Research Protection (OHRP)

We will use a code name rather than your name on study records. The information you provide will be stored in a locked cabinet and on a firewall protected computer until the research is over. When we present or publish the results of this study, we will not use your name or other information that may identify you. Focus groups will be used which means the limits of confidentiality must be discussed. You all will be asked not to reveal what was discussed in the focus group interviews. Please be warned that the researchers do not have complete confidentiality of the research.

Contact Information

Contact Dr. Akinyela (makinyela@gsu.edu) or Aubrey Williams at (awilliams190@student.gsu.edu)

- If you have questions about the study or your part in it.
- If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about the study.

Contact the GSU Office of Human Research Protections at 404-413-3500 or irb@gsu.edu

- if you have questions about your rights as a research participant.
- if you have questions, concerns, or complaints about the research.

Copy of Consent Form to Participant

We will give you a copy of this consent form to keep.

If you want to volunteer for this research and be audio recorded, please sign below.

Printed Name of Participant

Signature of Participant

Date

Principal Investigator or Researcher Obtaining Consent

Date

Georgia State University
Department of African American Studies
Actors Informed Consent

Title: Black Matter: Re-evaluating Representations of Blackness through the Arts

Principal Investigator: Dr. Makungu Akinyela

Student Principal Investigator: Aubrey Williams

Purpose

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is for the researcher to collect opinions about Black people's representation in classical media. (Classical media includes film, visual art and theatre). You are invited to participate because you are 18 years of age or older and you are able to participate as an actor for the play. 5 participants will be recruited for this portion study. This research will require 11 hours of your time over the course of 5 days.

Procedures

If you decide to participate as an actor:

- You will have to complete this consent form and fill out a demographic survey.
- You will be rehearsing twice a week for 2 hours a day. Rehearsals will be over the course of two weeks. Rehearsals will be between 4:00pm and 6:00pm. Rehearsals will take place over the weekend. During rehearsal, you will do warm-ups, have a table reading, and work on acting techniques.
- You will have to perform on the day research will be conducted. You have to arrive one hour before the research starts to begin rehearsal. The day of the show will require 3 hours of your time.

Your only interactions will be with the researcher, Aubrey Williams. The research and rehearsals will be done on the campus of Georgia State University. The research will take up a total of 11 hours of your time for 5 days.

Risks

In this study, you will not have any more risks than you would in a normal day of life.

Benefits

Your participation in this study may benefit you personally. You could use this performance as exposure for your talent, as well as to increase your awareness of current social issues. Overall, we hope to learn more about how useful theatre is as a tool for social awareness.

Alternatives

The alternative to taking part in this study is to not take part in the study.

Compensation

You will receive a \$10 Starbucks gift card for participating in this study. You will receive the gift card only if you complete the study.

Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal

Participation in research is voluntary. You do not have to be in this study. If you decide to be in the study and change your mind, you have the right to drop out at any time. Whatever you decide, you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Confidentiality

We will keep your records private to the extent allowed by law. The following people and entities will have access to the information you provide:

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If you want to volunteer for this research, please sign below.

Printed Name of Participant

Signature of Participant

Date

Principal Investigator or Researcher Obtaining Consent

Date

Demographic Questionnaire

Please answer these questions honestly:

1. Do you identify as Black or African American? YES NO
2. Are you in between the ages of 18 and 25? YES NO
3. Are you male or female? MALE FEMALE
4. What is your level of schooling? HIGH SCHOOL BA MA
5. Have you ever participated in a theatre activity or seen a play? YES NO

Please fill out the following:

Date of Birth:

Phone Number:

Email:

Title/Profession:

Any additional information that may be helpful to the researcher:

Pre-Intervention Questionnaire

Black Representation and Black Consciousness:

1. How are you familiar with the term “Black consciousness”?
2. What does Black consciousness mean to you?
3. Is being Black apart of your image?
4. How do you see Black people being represented in the media (literature, theatre, visual art)?
5. Do you feel that the representation of Black people through media influences the way Black people are treated in society? Why?
6. Do you believe Blacks are properly recognized as a part of the culture and history of the US? Why or why not?
7. Why is it important for you to know the history and the role that Blacks play in the US?
8. Describe a time you ever, at any point, rejected your Blackness to fit into mainstream/dominant society?
9. How is positive Black representation key to gaining equality?

Theatre Pre-Intervention Questionnaire:

1. Have you ever attended a theatre production or participated in a theatre activity before this interview?
2. Are you familiar with any plays?
3. Are you familiar with any plays that are written by a Black author? If so, what are they?
4. Have you ever seen a play that was about Black people but not written by a Black author?
5. How did this theatrical experience make you conscious of your race?
6. What role has fine arts or classic media (literature, theatre and visual art) played in the representation of Black people?

Post – Intervention Interview Guide (Focus Group)

1. In what ways did Black Consciousness reveal itself in the content of the intervention?
2. Were you satisfied with the way Black people were presented in this intervention?
What were some aspects of representation that stuck out/were missing to you?
3. Did you learn anything new pertaining to the history or culture of your race through the intervention?
4. Did you find the intervention helpful or harmful to the representation of Black people? Why or why not?
5. Did you find the theatre intervention educational?
6. On a scale from 1 to 10, how effective was this theatre intervention in terms of Black representation and consciousness?
7. Do you feel that theatre could be an effective tool to raising awareness and consciousness in the Black community- especially amongst African American youth?
8. Was your definition of Black consciousness the same or different after watching the intervention?
9. What other thoughts came to mind while watching the play?

Answer Sheet – Black Representation and Black Consciousness

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

9.

Answer Sheet – Theatre Pre-Intervention Questionnaire

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

