

University of Louisville

## ThinkIR: The University of Louisville's Institutional Repository

---

Electronic Theses and Dissertations

---

5-2012

### Journey towards artistry : Blues for an Alabama sky.

Jacqueline L. Thompson 1979-  
*University of Louisville*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ir.library.louisville.edu/etd>

---

#### Recommended Citation

Thompson, Jacqueline L. 1979-, "Journey towards artistry : Blues for an Alabama sky." (2012). *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. Paper 1433.  
<https://doi.org/10.18297/etd/1433>

This Master's Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by ThinkIR: The University of Louisville's Institutional Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of ThinkIR: The University of Louisville's Institutional Repository. This title appears here courtesy of the author, who has retained all other copyrights. For more information, please contact [thinkir@louisville.edu](mailto:thinkir@louisville.edu).

JOURNEY TOWARDS ARTISTRY: Blues For an Alabama Sky

By

Jacqueline L. Thompson  
B.A., Clark Atlanta University, 2001

A Thesis  
Submitted to the Faculty of the  
College of Arts and Sciences of the  
University of Louisville  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of

Master of Fine Arts in Performance

Department of Theatre Arts  
University of Louisville  
Louisville, Kentucky

May 2012

Copyright 2012 by Jacqueline L. Thompson

All rights reserved

Journey Towards Artistry: Blues For an Alabama Sky

By

Jacqueline Thompson

B. A., Clark Atlanta University, 2001

A Thesis Approved on

April 10, 2012

By the following Thesis Committee:

---

Professor ~~Mefertiti~~ Burton

---

Dr. Lundeana M. Thomas

---

Dr. Edna Ross

## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to the memory and legacy of Carol Mitchell-Leon and Whitman Mayo who inspired, nurtured, and believed in my talent.

It is also dedicated to my angels, two of my cheerleaders of life that transitioned during this process. Carrie Jefferson and Dawn Hatter... their spirit, memory, and love is alive and well in my soul.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This journey and process would not have been possible without the guidance and support of my professors in the theatre arts department at the University of Louisville. Special thanks to Dr. Rinda Frye for recognizing and believing in my talent.

Thanks to Dr. Lundeana Thomas who mentored, nurtured, and supported me during this process. Thanks to Professor Nefertiti Burton whose wisdom, direction, and willingness to go beyond the call of duty kept me anchored and sane.

For my parents (William and Stella Garrett) and (Larry Thompson) who never second guess my dreams and provide encouragement and love to see everything I begin to the end. For my grandmother (Mildred Thomas) for providing unconditional love that transcends all understanding.

Last but not least... praise, honor, and reverence to my higher power. Without the endurance, perseverance, and talent you have blessed me with, I am incomplete. I am humbled by my gifts and realize that you are the author and finisher of my fate. I am eternally grateful.

## **ABSTRACT**

### JOURNEY TOWARDS ARTISTRY

Jacqueline L. Thompson

April 25, 2012

This thesis represents and examines my metamorphic journey as it relates to acting. These pages hold my greatest fears, insecurities, perspectives, and mantras toward life and the magical world of theatre. Chapter One, *Genesis of Passion*, reveals how my childhood helped and hindered my progression as an artist in my adulthood. Chapter Two, *Metamorphosis of an Artist*, speaks to the mental and physical adjustments required to transition from the teacher back to the student. Chapter Three, *Touched by An Angel*, includes historical data surrounding *Blues For An Alabama Sky* as well as specific character research needed to bring my character to life. It discusses my mentality toward this preparation as well as thoughts and insights while rehearsing and performing the role. The final chapter, *Revelations of Possibilities*, speaks to my desire to leave a blueprint for Master of Fine Arts students in

this program who will graduate after me. It encourages and directs them toward a path of finding elements that perfect their artistry, filtering negativity that blocks this growth and forgiving themselves and others when instances and situations do not turn out as they might have wished.



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	iv
ABSTRACT.....	v
CHAPTER	
I.    GENESIS OF PASSION.....	1
II.   METAMORPHOSIS OF AN ARTIST.....	7
III.  TOUCHED BY AN ANGEL.....	22
IV.  REVELATIONS OF POSSIBILITIES.....	46
REFERENCES.....	53
CURRICULUM VITAE.....	55

## CHAPTER I

### GENESIS OF PASSION

Caterpillar: Who are YOU?

Alice: This was not an encouraging opening for a conversation. I -- I hardly know, sir, just at present -- at least I know who I was when I got up this morning, but I think I must have been changed several times since.

-- *Alice in Wonderland*

It is amazing what the mind can create without distractions. How many inventors, painters, and artists are we losing with our newfangled technology? Until the age of ten, I grew up an only child in the suburbs of St. Louis. Only children are forced to entertain themselves, so Barbie was my best friend. I created scenes, characters and shows within the imaginary land of my dolls. My mother and grandmother oozed love and understanding, but lacked sensibility to allow me to play outside with the rest of the world. Unfortunately, I can count on my hands the times I was allowed to play outside. Outdoor activity in their mind would cause my asthma and allergies to arise and so

that love forced them to trap me inside the walls of our house. This conformity lead to everyday restriction of activities that normal kids do like learning how to ride a bike, swimming and skating. This solitary state forced me to explore, create and dream. I performed and sang around the house. I entertained myself by writing short stories and performing them. This was the beginning of my love for theatre.

Quiet, withdrawn, shy, and mute would describe my early elementary days. Teachers would express concern about my silent disposition with my mother. She felt no need to worry because when I was at home, every room was my stage. I was colorful, alive and vibrant. Someone else sensed I had more inside me than I was sharing and pushed me to express my voice. My elementary music teacher, Cecilia Jenkins took the time to nurture my gift. Reflecting back on her, I believe she saw herself in me. She was mild mannered and soft spoken but passionate about her craft. Ms. Jenkins would visit my family and me at home and I felt safe to be me. I attended a Christian school where the Christmas and Black history plays were the highlight of the year. In second grade, we performed a skit where Jesus would come to different people and ask them for their time and each person would have an excuse. She cast me as a

feisty, party girl who did not have time for Jesus. My character was polar opposite of how at that time, I thought the world would ever perceive me. I can still remember the excitement I felt rehearsing and preparing for my five lines. The next year brought my first solo. I remember the nerves and I remember releasing them as soon as I hit the stage. Time passed and Julie Mock reminded me of my passion in high school. After taking her acting class, she encouraged me to take an intensified acting course to continue perfecting my craft. I was grateful for another teacher in my world to encourage and help illuminate my gift. She cast me as Mrs. Gibbs in Thornton Wilder's *Our Town* and encouraged me to audition for the swing choir where I was selected to sing show tunes with a group for many events in and out of school.

I continued my love affair with theatre in college. Attending Clark Atlanta University introduced me to the rich legacy of African American theatre. Carol Mitchell-Leon embraced me and allowed me to stretch myself beyond realms that I had placed around me for boundaries. While active with the CAU players, I had dreams of working in broadcast journalism. I had set out to become a news anchor or a disc jockey. Upon taking a few classes, I realized how saturated the field was and quickly switched to speech

communication. To this day, I have no recollection of my rationale for this. My young, naive mind must have thought this offered some sense of security. Had I listened to that small voice that resides inside all of us, I would have paid attention to the area where I spent most of my time. Graduation came and I realized as I explored the classified ads that there was no urgency for people holding a Bachelor of Art in my field. I began substitute teaching and that opened the door to permanent teaching which led down a path to a dead end. I soon realized that I was living in an awkward space of unhappiness and complacency in regards to my career. My passions and dreams were haunting me. I loved my students and believed I was there for a reason. That reason being to plant seeds of faith, encourage and uplift. My hope was to be what Cecilia Jenkins, Julie Mock and Carol Mitchell-Leon had been to me.

I learned that the St. Louis public educational system was filled with vicious politics, money making and injustice. I witnessed how prototype teachers are created and how everyone was expected to model that one example throughout a school. The artist in me rejected this theory at all costs. I refused to run my classroom like a boot camp. I pushed against the norms of the schools where I worked and integrated the arts into every subject I taught.

However, it still was not enough to make me happy or sane. Before my thirtieth birthday, I told myself if I was going to continue teaching, it had to be something that fed my soul as well. I had begun acting around St. Louis at local theatre companies and recharging my passion for theatre. It only made sense to go back to my beginning. The search for a MFA program began.

My first attempt was URTA. While writing, I recall my encounter with this organization my senior year of undergraduate school. I was disappointed after not being called back to the final auditions. This time around, would be different. I had worked at several professional theatre companies and had some independent films under my belt. They were sure to pass me on to final auditions. It is said that insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result. Once again I was rejected and defeated. I returned home and after chatting with a woman I met during auditions she informed me she was auditioning for the University of Louisville. My faith heightened and I remembered several of my classmates attending the program. I remembered Ms. Leon asking me had I considered the program ten years prior. I set up an audition. I was working on a show at the time and the director would not excuse me from photo call to come down

for the audition. I took off work, drove from St. Louis to Louisville, auditioned and immediately got back in the car and drove back to St. Louis all in the matter of eight hours. Time passed and my dream began to dissipate until the email from Dr. Rinda Frye. She asked me had I completed an application and that she had been waiting on it. This was followed by an offer and an assistantship. Many lack faith to believe in a higher power, but in my eyes this opportunity was nothing more than a blessing from God and a testament that dedication, risk and sacrifice make the perfect recipe for achieving what you want in life.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **METAMORPHOSIS OF AN ARTIST**

My transition into this MFA program allowed me the opportunity to release the constraints of conformity and embrace my artistic individuality or so I thought. The last charter school I taught at was founded by a chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority. The board was very specific and particular regarding the aesthetic of the school and how the teachers presented themselves in the community. What this meant as an employee is that we had to adhere to a strict dress code which ultimately transformed my style of dress. The transformation did not have negative repercussions but it molded my identity during my twenties. Much like an actor who wishes to uphold a positive image, teachers also have to be aware of their surroundings and actions in public. At work, there were particular teachers who were highlighted and other teachers would have to visit their classroom to ultimately run their classroom the way they had observed. While this was helpful in learning behavior management approaches, it was destructive to my creative, instinctual voice. I often felt stifled and



trapped and desired to run my classroom the way I felt would best benefit my students. Creativity on this level was frowned upon and often unappreciated by administrators.

Entering into the program, I still had a desire to teach. I wanted to perfect my artistry but education had become second nature. Since I had teaching experience, I was called on to teach more classes than my classmates. While I embraced and enjoyed this experience, I now realized it took away from a time in my life where I should have been completely focused on strengthening areas that were weak as a performer. I never was able to switch the teaching gear off. In hindsight, working in rep company or studio theatre would have been choices that would have stretched and possibly strengthened my skill set. I wrestle with this gift. Teaching is something that I will always do but my fear is that I use it as a crutch. If a stranger asks about my profession, I will say teacher before actor. It may be due to the flighty stigma that artist often hold in the eye of the public, but how will I ever turn my dreams into reality if I will not boldly stand on my choice and work towards that goal above all others? This last semester has led me to search for career paths outside of education because I know it will always be there. Finding the fit for my talents and type is not an easy task but one

I am willing to fight conquer. Switching from teacher back to student ultimately placed me in three disciplines of training:

### **Movement**

My young days of being confined to the house came back to haunt me during my first semester of graduate school. The weight of solitude always brings the weight of pounds. I struggled with obesity since elementary days. Southern cooking and love was expressed through food. Every member of my immediate family has high blood pressure and/ or diabetes. I witnessed one grandmother succumb to it. With overeating and lack of exercise, my physical life has always been stifled. The concept of movement first brought excitement. A year before graduate school, I had started working-out daily. I drastically changed my diet refraining from pork, beef and artificial sugars. The result of this change was a loss of forty pounds.

We began stage combat and acrobatic exercises such as forward rolls and headstands. The idea that I could make my body roll on its own purposefully or stand on my head willingly caused great fear and intimidation. Next came the Lecoq training where we were required to mime. Once again intrigue turned to confusion and fear. We were miming

activities like skating and swimming. When your frame of reference for doing an activity is from actually doing it, it gives you an advantage than when you have to imitate the activity. My lenses to view these things were clouded. My only perception was from watching others. I also noticed that I had some spatial-auditory difficulties.

I realized that when directions were given, I would do the opposite. To add insult to injury, we were required to wear white leotards. At first it added to my feeling of incompetence as I looked around at the other women in the room and noticed how much noticeably bigger my frame was in comparison with theirs. However, having to wear leotards resulted in freedom. This dress code created vulnerability with my classmates. It also created a heightened sense of confidence. It forced me to embrace my body, flaws and all. It forced me to observe my shape and make a conscious effort to accept or change.

In acting, I was reminded about my weight upon a mid-semester review. My professor confirmed my belief that I was talented and intelligent. However, he said that the kind of work I would want and what I would be cast in was in the difference of about fifteen pounds. I wasn't upset, shocked or dismayed. Quite frankly, I agreed with him. About two years prior to coming to graduate school, I was

cast in a film titled *Pennies for the Boatman*. I had been cast in the stage version months prior. The play won a competition and a new director was hired to bring it to film. He looked at me and another actress who was slimmer and lighter and said to me, "It's different when you are casting for film. I have to make sure this works for film." The play centered around two sisters. The characters were Camilla, the glamorous sibling and Helen the plain, mild mannered one. Despite, my review from KDHX.org, critic Chris Gibson:

Jacqueline Thompson delivers the most complete and assured performance among the cast as Camilla. This is the character most fleshed out by Farwell and Thompson manages to make her believable and compelling (Gibson, 2007).

The director switched my part. This was my first realization of image and types. I resented his decision but agreed to work on the film. This experience taught me a valuable lesson. An actor has no proprietary rights to any role unless it is one that they have created. I embodied an intense passion and interest in the character when I performed the stage version. I brought none of that to the screen when the roles were reversed. It was a lesson in

humility that I value to this day. As an African-American woman in this business, it is imperative to be comfortable in my body and to make conscious choices about how the roles I accept negate or confirm current myths and realities shown in society. When discussing this with a friend who was in the business, their advice toward my "type" was to train to create a vixen image. I stated cynically and sarcastically that this was exactly what the media needs, another woman to exude sexual energy and promiscuity. I reject the happy, overweight best friend type as well. I have recently observed that on every network in the last couple of years there is one overweight black woman in the midst of other races. Shows like *Glee*, *The Community* as well as *Parks and Recreation* have their token. Last year I began to see a trend on sitcoms. I call it the "new-millennium mammy." Every network has a sitcom with an overweight black woman who for the most part is portrayed as asexual, dumb-witted or emoting much attitude. Donna from NBC's *Parks and Recreation* was found on one episode donating money to a KKK member over the phone because he promised her lower taxes. The sitcom, *Community* has a description of the black student Shirley listed on their website as being a nosey bible-thumping Christian who loves to cook food. *Glee*, which I have only watched once,

once, has a character named Mercedes. Happy and singing is all I have seen as it relates to her development and life on the show.

Being aware of these images, makes me cautious and careful about auditioning and accepting work that perpetuates stereotypical, negative images seen constantly in the media. The work towards creating the body that best represents me is constantly evolving. Perhaps, those images penetrate the deepest walls of my mind. To my dismay, I can truthfully say stepping on a scale each morning is something I have done and fight against it. The balance between my mental and physical health is pivotal to functioning and focusing as an artist and human being. It is said that once you know better, you do better. I know better but when I also know the game, it affects how I play.

### **Voice**

If there is one concept or discipline that I had the hardest time committing to and investing in would be the voice work. The only vocal exercise taught in this program is the Linklater progression. This vocal warm up does not resonate in my body. The methodology does not stick. For the last three years, I have seen it done and still have

difficulty verbalizing the significance or importance of the vocal progression. I blame no one for this lack of fervor for the practice. My theory is that there are several ways to achieve a goal and this particular one does not work for me. If the program taught a variety of different vocal techniques, then I could choose which one is the best fit for me. Dropping a touch of sound on the ground and painting the room different colors with my voice never quite set well in my mind. Learning what supplements, exercises and routine to practice to keep my vocal folds healthy during the run of a show would have been insightful. The dialect work was most rewarding from these classes. While learning the International Phonetic Alphabet assisted some in this, I developed a keen ear to catch a variety of speaking patterns. I always chose to research dialects from cultures that I could realistically get cast to play. My speaking voice may not have been nurtured as much as I wanted, but through my time here I re-discovered my first love.

"He who sings, frightens away all his ills."  
--author unknown

Acting and singing are not synonymous. They require two different types of energy and discipline. As an actor, I make choices that justify the mental psyche of my

character. As a singer, I create melodic phrases and notes that are personal interpretations of where that song lives in my body. Singing is the ultimate form of vulnerability and truth on a stage. My voice was stifled for many years despite my passion and love for music. I simply was not confident. I knew I had the vocal ability to carry a tune, but to lead a solo was out of my comfort zone. I tried several times to fight this fear off-stage but it was never successful. Singing in plays was different than singing a solo for a wedding. In elementary school, I used to prepare creative, clever dialogue to call my local R&B radio station to get the Deejay to play my favorite artist and have our conversation played on the air. Music has always been an integral part of my life.

Being cast to sing in productions was constant but always caused great apprehension and tension. What was hindering my song? Why I was hesitant about letting my voice be heard? I still search for the answer. One of the greatest accomplishments I take away from my time in this program is the freedom of my voice. This new found freedom did not happen during class, it was birthed from determination, focus and drive to prove to myself and the faculty that I belonged in this department. From my first production in Dr. Rinda Frye's production of *As You Like*



*It*, I have been cast to sing. I was petrified in my first role as *Amiens*. I refused to let that type of fear take over my talent and I fought against the internal battle causing apprehension and doubt. Every show, every semester I have performed in a role that has required me to share my voice with the world. The most challenging vocal task was playing Princess Oshunana in *The Orphan of Chao*. Not only did I have to sing but I also had to compose melodies for poetry written within the script. The songs had to drive the story forward and contain all the emotions and intentions my character embodied within the scenes. It forced me to take risks, chances and explore vocal varieties and patterns that I have never before with an audience. I suddenly became the artist that was asked to sing and I embraced it. The release of that fear has been liberating and has given me a new found sense of confidence. My intent is to continue nurturing this part of my artistry to see where the notes lead me in the scale of life.

### **Acting**

My first semester of acting was a psychological nightmare. My instincts were challenged and I was introduced to concepts with which I often did not agree.

We were given open scenes without instruction or explanation. Searching to find intentions in language which has none was difficult and often uneventful. However, I learned the solution to many of my questions through my failure. I began to appreciate and recognize the beauty in subtleties on stage and realized the concrete meaning of having a specific intention for each line being said. I often wrestled with technical aspects of these courses. An example would be the theory of scoring your scene to orchestrate and avoid downward inflections. While vocal variety is extremely important, if an actor becomes so specific in the delivery of lines, what happens to the magic and mysticism of living in the moment?

Being overly technical can lead to boring, lifeless depictions of characters on stage. However, one technical aspect where I do find importance is in the breath. Since breathing is essential to life, it makes sense that it is just as vital in the existence of a character. Being reminded of this during training carried over into my personal life. While trying a pose in yoga, breathe. While getting blood drawn at the doctor's office, breathe. While experiencing pain after stubbing your toe, breathe. Breathing grounds, centers and relaxes my being into a state of calmness. It provides focus and endurance for the

pain, the moment, and the task. I also learned how vital research was in preparation for attacking any character. The phrase "know the world" was stated several times during the courses. Effectively gathering background information ensures a realistic depiction of an actor's work on stage. One of the worst things for an actress is to have an audience member know more about her character than she does. This component is crucial to hold the integrity of the work.

### **Personal Acting Methodology**

I am often reminded of a story a police officer shared with me about his graduation from the police Academy. He said that his lieutenant came to him and said, "You worked hard and learned the rules, however when you step out there in streets forget everything I taught you. Do whatever it takes to survive!" My personal methodology resides in this train of thought. I have been equipped with tools and tactics that have become second nature in my craft. This does not, however, mean that I will use these principles every time I step on stage. On stage and in that moment I must survive! I have to be open, vulnerable, and ready to respond to other characters as honestly and truthfully as possible for that moment. While performing, I have no

desire or need to think of technical aspects because my belief is that if I am connected with my character truthfully and honestly, all of the issues like vocal variety and inflections will flow out of my mouth in a way that effectively tells the story. My method can be summed up in these words *support*, *spontaneity*, and *spirit*.

*Support* meaning creating a safe environment for my fellow actors with me onstage. Mutual trust and accountability has to be established that allows confidence and chemistry to explode. I am quite aware that every actor I work with in the future will not be equipped to give that in return. I can only focus on putting those principles which are sacred to me into the universe and letting that power guide me through the process. *Spontaneity* allows for fresh, fun and provocative work on stage. This does not mean actors should intentionally find something different to change on stage nightly, it simply encourages the flexibility and freedom to allow the performance to take a flow and mood of its own. Being open and ready to catch new revelations and illuminations within the dialogue, discovering a new tactic in the middle of a scene or recovering from a dropped line are all ways in which being open to spontaneous energy can be entertaining for an audience and exciting for an actor.

Acting is *spiritual*. When an artist pushes away ego and judgment about the character and simply allows words and actions to live inside of them, something mystical occurs on stage. Technique tells an actor that a character should walk a certain way; the spirit allows it to become effortless for me on stage. Technique tells an actor their vocal range should be in another tone, the spirit allows the authentic rhythm, pattern and tone to flow organically through my soul when I deliver my lines. Technique makes an actor pinpoint a certain emotional state where they should arrive for a particular part in the script; the spirit allows emotions to come forth from my body at a moment that is genuine for my character in the world of the play. Connecting with the spirit of the character provides me with a third eye. I begin to see stakes and circumstances that others may miss or not fully grasp. Through that connection, a stronger intent of having this person's voice be heard becomes imperative. I knew I had found the spirit of Angel when I started taking offense to remarks made about her. In rehearsals, she was often labeled by my cast mates as the whore or other derogatory insults that before never bothered me. I was reminded of two things about life and her during those moments. The first being that she was a damaged and bruised soul that was operating the best way

she knew how. Her life was spent surviving and when you have no one to lean on you quickly adjust and make yourself flexible to any situation as a means to make it to the next day. Secondly, it is impossible to give what you never had. If she never experienced sincere love, how could she recognize it and be able to give it? In her spirit, I found a withered rose that never had the sunlight to bloom.

### CHAPTER III

#### TOUCHED BY AN ANGEL

Very few artists get the opportunity to discuss a play with a playwright before performing their work on stage. I was honored, humbled and overwhelmed with appreciation and excitement that this opportunity had been provided for my classmates and me. I had one burning question for Pearl Cleage: I wanted to know what aspect of Angel other actresses before me had seemed to miss. What nuances or elements of her personality were glazed over or underplayed? This next phrase helped me shape the psyche of the character and create textures to bring this Angel back to life. Cleage simply stated, "Don't try to redeem her at the end." She shared with me how during workshops of the play, Phylicia Rashad was the first to be cast as Angel. Ms. Rashad has a reputation that paints her as a portrait of grace, regalness and class from her unforgettable work on *The Cosby Show*. Rashad and Cleage had differences in opinion on how the show should end. Rashad wanted to portray the emotional exasperation of Angel in the last moments of the play as Cleage wanted to show a real, raw,

unapologetic view that lives in a world where self-preservation reigns above love, friendship and loyalty. I took these words to heart and did not have any concerns that I would fall into Rashad's trap at the end of the journey. However, once I began to walk in her heels and experience her pain, the choice at the end became harder to commit to. My external picture of Angel presents a portrait of a beautiful woman who exudes sensuality and confidence. In the script from *Blues For An Alabama Sky*, the character Guy states, "...she made half the queens who saw her second-guess their stated sexual preference" (Blues, 46).

What this meant is that I had to look and feel my best to present this image on stage. From my research about the Cotton Club, background singers like Angel were labeled with attributes that are a bit different from where I see myself in the world. The chorus girls were expected to be "tall, tan, and terrific," which meant that they had to be at least five feet six inches tall, light-skinned, and under twenty-one years of age. No problems with filling the tall requirement, I am somewhere between the 5'6" - 5'7" range. Terrific is a subjective word so I will take that adjective and live up to its definition. Tan is where I come to a roadblock. The reality is that a woman of my skin complexion during this time with the same qualities and



experiences as Angel would have had a completely different story. I would not have been allowed to sing in the cotton club. I questioned my connection to Angel because this pivotal point is crucial into the world of the play. The only lead vocalist that I could identify that performed in the Cotton Club with a skin tone similar to mine was Ella Fitzgerald. Her reign in the club comes a while after the time frame of the play but the point being made is that despite her impeccable vocal range and ability, she was never seen as a sex icon or glamour figure to the same degree as lighter skinned, artists like Lena Horne, Eartha Kitt and Dorothy Dandrige. In Ella's biography on her official website it is noted that:

She was self-conscious about her appearance, and for a while even doubted the extent of her abilities. On stage, however, Ella was surprised to find she had no fear. She felt at home in the spotlight. ([www.ellafitzgerald.com](http://www.ellafitzgerald.com))

The issue of skin tone and perception of beauty never toyed with my psyche as much as it did while working on this role. Reflecting on this subject now brings me back to my adolescent years, when my love for music kept me glued to BET and MTV for the latest music videos by my favorite

artist. I remember noting even then that the principal females in these videos were always the thin, light-skinned model types. My interest in attending an HBCU was somewhat sparked by watching Spike Lee's film *School Daze*. (I later discovered while attending Clark Atlanta University that Lee had taken undergraduate mass media arts courses in my department because it was an area that Morehouse did not offer at the time.) His distinct depiction of the sorority's color system as the Jigaboos and Wannabes was a powerful image of a caste system within my own race. I can remember hanging with some friends in junior high school and hearing a student walk by my table and refer to my friends and me as Jigaboos. So what are the attributes that live in these titles?

**Jigaboo** - a derogatory term for a black person with stereotypical black features (e.g., dark skin, wide nose, and big lips) *Jiggaboo* or *jigabo* is from a Bantu verb *tshikabo*, meaning meek or servile (urbandictionary.com).

**Wannabe** - someone attempting to emulate a person or genre of people but failing and earning the disgust of those he is trying to emulate (urbandictionary.com).

I would not fully understand the origin of this division until a history course in college. In the class, I was taught about a man named Willie Lynch who devised a plan to cause division amongst the slaves by imposing a caste system. I questioned the power of his speech. Could one man truly hold the secret to breaking down a group of people birthed so rich in tradition, wealth and regality? It is appalling to think that one man devised a plan to tear down the foundation and structure of a race. It is even more disheartening when the effects of this tactic can be seen today. If we look at some of the most successful African American female entertainers today, they have a major physical trait in common. Beyonce, Alicia Keys, Mariah Carey, Rihanna as well as actresses Halle Berry and newcomer Paula Patton all have light skin tones. This observation does not question or ridicule the skill level or talent of these women, but I am offended that there are no other entertainers that represent other shades of brown in the industry today. This is also observed on news networks like CNN. Having an interest in journalism early in my career, I always looked for anchorwomen that I could identify with. Women that I could see myself in. Two broadcast journalists of color that I respect on this channel happen to look nothing like me. Soledad Obrien and

Fredrika Whitfield are clearly competent in their positions but where is the representation and diversity of women of other shades?

It left me wondering, If Angel looked exactly like me and she managed to get a job in the Cotton Club, what would be her occupation? Despite her singing talent, would she have to serve as the night cleaning woman? Would the gangsters take a second look at her dressed in her cleaning uniform as they would in a tight-sequin ball gown? Does the cleaning woman get to have her own apartment owned by a gangster like the sex-kitten background singer? The great depression brings tattered finances for everyone but how much harder is it when your options become even more restricted based solely on the way you look? I wonder would she have heard the phrase that I have heard countless times in my life by some African American men. "You're real cute for a chocolate girl." Beauty is beauty and it comes in every shade, form, shape and fashion. This is something I have had to internalize or otherwise be constrained and brainwashed into society's ongoing blemished perception of perfection. Recognizing, appreciating and accepting myself with flaws and all was the key force in committing to this role. The historical aspect caused no hindrance in my ability to embody the soul and heart of Angel during the

process of the show. When approaching roles, I always search for traits about a character that naturally reside in me. I aim to create a three-dimensional being that demonstrates the complexities of human behavior. My question for myself became, "where does Angel live inside me?" How does her belief system flow or contradict with who I am.

The first similarity that I discovered was her resilience and focus on making sure her needs were met at all costs. Even when Guy offers his place to her she quickly responds that she should be figuring things out for herself. She tells Leland, "I know how to take care of myself, I'm not going to be some broke woman begging up and down 125th street" (Blues, 50). Angel and I share this sentiment. I spent the first ten years of my life in a field that I was not passionate about because it was my means for survival.

My education gave me more options than Angel had so I chose to make choices that did not lead me into the arms of men with illegal jobs looking for them to financially support me. This mindset often blocks me from pursuing acting whole heartedly. Someone asked me recently, what was I willing to risk? Am I willing to go without basic needs for a while to ultimately work towards my dream? I ask

myself, what am I willing to sacrifice to arrive at the level of success that I daydream about? This sacrifice can be something as serious as not accepting any form of employment that does not directly relate to theatre and only accepting jobs that will take my career to the next level. This sounds amazing but the reality of car notes, bills and student loans is a dooming factor in the grind of life. This battle is a daily challenge for me. One that I hope my head loses and my heart wins.

Angel and I find common ground in some of our views about the opposite sex as well. While discussing this role with Dr. Edna Ross she made a profound statement that not only resonated within my character work but hit a chord within my personal life as well. She said that in life we get exactly what we expect. I questioned Angel's last moments before the show closed and how the stage directions depicted an unaffected Angel sitting in the window pondering her next move. She expected everyone in her life to leave. Her life and body became a revolving door for men and she anticipated their exit. Guy was no exception and his sexuality confirmed that he would in fact find love and do the same thing. Bouncing back from a failed engagement has by far been one of the toughest issues dealing with the heart that I have ever had to face. From this incident, I

could relate when Angel says "There's nothing that a man can do that will surprise me" (Blues, 38). It speaks volumes to the power that is found within our tongue. Whatever thoughts and perception we hold, we manifest that into our reality. Angel developed a defense mechanism against people in her life. This made me challenge my thoughts about love and caused me to take a microscopic view of relationships in my life. It forced me to raise my expectations and deal with healing my own bruises and fears as it relates to matters of my heart.

One attribute that I respected about Angel was her courage. It is clear she often used this trait in negative ways but she unapologetically lived life the way she wanted to. If it meant running away from Savannah for a better life to make a living as a singer in Harlem, she ultimately made it happen for herself. She was not willing to bend or adjust her personality for anyone for too long. Dr. Ross also made me ponder the notion that no one uses Angel without her being aware of it. This was fleshed out clearly in the monologue about Tony T.:

I drank with him and listened to him telling me how long he'd been wanting to know me better and I watched him put his hand on my knee and I pretended not to notice (Blues, 59).

Her relationship with Leland mirrors the same notion. She is clear that he is with her out of grief and is attempting to mold her into his deceased wife. She plays the role because he offers a form of security and stability. Having a keen spirit of discernment in life is essential in self-preservation. I have grown into a sensitive being who is able to deal with people in a manner that allows me to quickly identify whether their intent with me is positive or whether it can be toxic.

The last connecting element between Angel and me is the gift of song. As it relates to Angel, neither one of us considered ourselves a singer. In creating a back story on how Angel began to use her voice, I imagined some of her clients or friends who worked at Ms. Lillie's heard her singing one day and made her believe in her talent. Friends, family members and teachers have encouraged me to believe in my voice as well. When Angel arrived in Harlem and realized she could make a living performing that became her means to survive. This view was justified in Act one when Guy asked Angel how her audition went, she replied:

*Good... the band sounded so good they made me think I could really sing!* (Blues, 33)

Angel was not driven or passionate about singing. It was a gig and the only form of work that she knew how to



do. Without any other training or skill set, this was what she did best. Where we differ is my interest in perfecting this gift. This skill strengthens my opportunities as an artist. I never considered Angel as that.

## **History**

"I don't know nothin' bout no depression," the housekeeper of sociologist, E. Franklin Frasier used to say. "I aint seen nuthin' but hard times all my life." (Osofsky, 97)

When performing in a period piece, research is essential in taking on the true essence of your character. One of the first elements necessary for this production was to truly embody and embrace the energy and culture of Harlem. In February of 1930, four months after the stock market crashed, the *New York Herald Tribune* found that Harlem was "the poorest, unhealthiest, unhappiest and most crowded single section of New York City" (Osofsky, 101). Despite this statement, the great migration did not stop masses of blacks from southern states and the West Indies in search of jobs and justice. Angel and Guy were not the only people trying to get out of Georgia. In 1930, 19,546 blacks from Georgia moved to New York City (Osofsky, 121). The population was over three-hundred thousand and was

labeled the largest black city in the world. Only fifteen percent of residents could be considered middle class and the number of upper class blacks residing in Sugar Hill, Hamilton Heights or Strivers Row was a small proportion of that (Osofsky, 123). The average person who was able to find a job made under eighteen dollars per sixty-six hour week compared to whites who were paid twenty-three dollars for the same work. However, by 1930, the year *Blues For An Alabama sky was set*, a quarter of all Harlemites were out of work. Living conditions were harsh and a study found that sixty percent of people living in apartments were in desperate need of repair, partly because superintendents were given free basement apartments but no salaries, which meant that they had to work full time jobs that left no time to maintain buildings. Apartments had one bathroom where several families had to share. Many used outhouses located in backyards and alleys. Despite the circumstance of the economy, blacks rent remained higher than economically comparable white neighborhoods (Osofsky, 125).

The average cost of rent a month was around \$42. In 1930, Blacks in Harlem paid \$9.50 per room while white people paid \$6.67. 1930 also marks the year of the first housing project being developed (Gill, 298).

Despite the harsh living conditions, artistically Harlem flourished. Claude McKay stated that, "Harlem of the twenties was presented as a great playground, America's answer to Paris" (McKay, 234). From fearless writers such as Langston Hughes and Bruce Nugent to smooth composers and musicians like Duke Ellington, art undertook a soulful rebirth. Entertainment venues like the Cotton Club provided work for some artists but at what cost? One of the most notorious pre-prohibition gangsters was Owney Madden. He purchased the night spot Club Deluxe to find an outlet to serve his "Madden's No. 1" beer. Madden changed its name to the Cotton Club. The exact derivation of the name is unknown, but many assume the "whites only" policy in conjunction with black entertainers was the reason for the choice. The club was converted from five hundred to seven-hundred seating capacity. The club was refurbished with a jungle décor and until 1927, workers and entertainers were brought in from Chicago. Impeccable behavior was expected and demanded of the guests (Haskins, 154). Waiters served food and drinks with elegance and class. Like other establishments, color boundaries were set. Manager Jimmy Durante stated that "most white downtowners wanted to observe Harlem blacks, not mix with them. Racial lines are drawn here to prevent trouble. Nobody wants razors,

blackjacks or fist flying-and the chances of a war are less is there if no mixing." Bodyguards were placed at the door and only the lightest complexioned blacks were allowed entrance (Haskins, 156).

### **Pre-Show**

An actor is made to believe image is everything. There is a weighted pressure always to look aesthetically pleasing to the eye. There is added stress when the character you are playing is to match this glamorous picture. The summer of 2011 was filled with a daily boot camp regime. My goal was to lose fifteen pounds and tone for the six months leading to rehearsals. A daily routine including circuit training was building my endurance, stamina and confidence. The fall semester brought my grind to an abrupt stop. Exercise has become an intricate part of my life. The frequency and intensity became affected with my school schedule. I also noticed that when I go home for breaks my normal eating habits are influenced by my family traditions. I had to pay close attention to whether the stress or anxiety of attacking and learning lines for the role were adding an extra level of nervousness that I was not dealing with in the most productive way. I worked my body and my mouth while I was home. The end results was not

obtaining my desired weight for the character but actually gaining ten. I was disappointed in my choices and worked hard to drop back down to my normal weight the whole month of January. This experience forced me to deal with this issue. Emotional eating is common but it is something I never believed that I dealt with. The added weight made it more difficult at times to find the sensuality and sexuality in Angel because I did not feel attractive. As an actor, you have to wear the mask despite what internal insecurities and restraints are living in your psyche.

Preshow also involved becoming reacquainted with my first love. I was introduced to the world of Langston Hughes my sophomore year of high school. I did a report for an English class and began researching all of his poems and committing many of them to memory. While attending Clark Atlanta University, our theatre group performed his play *Simply Heavenly* where I played the role of Mamie. My years spent teaching in elementary schools kept Hughes glued to my fingertips. Every school I taught at, I was called upon to organize and write the Black History Month Program. Introducing his montage on dreams uplifted my students and provided them with words of hope and promise. His language and vision has stood the test of time. His work has relevance and relatability where many poets' collections

fall short. The mere fact Angel and Guy make references to sharing the same space or room with Hughes incited an authentic zeal inside of me.

My next assignment would be searching for visual images of women of the thirties. I looked at make-up, hair, clothes and paid particular attention to women that worked inside The Cotton Club. One major difference, I noted was the attire of the costumes. Aside from a turquoise, tight-fitting gown I wore in this production, the other outfits were modest to say the least. Many pictures I viewed showed women in flapper, shorter ensembles.

### **Mental State**

The script states that Guy and Angel lived at Ms. Lillie's house in Savannah and it is described as a brothel. It was vital for me to research the mental effects of prostitution and how the results affected the choices and decisions she makes throughout the play.

A study conducted by the *Yonsei Medical Journal* reported mental health issues like depression, anxiety, and psychological distress are higher in women in prostitution. To examine the mental health of women who are engaged in prostitution, the characteristics of the process of prostitution must be understood. According to previous

studies, prostitution is essentially a multi-traumatic phenomenon. Women in prostitution may occasionally be involved in violence. A recent study of 854 women in prostitution in nine countries reported that 70 - 95% of the women experience physical assault, among which 60 - 75% had been raped (Hong, 2009).

The study listed the following emotional affects:

- Stress, trauma, depression, anxiety and eating disorders.
- After leaving the life of prostitution, women often suffer from post-traumatic disorder, i.e., severe depression, acute anxiety, insomnia, irritability, flashbacks, and emotional numbness.
- Drug and alcohol abuse
- Distrust and hatred for men
- Anger and rage
- Deep emotional pain and grieving.

Being aware of these facts before starting the process, allowed me to understand Angel's actions and provided justification for her habits and vices. The abuse of alcohol can be identified the moment the play begins. Angel drinks from the time she wakes up until she goes to bed. She finds comfort and solitude in liquor. Alcohol provides an escape and numbness from her reality and caused

her to lose her job at The Cotton Club. Rage can be seen when she asks Guy did she throw anything at the club. This comment revealed a possible history of violence and erratic behaviour while intoxicated. Deep emotional pain and grieving were also displayed at the top of show. Nick's engagement hurt Angel despite the transparent reality that their relationship would never lead to matrimony. Angel spoke of her distrust for men and displayed it with her attitude and relationship with Leland.

### **Rehearsal**

I could not have asked for a more cooperative, supportive and giving cast. We knew we had the shortest rehearsal time of the season and were ready for the challenge. Throughout the whole process, I never experienced a moment where I dreaded or feared what the rehearsal would bring. I particularly appreciated the directing style of Professor Nefertiti Burton. Burton possesses a unique way of making an actor search deeply into her character's psyche by asking questions. Many questions assisted in finding elements of Angel's relationship with others that I had not previously noticed. Through a series of improvisations, we were able to discover elements in the back story of these character's



lives that created textures on stage. Two moments of this process were integral in my development: an improvisation of Guy and Angel getting off the bus from Savannah to New York and living the moments after Sam's death. As it relates to Guy, I was soon convinced from the beginning Angel has always counted on Guy to fix her problems. In our scene, Guy was the one coming up with suggestions on where to stay and find work. Without Guy's charm, skill set and love, the big apple would have taken a bite out of Angel. When it came to the harsh, chilling moments after the gun shot, I found myself crawling behind a dumpster in the back of the apartment building.

At this moment, Angel has had the abortion maybe two hours prior, physically she is not strong enough to walk or move fast enough to get away If Leland were to come back seeking to harm her as well. Fear, physical and mental pain paralyze her until she is capable of getting off the ground to plan her next move. Burton asked another question that was even more disturbing, where does Angel go? The script tells us she is missing. In my walk in this character's shoes, my only option was to go back to Tony T's. The price to pay is my body but I may be able to at least hide out in the dressing room of his club until the controversy of the incident has calmed down. While reading this script, it is

clear that the character experiences a roller coaster of emotions but the intensity felt when these actions came to life was something that I had not quite prepared myself for.

### **Angel/Guy**

This relationship was easy to cultivate due to the nature of my offstage rapport with this actor. He is someone that I look to when I want a true, unfiltered opinion about a situation and I respect and value his opinion on all matters. Conveying their closeness and comfort with each other was second nature.

### **Angel/Leland**

This chemistry was a bit harder to brew. Gary Brice is a brilliant actor. He is someone who I respect and love like a younger brother or family member. The concept of playing the role of his opposite love interest concerned both of us in the beginning stages of this piece. A professional actor must tap into different realms of existence with other people despite the reality of their relationship. He never ceased to amaze me with experimenting with different tactics during our rehearsal process. Each day he brought a fresh approach to our scenes, which often made me question my character's true

feelings for Leland. Many viewers interpret Angel as having no affection toward Leland at all. The energy poured into Leland's life through Brice made this perspective hard to embrace. Angel found him charming and hoped that he would offer her a better way of life. His head-strong, obstinate views of the world pushed her away. She would never conform to his mindset of molding her into Anna's image. Brice's portrayal would make any woman take a second look.

### **Angel/Sam**

From the moment I read this script I felt underlying chemistry between Doc and Angel. Cleage subtly infers that the possibility of them having some sort of past relationship is a high probability. Sam's profession and night life make it clear to Angel that she would never be number one in his life. She believed he ran through women as much as she ran through men. I believe they knew each other's dark side, acknowledged it and chose to love each other in spite of it. From that, a playful friendship was born. A. J. Green was able to portray the light-hearted nature of Sam that was challenged severely during the abortion scene.

### **Angel/Delia**

Delia says that Angel treats her like she is her little sister. (Blues, 11) Angel loves and respects Delia. She finds her highly naïve and considers the challenge of changing her to be her and Guy's special project. She wants to expose Delia to the night life of Harlem and loosen up her belief system. It is a bit perplexing as to why Angel does not talk with Delia about birth control however upon closer examination, what older sexually active woman would consult a younger virgin regarding methods of preventing pregnancy? Angel has bitter sweet emotions about Delia and Sam finding love with each other. On one end she finds it endearing, yet on the other she envies the idea of them settling down as well as finding stability and solace within each other. She believes Sam would straighten up his playboy ways for Delia and wishes someone would make an honest woman of her.

### **Performance**

A major goal during performance mode was to get out of my head and into my body. Without training, actors hold a rawness and edginess on stage. The constraints of technique are not overpowering their artistry. I have no regrets about obtaining my MFA however I have been affected and

guilty of over-analyzing my performance while onstage. This is something I never experienced prior to training. Training can become so calculated that actors begin to doubt or critique their own work when they should be simply living in the moment of the story. This can be seen if an actor has an emotional scene and makes a choice that they should be in tears by a particular moment in a play. If an actor is alive and free to the action of the circumstances, every external emotion will be displayed. My prayer nightly was for God to take me away and allow my body and voice to be open and vulnerable to tell this woman's story.

As the run progressed, I began to truly understand where Angel resided within me. This is the first production at the University of Louisville where I wanted the run to last longer than the time allotted. By the closing performance, her desperation, fear, resilience and struggle was so strong that it took all my might not to break down at the closing scene. We are told as actors, to live in the moment. When that moment is a direct contradiction of the playwright's intent, the actor's instinctual urges are challenged. My insight into Cleage's rationale for this moment was important to me. I heard her voice saying, "Do not redeem her at the end." She shared with me how some of her students at Spelman challenged the ending stating their

disapproval of how it depicted Angel. What I gathered from her explanation and what I believe to my core is that everybody is not noble or just. When you write or act out the human experience, it is vital to show the truth and complexities of humanity. Living Angel's complexities was important because I did not want to portray her utilizing all negative choices. I wanted the audience to see her sisterly nature with Delia, her camaraderie with Guy, her playfulness with Sam and her hopefulness in Leland. It was important to me that Angel not exist in a state of constant agitation and bitterness. I worked for layers and nuances that would evoke in the audiences an array of emotions toward my character.

I closed this run confident and proud of my work. Praise from others is always reassuring but when I can reflect on myself without boasting or having an inflated ego, just pure, genuine pride for my growth and dedication, that is the only standing ovation I need.

## CHAPTER IV

### REVELATIONS OF POSSIBILITIES

#### **Filter, Find, Forgive**

I was asked what I wanted my legacy to be within this department. What words of wisdom could I impart to students in this program who will come after me? The following strategies are principals I have learned through my journey. They are thoughts, ideas and perceptions that I not only try to teach but try to embody through my own actions daily. Three things needed to live a balanced and healthy life during your study at the University Of Louisville's Theatre Arts Department can be summed up in these three words: *filter*, *find*, and *forgive*.

#### **Filter**

As an artist, you will always be critiqued. You step on stage under a microscope where every action, movement and essence of your being is vulnerable and shared with the public. This business leaves no room for the meek at heart and the easily bruised. One thing to always remember is that art is subjective. Everyone views a performance through their lens from their own personal experiences. The

only thing you can do is fully commit and give the most honest work that is alive, real and instinctual in that moment. Your best internally may vary from performance to performance. Have the confidence and integrity to give your best (whatever it may be on that day). When you hold yourself accountable and solidly know that you have left everything you have on stage when you walk off, then as an artist you can stand boldly. When you have confidence in your work, you can handle critique and begin filtering for the truth in feedback.

Directors and actors share many goals. One should be a passion or desire to create a solid show which compels and captivates an audience. The critiques and comments given to you may not always come out gentle, kind or as nurturing as you may want them to be. However, I challenge you to sift through your feelings and release your ego to discover any points that are valid to your artistry. Ask yourself... Is there a morsel or hint of truth that is being presented about my work? Are you upset because what has been said is actually true and you do not want to receive it? Surely, there are exceptions to this statement. Some Professors or directors may be way off base with their perceptions of you. Every rule has an exception. Be mindful and cautious of your own arrogance or ego that convinces you that your



work and acting technique leaves no room for improvement. We are all a work in progress and learning is a continuing task. When you filter, you take an objective look and examine yourself. Release excuses for why you do what you do. The reality is few people will care and take time to realize the whys about you. They demand to see the end result. A prime example of when I had to apply this practice in my life can be seen in many of my graduate reviews as it related to my progress in movement. It was stated that I was disconnected from my body and that my coordination was lacking. I was also told that there was no reason why I should be having these difficulties. I could have chosen to spend my semester review meeting playing my violin with sob stories as to how I was never involved with any sports and how I never freely live inside my body. I chose to take an alternate route and spend the summer taking yoga, stretching my body beyond its comfort level and strengthening and challenging myself into positions and poses that I never imagined and dreamed I could do. I sifted through the message and found the essence of truth that applied to improving my physical state and in return gained a greater level of confidence and control of my body.

## **Find**

You will find many of your classmates complaining and become disenchanted with this program and process. It is easy to identify negative factors in our daily lives. It is more productive to embrace the aspects that you can grow from. Be proactive and **FIND** alternative programs that you feel are lacking. Take ownership and research specific areas that will help you grow as an artist. I wondered my first year why the theatre department did not have a closer relationship with Actors Theatre of Louisville. Through questioning and searching, a teaching artist position was created and I spent the next two years working with their education department. If you have a desire to perform musical theatre, enroll in a voice class in the music department. Use the university resources to build your skill set. To stagnate and expel energy regarding what is needed in the department will not further your career or better your understanding about what you need for your own development. Find the things you lack and create an environment where those things are being nurtured. Whether or not you have previous experience is irrelevant at this stage in life. If you desire to dance--and we know it is needed for the working actor--get out there and take lessons. I read a quote that said, "sometimes we must lose

ourselves to find ourselves." Calm any voices that refute your passions and urges. Be brave and bold enough to lose whatever is comfortable and safe and leap for the unknown. In that leap, we often find that our dreams are waiting to be placed in reality.

### **Forgive**

"Bitterness is like drinking poison and waiting for the other person to die." --Ron McManus

What good can come out of investing three years in a program and leaving with resentment and anger from the experience? Every day brings new challenges and obstacles to fight and find your way through. Artists are often typed as emotional, lively, passionate people that express themselves in every shape, form and fashion. When dealing with these "types" daily, there is bound to be a day where something said may offend you. Once again, I challenge you to face the issue head on and find a means to resolve it. This needs to happen without the problem spreading through the department prior to your discussion about the matter with the source of your complaint. It is important to remember that classmates and faculty become colleagues upon graduation. The theatre community seems massive but becomes quite small in the big picture of things. Artists who are

open, dedicated and easy to work with and giving on stage are hired. If you hold ill will in your heart, find a means to release that prior to walking across the stage. Use that energy and find an outlet for it to help students entering into the department after you. What good does it do to complain but pose no solutions to the problems? These are thoughts to ponder and explore as you are traveling through, begin to search for what your legacy and time in this department means beyond what is in it for you.

The hardest part of forgiveness is forgiving ourselves. I used to become frustrated when thinking about why I waited ten years to go back to obtain my Master's Degree. I put myself on a clock and assumed certain levels of success should be reached at specific points in my life. Life has taught me that things happen on their own time. The only thing we can do is work diligently towards our passions and have the patience to watch our labor manifest into reality. While I loathe the thought of teaching elementary school full time again, the experiences were invaluable. The skills I learned have sustained me economically and broadened my opportunities. Accepting and utilizing detours has been essential in maintaining my focus and viewing life in a brighter perspective. I wrestled with many possibilities on my journey and

continued hitting roadblocks. My closing thought is to encourage students coming after me to remember the importance of learning the curriculum the department has to offer and utilizing what elements work best for you. **Find** the gems, tools, skills and professors who speak to your learning style and need. **Find** ways through community service and networking to build contacts within the theatre community in and out of state. **Find** and identify all your strengths to ensure work after graduation. Become a sponge and absorb as many theories, techniques and practices as you can hold. When you are full, saturated and can hold no more, begin to squeeze. Remove the excess and clean your own house. I am cleaning away fear, insecurities, doubt and exploring what is next.

My possibilities are endless. Narrowing down a specific next move is hard and I often feel alone without help transitioning back into the real world. Then I remind myself of the beauty of a journey. The pains, frustration and joys in life all have a purpose. I defy anyone to take those elements and in the words of my Clark Atlanta University alma mater... **Find a Way or Make A Way**. I am searching and the journey continues.

## REFERENCES

- Alexander, Ruth M. *The Girl Problem: Female Sexual Delinquency in New York, 1900-1930*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1995. Print.
- Chasar, M. "The Sounds of Black Laughter and the Harlem Renaissance: Claude McKay, Sterling Brown, Langston Hughes." *American Literature* 80.1 (2008): 57-81. Print.
- Cleage, Pearl. *A Song For Coretta*. New York: Dramatist Play Service, 1999. Print.
- . *Babylon Sisters*. New York: Dramatist Play Service, 2005. Print.
- . *Blues For An Alabama Sky*. New York: Dramatist Play Service, 1995. Print.
- . *Bourbon at the Border*. New York. Dramatist Play Service, 1997. Print.
- . *Chain*. New York. Dramatist Play Service, 1992. Print.
- . *Flyin' West*. New York. Dramatist Play Service, 1992. Print.
- . *What Looks Like Crazy On An Ordinary Day*. Dramatist Play Service, 1997. Print.
- . *We Speak Your Names*. New York. Dramatist Play Service, 2006. Print.
- . *I Wish I Had a Red Dress*. A novel. s.l:s.n, 2004. Print.
- . *Mad At Miles*. Cleage Group Publication, 1990. Print.
- Cohen, Robert. *Acting One*. Mayfield Inc., 1984. Print.

- Driskell, David C., David L. Lewis, and Deborah Willis.  
*Harlem Renaissance: Art of Black America*. New York:  
 Studio Museum in Harlem, 1987. Print.
- Ellington, Duke. *The Collection*. Columbia, 1972.
- Fitzgerald, Ella. *St. Louis Blues*. Sony, 1950.
- Gibson, Chris. "The Seamstress of St. Francis Street." Dir.  
 Mario Farwell. *KHDX.org*. 19 Aug. 2007.  
[http://kdhx.org/arts/theater-reviews/the-seamstress-  
 of-st-francis-street](http://kdhx.org/arts/theater-reviews/the-seamstress-of-st-francis-street)
- Holiday, Billie. *St. Louis Blues*. Paramount, 1943.
- Linklater, Kristin. *Freeing The Natural Voice*. New York.  
 Drama Book Specialists, 1976.
- "The Final Call." *Willie Lynch Letter: The Making of a  
 Slave*. Web. 25 Mar. 2012.  
[<http://www.finalcall.com/artman/publish/Perspectives\\_  
 1/Willie\\_Lynch\\_letter\\_The\\_Making\\_of\\_a\\_Slave.shtml>](http://www.finalcall.com/artman/publish/Perspectives_1/Willie_Lynch_letter_The_Making_of_a_Slave.shtml).
- Gill, Jonathan. *Harlem: The Four Hundred Year History from  
 Dutch Village to Capital of Black America*. New York:  
 Grove, 2011. Print.
- "Harlem, Claude Mckay." *Claude Mckay*. Web. 25 Mar. 2012.  
[<http://www.abebooks.com/book-  
 search/title/harlem/author/claude-mckay/>](http://www.abebooks.com/book-search/title/harlem/author/claude-mckay/).
- Haskins, James. *The Cotton Club*. New York: Random House,  
 1977. Print.
- Hughes, Langston, Arnold Rampersad, David E. Roessel, and  
 Benny Andrews. *Langston Hughes*. New York: Sterling  
 Pub., 2006. Print.
- Osofsky, Gilbert. *Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto: Negro New  
 York, 1890-1930*. New York: Harper & Row, 1966. Print.
- Ward, Geoffrey C., and Ken Burns. *Jazz: A History of  
 America's*

## CURRICULUM VITAE

NAME: Jacqueline Thompson

ADDRESS: 602 Ruggles Place  
Apt. 210  
Louisville, KY 40208

DOB: St. Louis, Missouri - April 15, 1979

EDUCATION & TRAINING: B.A., Speech Communications  
Clark Atlanta University  
1997-2001

M.F.A., Performance  
University of Louisville  
2009-2012

### TEACHING:

TA 207 Enjoyment of Theatre (2 semesters)  
TA 324 Acting For Non-Majors (4 semesters)  
TA 322 Acting the Black Experience (1 semester)  
TA 326 Cultural Diversity in Performance (2 semesters)

### TEACHING ARTIST:

Actors Theatre Of Louisville (2010-Present)  
Sacred Heart School For The Arts (2010-Present)