5-2018

Self-executed dramaturgy : a journey with Miss Ida B. Wells.

Sidney Michelle Edwards
University of Louisville

SELF-EXECUTED DRAMATURGY:

A JOURNEY WITH *MISS IDA B. WELLS*

By

Sidney Michelle Edwards
B.F.A., William Peace University, 2013

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Louisville in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts in Theatre Arts

Department of Theatre Arts
University of Louisville
Louisville, KY

May 2018

SELF-EXECUTED DRAMATURGY:

A JOURNEY WITH *MISS IDA B. WELLS*

By

Sidney Michelle Edwards
B.F.A., William Peace University, 2013

Certification Approval on

April 12, 2018

By the following Thesis Committee:

_____
Thesis Director, Johnny Jones

_____
Dr. Baron Kelly

_____
Dr. Joy Carew

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of Wendell Edwards and to my sister,

who can do anything she wants to do.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow, for granting me the opportunity to obtain a Masters of Fine Arts in performance.

I want to thank my mentors: Nefertiti Burton, Johnny Jones, Baron Kelly, Walter K. Hurst, Maria Hurst, Jacqueline Thompson, and Joseph Vaughan for their support and guidance throughout my career.

To my village: My parents, Mr. and Mrs. Rudolph and Terry Edwards Jr.; My sister, Paris; My grandparents: Grace, Wendell, Zelia, and Bob; and every "Ms. Edwards", "Mr. Edwards", and extension thereof, thank you for telling me in so many ways, "YES, YOU CAN".

Thank you, Byron Lee Coolie Jr., for holding me when I cry and making me laugh. Thank you, Brianna Demby, for keeping me close even when I am far away. Thank you, Elyse "Providence" Roberts, for showing me what the spirit of a true artist is. Thank you to my classmates, Mia Donata Rocchio, Ross Joel Shenker, and Lois Abdelmalek. We came. We grew. We conquered. Onwards!

My love to each and every one of you.

ABSTRACT

SELF-EXECUTED DRAMATURGY:

A JOURNEY WITH MISS IDA B. WELLS

Sidney Michelle Edwards

March 28, 2018

This thesis presents my experience with the production of *Miss Ida B. Wells* by Endesha Ida Mae Holland. I used self-executed dramaturgy to enrich my process as an actor and create multiple vocally and physically dynamic historical characters. Throughout this document, I explore how my personal acting process and development as an artist are heavily influenced by the practices of the Alexander Technique. I discuss the unique challenges that I faced with scoliosis and vocal trauma and how I used the training I received during my graduate career to address those challenges. My personal account details the specific methods by which I approached the script, the research, the character development, and the rehearsal process of devising from a script.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

In the fall of 2017, the University of Louisville produced *Miss Ida B. Wells* by Endesha Ida Mae Holland as the first production of its season dedicated to women playwrights. The play is a one-act dramatic biography about the life of anti-lynching activist, pioneer, and journalist, Ida B. Wells. The production was directed by theatre[1] scholar Professor Nefertiti Burton, whose special research interest focuses on African Diasporic theatre. The cast of two was comprised of first-year graduate student, Mutiyat Ade-Salu, and myself, a third-year graduate Master of Fine Arts candidate. *Miss Ida B. Wells* served as the thesis show that culminated my graduate experience with the Theatre Arts Department at the University of Louisville.

This thesis presents my experience with this production and how I used what I refer to as self-executed dramaturgy to enrich my process as an actor and to create vocally and physically specific historical characters. Throughout this document, I explore my personal acting process and my development as an artist. I discuss the unique challenges that I faced and how I used the training I received during my graduate career to address my challenges. I will detail the specific methods by which I approached the script, the research, the character development, and the rehearsal process.

[1] Throughout this thesis I use the spelling "theatre" to refer to the art form and the spelling "theater" to refer to the physical playing space. Quotations and titles apart from the proper noun "Thrust Theatre" are exempt.

Defining Self-Executed Dramaturgy

I have never served as a dramaturg for any production. My primary experience with dramaturgy comes from exposure to the work of dramaturgs assisting with productions I have been involved with, especially Shakespearean productions. Before my graduate training, my understanding of the role of a dramaturg was to provide historical and/or cultural contexts to a production team for the purpose of supplementing the director's and actor's processes. They brought important information to the rehearsal space so that I, as the actress, did not have to concern myself with extra research. I did not realize what a luxury having a dramaturg on a production team was or that the scope of the kind of work dramaturgs can do is far more expansive than that which I thought. In his *Dictionary of Theatre* Patrice Pavis summarizes the dramaturg's responsibilities:

> 1) Selecting plays for a program on the basis of a particular issue or objective; 2) Carrying out documentary research on and about the play; 3) Translating, adapting or modifying the text, alone or with the director; 4) Determining how meanings are linked and interpreting the play according to an overall social or political project; 5) Intervening from time to time in rehearsals as a critical observer with a fresher pair of eyes than the director; 6) Looking after relations with a potential audience (deLahunta, 2000).

If there was ever a play that could benefit from a dramaturg, it was *Miss Ida B. Wells.* The script provided an outline for research that required a significant amount of filling in. Although the script itself is very informative and considered an educational piece, it only provided a surface amount of supporting information for the various historical moments of Ida B. Wells' life being highlighted. When I realized early in the process that no official dramaturg had been assigned to the show, I understood that I would need to do much of the research on my own out of immediate necessity.

Essentially, there is no way to begin work on a historical play without knowing the history. It was up to me to find critical pieces of information for the purposes of creating a fuller picture of the circumstances of the play for myself.

The typical presumption about actor's research is that it is solely based in the imagination, and that they must create completely from their own psyche. Particularly for young actors, outside research comes second in importance to acting choices based in their singular interpretation of a script. This was true of myself at one point. However, when I found myself faced with the challenge of creating a character based on a prominent historical figure, I innately understood that I would need more than the script and myself. I wanted to give a performance that was grounded in history and facts and not just the musings of what I wanted the character to be in my mind.

By being placed into a circumstance where I had to do research on my own, I began to realize the expansive possibilities of merging fact with imagination. My acting choices were informed and easily justified by the supporting materials. As I read through the script and looked for different entities to research, I became excited about the information I was gathering. I define this portion of my process as self-executed dramaturgy: research completed by an actor for her own character development. Because of the nature of the script for *Miss Ida B. Wells,* my research was not limited to the singular historical figure, but expanded to the approximately 50 names of people and organizations mentioned, including seven of the 11 characters I would develop for the production. This solo venture gave me a sense of ownership over my creative process that I had never experienced before.

Performance and Educational Background

I received the first-ever Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in Musical Theatre from William Peace University (formerly known as Peace College) in Raleigh, North Carolina. My experience there was unique in that the program developed while I was enrolled at the university. Unlike my fellow third-year graduate school counterparts at the University of Louisville, I did not decide to pursue a career in performance until I was at Peace. My undergraduate experience primarily consisted of training in dance, singing, and comedic improvisation. I was not exposed to formal acting techniques during my undergraduate training. I spent two years between undergraduate and graduate school performing musicals and plays locally in Raleigh. Teaching opportunities emerged by way of youth summer camps and a tour with Children's Theatre based in Montana. One of the reasons I decided to pursue a graduate degree was that I wanted more in-depth training in the craft of acting. I felt that I could be a more diverse performer by broadening my skill set in this way. Additionally, the prospect of being able to pursue my newfound love for teaching was attractive to me.

About the Playwright

Black female playwright Endesha Ida Mae Holland (1944-2006) was born in Greenwood, Mississippi. Holland's interest in playwriting began when she accidentally signed up for a playwriting course instead of an acting class at the University of Minnesota. Her most well-known play is *From the Mississippi Delta*, which with partial backing from Oprah Winfrey, premiered Off-Broadway in 1991 (Fox, 2006). Holland's play *Second Doctor Lady* won the Kennedy Center's Lorraine Hansberry Playwriting Award in 1981. The two plays were based largely on her mother, a brothel owner, and

her experiences in her impoverished hometown. In interviews, Holland speaks openly about her past as a thief and sex worker (Smith, 1990).

As a young adult, Holland became heavily involved in the Civil Rights movement and was arrested several times for her activism. It is not surprising that Holland admired the work of Ida B. Wells and was inspired to write about the historic pioneer. In contrast to writing plays about her own experiences, Holland wrote *Miss Ida B. Wells* in 1983. It received a staged reading at the University of Buffalo (year unknown), and one touring production mentioned later, but remains relatively unknown. The play's only publication can be found in the anthology, *Strange Fruit: Plays on Lynching by American Women* (1998) edited by Kathy Perkins and Judith Stephens.

Notes on the Playscript

Miss Ida B. Wells explores the remarkable life of Ida B. Wells, a Black woman and pioneer of the anti-lynching movement at the turn of the 20th century. Holland bills her script as a "dramatic biography." There is no linear plot in the script, but rather the action of the play moves through the personal accounts of Wells' life that Holland perceived as the most significant. For the purposes of this thesis, I will refer to each shift in the action as "sections," as the script is not divided into scenes like traditional western plays. The storytelling moves seamlessly between the two characters that both play Ida B. Wells. They are listed as Wells One, played by Mutiyat Ade-Salu, and Wells Two, played by myself.

Notes on the Production

The only other production of this play known to the collaborating ensemble is the one in which Professor Burton toured as Wells Two in the 1990s. Therefore, the script is

largely unknown and underdeveloped. The script required distinct creative attention to make the performance unique and engaging. This creative process will be explored in detail throughout this thesis.

This production was designed to tour and can be performed with a minimal set consisting of a table, two chairs, and two teacups. The production staged at the University of Louisville used a few more props and was uniquely highlighted by a screen shaped in the silhouette of Ida B. Wells' famous photograph (see *Appendix C).* The screen and projector are portable and convenient for touring.

From its initial run at the University of Louisville, this production went on to be an invited production at the 2018 Region 4 Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival (KCACTF) in Americus, Georgia. There, Professor Burton received a Distinguished Director award. In addition, Mutiyat and I both received nominations to compete in the KCACTF Irene Ryan Acting Scholarship competition, where we both placed into the semi-finalists round. The collaboration of designers and the care taken in devising the action of the script made this production unique and dynamic.

CHAPTER 1

THE INFLUENCES OF MULTIPLE THEATRE STYLES ON *MISS IDA B. WELLS*

The style of the University of Louisville's production of *Miss Ida B. Wells* was dynamic and multifaceted. The stylistic choices derived from three different genres of theatre: African American (Black) or African-influenced theatre, Didactic theatre, and Lynching Dramas. This chapter will explore how the production of *Miss Ida B. Wells* encompasses elements of each of these genres of theatre. In addition, I will explain how the various style choices made in this production were founded on dramaturgical research. Some of these choices derived from the script, some by the director, the actors, and technical designers. For the purposes of this thesis about my acting process, I will focus mostly on the aspects of the physical performance and the stylistic choices that influenced it.

AFRICAN AMERICAN (BLACK) OR AFRICAN INFLUENCES

During the same semester that I rehearsed and performed *Miss Ida B. Wells* I also served as a teaching assistant for Professor Nefertiti Burton's class on African diasporic theatre and performance titled Acting the Black Experience. Not only was this course a great study in pedagogy for me, but I learned about aspects of African theatre and their application of storytelling. Professor Burton, an African theatre scholar whose work emphasizes Yoruba ritual and performance, taught that African theatre encompasses the themes of *Spirit, Call and Response, Improvisation,* and *Rhythm*. The class was required

to see *Miss Ida B. Wells* and a discussion about the play highlighted the use of these themes throughout the production.

Spirit

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines spirit as "an animating or vital principle held to give life to physical organisms" and/or "the activating or essential principle influencing a person" (Merriam-Webster, 2018). In the context of theatre and storytelling, I would like to define it as the energy and enthusiasm with which one portrays life onstage. Spirit is imperative for effective performance. That is not to say that every performance needs to encompass high and extroverted energy, but the strength of the intent behind the performance, which is always to communicate, should be strong.

Professor Burton teaches that the concept of spirit is about connection to the divine, God, or a great universal power. During our email conversations, Professor Burton explained that based on her research on African culture and theatre, "performance stems from ritual, and the purpose of ritual is communication with the divine." As a performer, Professor Burton stated that one's personal understanding of their own spirit can be used as a means of communication with both the divine and the audience: "your understanding of yourself as a spiritual being who is onstage for a purpose allows you to tap into divine energy and share it with your audience, helping them to be in touch with their own divinity" (Burton, 2018).

In Professor Burton's class, students were asked to read traditional African stories and then retell them to the rest of the class. Students that had a strong desire to communicate a message through their story and understood their characters and plot were prepared to

perform and did the best work. It is important to note that good preparation fosters good Spirit. The best performances engaged the audience and it was evident that the performers were not thinking too intensely about what they would say, but rather being present in the moment with the audience and the story. Students were not merely telling the story, but they were experiencing it and living through the characters' words and actions.

For *Miss Ida B. Wells*, my desire to tell the story of Ida B. Wells was strong because of my passion for the content and message of the show. I agreed with the play's messages about justice for Blacks and connected them to the issues of social injustice Blacks are currently facing in America. That is what fueled the overall intensity and spirit of my performance. Within the larger context of the show, each character that I portrayed possessed its own specific energy or quality of spirit. Through my dramaturgical research on each character, I was able to not only create distinct bodies and voices, but distinct inner lives and intentions as well.

Often, one may recognize the spirit of a performance by the sense that the performers are enjoying what they are doing. Despite the weighty subject matter of the play, my cast member Mutiyat Ade-Salu and I found moments of humor. A comment that I received several times during the run of the show was that audience members felt that Mutiyat and I were having fun onstage, despite the violent content and history of lynching surrounding the play. According to Professor Burton, the term "spirit" in African-influenced theatre also speaks strongly to the relationship between the audience and the performers. When the give-and-take of energy between the two groups is generous and amicable, the performance become enjoyable for all involved.

Call and Response

In African storytelling there is no differentiation between the performer and the audience. African storytelling often incorporates a style of call and response in which the storyteller who holds the focus in a given moment will set up a word, phrase, or sound that prompts the other participants to verbally or physically respond in a unified manner. The word or phrase is often repeated several times during a performance so that the participants can recognize its sound pattern, repeat it, and make it an integral part of the storytelling. This convention is also frequently used in Black churches whether it be a formal, pre-planned call and response reading of scripture or an impromptu urging in a minister's sermon.

This convention also exists in *Miss Ida B. Wells*, though not in the same way as previously noted. This production had a defined boundary between the audience and performers, but still engaged the audience in a non-participatory way. There are two sections in the script where Wells One and Wells Two have a series of short lines that alternate between the two characters. In these sequences, Wells Two repeats the same phrase between the varied phrases of Wells One. Both characters are describing one incident simultaneously in two different ways. What made this performance different from the traditional style of call and response is that it did not directly involve the audience. The two characters performed call and response with each other, which allowed audiences to recognize this theme that is strongly connected to African performance.

It was Professor Burton's desire to incorporate music into this production and the call and response moments served as the vessels for doing that. During the first call and response sequence I embodied the character of Mrs. McDonald, an older woman living

during the Reconstruction Era just after the Civil War and the abolishment of slavery. I chose to use the melody of a Negro spiritual to sing my repeated lines, "The South is charting its own course" and "Child we're picking in low cotton" (Holland, p.305). After listening to music and exploring the rhythm and tune the words might fit in to, I decided to use the melody of the Negro spiritual "Wade in the Water." My research supported this decision, basing it on the time period and the rural aesthetic of the character Mrs. McDonald, who would have had a deep understanding of the song (Holland, p.305).

Towards the end of the play, the call and response convention is used again but with the character of Tell-it Lady, named because in our production she announced the news that Frederick Douglas has died. Since Professor Burton wanted to incorporate Blues music for this section, I listened to pioneering Blues singer Bessie Smith and studied the A-A-B structure of traditional Blues music (Davis 2, p.86). The Blues singing style was different from the Negro spiritual in that it was lighter and allowed for more vocal flourish.

Both call and response pieces served as transitional moments in the production, linking one idea to a completely new one by the end of each "song."

Improvisation

The element of improvisation in African theatre was mostly employed during the rehearsal process. Because we were working with a script, there was less room for improvisation during the performances. However, shared energy from the audience and strong responses to a moment onstage would sometimes prompt small flourishes in action onstage. For example, while performing *Miss Ida B. Wells* in Americus, Georgia for the Kennedy Center American College Theater Regional Festival, there was a moment right

after the recollection of Ida B. Wells' wedding where the audience response was so high that it prompted me, as Wells Two, to give an eyebrow raise as I transitioned into a frozen moment. This gesture subsequently prompted more response from the audience. It felt as if we were telling the story together at that moment.

During the rehearsal process I used improvisation to help me explore character choices. Modern improvisation was developed in large part by Viola Spolin. Spolin was a theatre academic and acting coach credited as the creator of theatre games and renowned for her work with the original *The Second City Improvisational Comedy Troupe*. She defines improvisation in three ways: setting out to solve a problem with no perception as to how you will do it, not the scene [but] a way to the scene, and/or a predominate function of the intuitive (Spolin, 1999). In the beginning, I did not come to rehearsal with pre-planned choices. Instead, I allowed the space I was in and what I was receiving from my partner to influence me. Once I found something workable for the performance I journaled about it and developed it outside of rehearsal. I brought what I worked on to rehearsal for Professor Burton to critique and mold. Improvisation was one of the first stage techniques I was trained in, and it has always been fun to do. For me, it is always important to find the enjoyment in my work from the beginning. That enjoyment gives me purpose, fosters spirit (as defined earlier), and helps to build good working relationships, especially with people I have not worked with before. I have consistently achieved this through improvisation. Unlike acting from a script, improvisation allows the actor to create their own given circumstances or situations. Improvisation allows me to start from a place of freedom and prevents me from overthinking choices or getting locked into decisions too quickly before I have explored the extent of a role's possibilities.

Rhythm

In the context of African theatre, rhythm is often thought of as the beat of a drum or a performer's movements or words being in sync with music. When teaching the theme of rhythm in the Acting the Black Experience class, we played games that built ensemble and required the class to build a broad awareness of each other in order to stay together in timing and keep a rhythm intact. Therefore, I describe rhythm as an awareness of surrounding stimuli and the effort to parallel oneself to those stimuli.

Actress Mutiyat Ade-Salu (Wells One) and I worked with each other to develop a rhythm of speech and movement that expressed similarities between our characters and kept the play moving at an engaging pace, linking one moment to another. Our rhythm could be heard in our vocal pacing, our shared dialect, and the brisk timing with which we picked up line cues from each other. Our physical relationship to each other onstage and the tempo of our movements was also a result of our exploration of rhythm in rehearsal.

Great examples of rhythm in our production of *Miss Ida B. Wells* occurred during the moments of dialogue between Wells One and Wells Two. Mutiyat and I were responsible for listening to each other and responding to each other in a way that moved the scene forward. We were careful to maintain a timing that kept the energy of the play lifted. I further discuss our development of rhythm in "Chapter 4: The Rehearsal Process".

INFLUENCES OF DIDACTIC THEATRE

In the *Dictionary of the Theatre: Terms, Concepts, and Analysis* (1998), Patricia Pavis defines "didactic theatre" as

> any theatre that aims to instruct its audience by inviting them to reflect on a problem, understand a situation, or adopt a certain moral or political attitude. In the sense that theatre does not normally present gratuitous or meaningless action, there is an element of didacticism in all theatre work. What varies is the clarity and force of the message, the desire to change the audience and to subordinate art to an ethical or ideological design. Didactic theatre in a strict sense is moralizing (the morality plays of the Middle Ages), political (Brechtian), or pedagogical (parables and fables) (Pavis, 1998).

Though often thought of as having an overbearing quality, didactic theatre at its core simply contains themes of morality, politics, and education. *Miss Ida B. Wells* encompasses these elements, and certain acting choices and technical design choices aided in emphasizing these elements in our production. I will describe how the script and production express these didactic themes and how they affected my acting process and performance.

Morality in Miss Ida B. Wells

One of the main messages in this play about the life of Ida B. Wells, the pioneer of the anti-lynching movement, is that lynching is morally wrong. Drawing a clear line between right and wrong is what makes this play a morality play. The play itself takes the same definite stance as Wells, which is that unjust murders of Black men and women throughout the country are criminal and need to end. This specific ideology is as relevant today as it was during Wells' lifetime. The script repeatedly addresses the issue directly, expressing Ida B. Wells' resentful attitude towards lynching, lynch mobs, and the government that hesitated to rectify the crisis:

> **WELLS TWO:** "Now the mob usually comes at night, leaning on each other for support while they murder. Any colored person can be lynched. I ask you, where is the north? I don't believe that the north knows about these murders. Surely they wouldn't ignore our call for help" (Holland, p.307).

The play did not only express Ida B. Wells' moral stance, but those of her contemporaries as well. As Wells Two, I portrayed the characters of Susan B. Anthony, Jane Addams, and Mary Church Terrell, all of which had moral views that slightly contrasted Wells'. For example, while Wells was a strong advocate for racial equality, the script portrays how the character Susan B. Anthony compromises her own stance on discrimination:

> **WELLS TWO/ANTHONY:** "...when the [National Women's Suffrage Association] convention was held in Atlanta, Georgia I asked Mr. Douglas not to attend. I was afraid that the southern white suffragettes wouldn't attend if they had to sit on the same platform as Mr. Douglas, a former slave. Was I wrong to do so my dear?" (Holland, p.311).

As a performer, it was imperative for me to be able to understand the varying perspectives of these characters to construct a genuine performance and to understand that each character believes that what they believe morally is justified and true.

The Production is Political

The script is undoubtedly political, as it speaks about specific legislation during the Reconstruction Period and Jim Crow laws and customs that affected the lives of Blacks throughout the country. In addition, carefully chosen images used throughout the production, but particularly towards the end, incorporated subsequent political movements and figures in an effort to draw a parallel between the pressing issue of the treatment of Blacks in the past and in the present. The images were projected onto a screen shaped like the silhouette of Ida B. Wells' iconic photographic image. The projections included images of activists, revolutionaries, and victims of state violence such as Angela Davis, Fred Hampton, Trayvon Martin, Mike Brown, and Black Lives

Matter protesters. As an actor in the production, I was unable to see the images during the majority of the performance. However, I did look at the images on my own and did a substantial search for images for character work. At the conclusion of the performance, Wells One and Wells Two stand to face the projection screen while singing an arrangement of "Strange Fruit", a blues song about lynching that was written in the 1930's and made famous by Billie Holiday in 1939 (Davis 2, 1998).[2] During this time, I was deeply affected by the images of Emmett Till and Martin Luther King Jr.'s caskets that were projected onto the screen, and I allowed the emotion to be expressed in my singing.

By virtue of this play being political, it also forced me to think deeply about the reality being discussed. The issue of lynching affected the entire country. Though lynching was primarily practiced in the south, northern states were being implored to address the issue as well. The government largely ignored the lynching crisis. Thinking about the weight of the trauma being experienced by Blacks during Ida B. Wells' lifetime and drawing the parallel to current issues of my own time, instilled in me a purpose for the production: to bring awareness to the issue of racial inequality in America that continues to persist.

Pedagogy of the Production

What gave this production its pedagogical quality was the primary audience for which it was performed and our engagement with that audience. This production was part of the main-stage season of shows for the University of Louisville Theatre Arts

[2] "Strange Fruit" is a jazz standard originally written as a poem by Jewish lyricist Abel Meeropol (Blair, 2012).

Department, which produced its a season of women playwrights under a theme titled, "Five Plays Written by Women".[3] The production also supported the Theatre Arts Department's mission, which is in part to "create Art in Action: theatre that is engaged and inclusive, rigorous and enjoyable, thoughtful and transformative" (University of Louisville Theatre Arts). Because it was being performed in an educational setting, it was discussed and analyzed by audiences and classes for its educational value. One technical element that was of particular importance for aiding this educational goal was the decision to leave the house lights half up during the entire performance. This decision linked ideals of African-influenced theatre and Brechtian theatre in that it encouraged the same sharing of space between the audience and the performers that occurs in African storytelling. Likewise, leaving the house lights up was also a device used by German theatre director and epic theatre pioneer Bertolt Brecht, who sought to prevent the audience from disconnecting the moral and political messages of the performance from their own lives. This device contrasts the conventions of realistic theatre that creates an imaginary "fourth wall" by turning off house lights, drawing audiences' focus solely to the stage, and encouraging the suspension of disbelief. Raised house lights encourages the audience to exam themselves and others in the space in context with the play's subject matter (Distancing Effect, 2010).

Another significant pedagogical aspect of this production was the nightly talkbacks with the audience, which were facilitated by various academic professionals and included the cast and director. In addition, I was personally able to visit several

[3] *Miss Ida B. Wells* was the first show in the University of Louisville's season of Women playwrights. The season included *Our Country is Good* by Timberlake Wertenbaker, *Eurydice* by Sarah Ruhl, *Fabulation or, the Re-education of Undine* by Lynn Nottage, and *The Long Christmas Ride Home* by Paula Vogel.

classes in the Theatre Arts Department during and after the production run as part of conversations surrounding the show and its content. These conversations allowed the production to further reach its goal of educating the primarily college-aged audience. Several Theatre Arts Department classes make it a requirement to see mainstage productions. This means that there were many students who would have never come to see a production like this on their own desire. Furthermore, those who were unfamiliar with the history were exposed to this important and timely message about the treatment of Blacks in this country. These conversations, the ideas discussed, and the questions asked of me and other members of the production prompted me to expand my own thinking about the characters I portrayed. Through these interactions I became particularly interested in the social dynamics surrounding intersectionality of feminism and equality for Blacks. I discuss this in detail later in my exploration of the character Susan B. Anthony in Chapter Three. The issue of Ida B. Wells being a mother, wife and activist simultaneously and the fact that it was not looked upon favorably by her contemporaries was often discussed. Wells received letters of protest after her marriage to Black activist, Ferdinand Lee Barnett (Holland, p.313). This prompted me to think deeply about the criticism Wells faced on a regular basis.

THE LYNCHING DRAMA

History of the Lynching Drama

Part of my research on the Lynching Drama came from Koritha Mitchell's chapter, "Black Authored Lynching Drama's Challenge to Theater History" in Tommy

De Frantz and Anita Gonzalez's book *Black Performance Theory* (2014). The Lynching Drama first came into existence in the early 1900s. The first recognized play of this genre was Angelina Weld Grimke's *Rachel,* which was commissioned by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) for its publication *The Crisis.* The newly formed NAACP of which Ida B. Wells was a founding member, hoped to counter the crippling social consequences of D.W. Griffith's new and wildly popular film *Birth of a Nation* (1916). Therefore, the Lynching Drama was developed as a form of political activism to resist anti-Black attitudes and racial violence. In addition, this creative outlet was also a means to record the sentiments of Black people of the time. Lynching Dramas provided the preservation of ideas and ideals to prove that "creative work produced during adversity is not solely a response to outside forces; it is an attempt to safeguard community perspectives" (Mitchell, p.88).

Elements and Examples

Lynching Dramas did not typically depict the physical act of lynching, which was an intentional decision in opposition to the fact that white mobs that murdered Blacks often made lynching incidents theatrical events. Lynching Dramas rather focused on the affect that these murders had on the households of the slain. The emotional and psychological aftermath of lynching in the Black community was never before portrayed in popular entertainment, which purported only disenfranchising images of Black men and women as, "bestial rapist" and lynching victims. Lynching Dramas humanized Blacks and addressed the tumultuous reality of the social and political climate from their perspectives (Mitchell, 2014).

What makes *Miss Ida B. Wells* a Lynching Drama?

Miss Ida B. Wells by Endesha Ida Mae Holland was written in 1983, far after the height of the lynching epidemic. The play is only published in an anthology of plays about lynching titled *Strange Fruit: Plays on Lynching by American Women* (1998), edited by Kathy Perkins and Judith Stephens. The script itself is not a Lynching Drama in the traditional sense, as its action does not revolve around a family. In fact, Holland defines the play as a "dramatic biography" (Holland, p.301). The play does, however, examine the effects of a single lynching on the life of Ida B. Wells, who was called to action after her friends, grocery store owners Tomas Moss, Calvin McDowell, and Henry Stewart in Memphis, were lynched because they posed an economic threat to a competing white-owned store. Wells was the godmother of the slain Thomas Moss' children. The play speaks to how the lynching affected Wells, serving as the inciting incident that inspired her to do battle against lynching. The play also expands its scope to address how lynching affected the country at large by discussing political and social happenings of the time from Ida's perspective.

One large deviance that this production took from the traditional lynching drama is its use of lynching images within the projections. It was, however, a necessary addition in that the University of Louisville's contemporary, mostly student audience is so far removed from the historical phenomenon of lynching as a common occurrence. Therefore, images were the most effective way to relay the weight of the reality of these murders during this period and throughout history. As a contemporary actor, I too had to realize that I am removed from the understanding of what it means to be faced with the fear of lynching (in the historical sense, at least). During the rehearsal process, I studied

lynching photographs collected in a book call *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America* (2000) by James Allan. I detail my experience with this in Chapter 4, which focuses on the rehearsal process.

In conclusion, *Miss Ida B. Wells* was a challenging piece to work on and to write about because of the scope of influences on the script and the production. From the style of the script to the technical and interactive components that we added to our production, my journey with *Miss Ida B. Wells* became a composite of varying factors that shaped my acting and development process for this production.

CHAPTER 2

CHARACTER ANALYSIS: WELLS TWO IN *MISS IDA B. WELLS*

IDA B. WELLS: THE WOMAN AND PIONEER

While being credited as the pioneer of the anti-lynching movement beginning in the 1890s, Ida B. Wells was a journalist and pioneer of the Black newspaper press. In addition, Wells is known for her contributions to women's rights and for being a founding member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) as well as other prominent social justice organizations.

Wells was born in Holly Springs, Mississippi on July 16, 1862, just three years prior to the end of the Civil War and the Emancipation Proclamation that abolished slavery in North America. Wells grew up in the Reconstruction Era south and was undoubtedly influenced by Blacks' involvement in politics (some even holding office) and her parents' interests in education and equality. Her parents were former slaves but became founding members of Shaw University (now Rust College) in Holly Springs (Duster, p.xv).

When Ida B. Wells was 16 years old, both of her parents died of the Yellow Fever epidemic (Duster, p.xv). Determined to not let her family be separated, she took on the responsibility of caring for her seven brothers and sisters of which she was the oldest. To support them she took a job teaching. Teaching eventually led her to Memphis where she cultivated her love for journalism.

At a time when women had few rights or social/political agency, Ida B. Wells became part owner of a local Black newspaper in Memphis called *The Free Speech*, which would serve as her initial platform for exposing the truth about lynching incidents in the south. From there, Wells went on to travel abroad and moved to the north where she continued to speak out against lynching and inequality for Blacks and women. She wrote for the *New York Age* newspaper, spoke at the World's Fair in Chicago, and continued her activism through marriage and motherhood (a choice for which she was often criticized). She penned her own autobiography (an invaluable resource for my creation process) and innumerous pamphlets and articles supporting her causes.

Ida B. Wells died in March 25, 1931, at the age of 69, in Chicago, Illinois. Her contributions are often lost in an American history focused primarily on the accomplishments of men and whiteness. Her name is often only briefly mentioned during Black History Month. While promoting the University of Louisville's fall production of *Miss Ida B. Wells* by Endesha Mae Holland, I was not surprised to find that many people had heard her name but were unfamiliar with what she had done. I was not surprised, because I too was unaware of her significance. Nonetheless, having the opportunity to discover who Ida B. Wells was and to develop a character portrayal of her was a wonderful challenge. I suspect that the author of the play, Endesha Mae Holland, may have faced a similar dilemma: How does one choose which moments to explore in the life of a woman with such a breadth of experiences? How does one express all of who she was as a human being?

WHO IS WELLS TWO?

In the two-person play, *Miss Ida B. Wells*, I play Wells Two. Wells Two is the younger Ida and operates as a memory for Wells One who primarily represents an older, reminiscent Ida B. Wells. Wells Two also portrays several other characters to counter Wells One as she steps in and out of her own past. Holland explores Ida B. Wells' life by highlighting moments of significance and exploring those moments through seamless transitions between in-the-moment perspectives (explored in dialogue) and more reflective perspectives (monologues about the past).

In the first moments of the play, Wells Two is playing a little girl on the street elated to meet the older Wells One. After a brief transition and quick change (the only quick change in the production despite the multiple character changes), Wells Two becomes a young Ida B. Wells in England and Wells One becomes Lady Henry Somerset, the Countess of Aberdeen. This portion is an example of the author's storytelling in the moment. Immediately after this interaction, Wells Two freezes and then disappears as Wells One goes into a lengthy monologue about her own childhood and growing up in the south. This is a specific example of the author's use of reflective storytelling.

At no point does Wells Two speak in the reflective voice. Wells Two is always in the action of a situation or portraying another character that interacts directly with Wells One. Also, at no point does Wells Two speak to Wells One unless she is playing a character that is not Ida B. Wells. Wells Two's lines outside of these interactions are all addressed directly to the audience. In addition, Wells Two has the challenge of addressing "imaginary" figures", which are real persons that are not the audience and are

not portrayed by another actor but have definite presence for the few moments of the interactions. Wells Two has several one-sided conversations with Mr. Slayton from the Speakers Bureau, with the only colored lawyer in Memphis, and with William Lloyd Garrison Jr., all of which serve the progression of the play.

I developed my portrayal of the character of Wells Two through a process I will describe in three phases: 1.) I compiled independent dramaturgical research for subconscious context; 2.) I applied script analysis for the personality choices I would attribute to the character; 3.) I used physical exploration that included improvisation. Because this play was about a historical figure, the research component was crucial and infiltrated each part of the development process.

This research that lead to specific personality and physical character choices for the portrayal of Wells Two was both historical and subjective. Direct historical accounts were taken from Ida B. Wells' autobiography, *Crusade for Justice: The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells* (Duster, 1970*),* in addition to excerpts from various scholarly writings about Wells. The sociopolitical climate of America during her career was crucial for building the foundation of the complex and multi-faceted character I would portray. I interpreted her interactions with others in the script and sometimes her personal opinions of others and situations in *Crusade for Justice* so that I could piece together what Ida B. Wells' personality might have been like. I focused on how she responded to varying social stimuli. The physical creation of Wells Two — how her body would move and the way she would speak — were the most subjective choices I was able to make. However, those choices were also grounded in the influences of the research and script analysis.

RESEARCH FOR THE SUBCONSCIOUS

Much of the research conducted focused on specific dates and occurrences in the script. To develop a "world" for my character, it was important to also understand what was happening politically and socially during Ida B. Wells' life. This research, though not explicitly used in the onstage performance, served as subconscious context for which to ground the mindset of Wells Two.

Wells grew up during the Reconstruction Era, a time period after the Civil War in which the government attempted to assist former slaves in establishing themselves through various Freedmen's Bureaus. This was a short-lived social policy, however, as the government's focus on Black lives and equality waned. Consequently, Jim Crow laws were established in the south and led to violent and institutional policies for the segregation of Blacks and whites (Giddings, 1996).

Black scholar and author Paula J. Giddings notes that many Blacks around the end of the 19th century were under the assumption that they were under the protection of the United States law during the Reconstruction Era. However, lynching executed by white mobs became a common method of terrorizing Black communities in order to prevent them from progressing economically, socially, and politically. The lynching epidemic grew and more Black men were being unjustly killed. Blacks began to realize that the terrorism they were experiencing was not isolated to a few incidents involving disgruntled southern whites but was becoming a systemic practice supported (or rather ignored) by the country at large. This revelation arose for Ida B. Wells when on March 9, 1892, her close friend and Memphis business owner Thomas Moss was lynched with two of his business partners (Giddings, p.17). A large mob of white Memphis residents

lynched the trio over competition with a white-owned grocery store that had previously held a monopoly in the Black community. Moss held an upstanding reputation and it was clear that Blacks were being targeted regardless of class, education, or if they were actually committing crimes. Wells' devastation over this incident spurred her passionate career and lifelong fight for equality for Blacks and women (Giddings, 1996).

After that personal ordeal, Wells was inspired to travel to investigate many lynching incidents in the south. This is addressed in the script, as Wells became a pioneer of investigative journalism with this work. During her trips she would often learn that the lynching victims were often unjustly murdered. She kept records of her findings and published them in newspaper articles. Her zealous desire to report the truth put her own life at risk. In May of 1892 Wells' printing press in Memphis was burned to the ground after a white mob looked for her but could not find her (Duster, p.186). This is just one account of the life-or-death stakes that Ida B. Wells encountered and how she demonstrated unwavering determination for justice despite the danger.

Another specific situation explored in the script was when Wells was thrown out of the first-class car of a train because she was Black. Wells sued the railroad company for discrimination and won, becoming one of the first cases of its kind with this outcome. However, the decision was later appealed by the CO&S Railroad Company and reversed by the Supreme Court. My research led me to find the hand-written transcript of Ida B. Wells' account of the incident (Wells, DPLA, 1885). Reading the account of what happened in her own words helped me to visualize and contextualize her actions and emotions in those moments.

THE PERSONALITY OF WELLS TWO

To stay grounded as an actor building a character, I decided to let the choices I made about Wells Two be supported more by the script and less by the history books. This was easy for this character as most of the script is about her, despite the lesser information the script provides on some other characters. The bulk of my portrayal of Wells Two came directly from questions I asked and inferences I made about the script. One word that I felt summed up Wells Two's personality is "battle" because she is constantly battling for her causes.

One of the more significant discoveries that I gleaned from the script was Wells' personality and her essence of entitlement. In research and discussions with Professor Burton and my cast mate, I gathered that it was some combination of her rearing, her parents' interests in education and equality, and an innate sense of obligation to justice that impassioned her bold style of activism. Wells and her parents were born into slavery and freed by the Emancipation Proclamation shortly after Ida's birth. Angela Y. Davis' research on Black family life during this era suggests what Ida's home life might have been like. Davis purports that equal treatment of Black men and women by slave masters (working and being punished the same), created equality in male-female relationships. However, Black women were also subject to forms of sexual harassment that men were not, thus creating a greater resilience in the collective spirit of Black women. The development of female agency in the Black family also emerged as Black men were not recognized as head-of-households during slavery. If Wells was indeed exposed to a dominant female presence in the home it could account for the agency she assumed and entitlement to freedom that is often used to describe her character (Davis 1, p.1). Ida B.

Wells took up the baton of Black female leadership in the home when at age 16 both of her parents died of the Yellow Fever epidemic and she had to care for her siblings.

While I find merit in Davis' research, the script tells me that Ida B. Wells' father was also a big part of her life. In the script, she speaks fondly of him and his determination in helping with the success of the local Freedman's Bureau, one of several organizations in the south during the Reconstruction Era that served the purpose of helping newly freed slaves acclimate to society. The lines in the script describing her father lead me to infer that she gathered her sense of pride from him:

> **WELLS TWO:** "My daddy, Jim Wells, was the best carpenter in the county, if not the whole South. Daddy always talked about how he built a lot of the slave owners' houses. And a lot of slave cabins too. 'The Civil War was over and we was free. I started building homes. I even now built dis house. We done got de freedom; now us gots to keep hit'. Daddy took part in just about everything the Freedman's Bureau did in Holly Springs" (Holland, p.303).

Incidentally, I found that many of the clues to Wells Two's personality were gleaned from the lines of Wells One. They are, in fact, representations of the same person and so the transfer of qualities can be validated.

As the younger of the two Ida characters in the play, Wells Two has more moments of what can be described as a feisty energy. Interactions with the "imaginary" characters, in particular, are feisty in that Wells Two seems to be speaking her truth, without reserve, to the various persons in which she finds herself in conflict. What helped to vary the energy of each of these interactions (to prevent the delivery of lines from becoming monotonous) was visualizing a distinct setting for each interaction. I allowed Wells Two to be at her highest energies during her interactions with the train conductor and her lawyer. The train confrontation comes just after the extremely physical

altercation that ended with her being dragged out of a train car and therefore she is emotionally charged through her breath and heart rate. After only a few seconds of transition, Wells Two has a candid conversation with her lawyer in what I visualized as a private meeting with a Black man whom I surmise she saw as her equal and not a threat. The fact that she believes he is being disloyal to her case only fuels her fire more.

Despite her obvious passion, I did not characterize Wells Two as a rambunctious screamer. Understanding her as a southern lady, I interpret that she allowed herself to be impassioned without raising her voice for the most part. However, the intensity with which she speaks more than conveys her displeasure. What led me to this choice in the text is that even when she is communicating her grievances, she uses titles like "Sir" and "Mister" which convey to me that she is making an effort to maintain a civilized tone despite her emotion. This is true in the conversation with the lawyer and moments later in her address to the school board with which she is upset because they will not repair the school building.

There is a lighter side to Wells Two as well. The text shows a glimmer of youthful optimism during the moments in which Wells Two decides to become part owner of *The Free Speech Newspaper* in Memphis, Tennessee. Delighted with the prospects, it is one of the few times I allowed Wells Two to smile a large genuine smile. Her warmer side also surfaces during the section about her wedding. She is elated but more mature and grounded than the Wells Two who purchased the newspaper. It is a reserved happiness.

I also learned by observing and listening to Wells One during the interactions in which I played her opposing character. Below is an excerpt from the section in which

Wells One interacts with Jane Addams, pioneering social worker and founder of Hull House in Chicago, Illinois:

> **WELLS ONE:** Now Miss Addams, you know that I think you're the greatest woman in the United States.
>
> **WELLS TWO (Addams):** Yes my dear, I know you hold me in the highest of esteem.
>
> **WELLS ONE:** From your remarks, it seems to me that you've accepted the South's threadbare lies that Negro men are being lynched for raping White women…
>
> **WELLS TWO (Addams):** My dear…
>
> **WELLS ONE**: Rape is a charge that allows White mobs to kill Negro men. The figures here in the *Chicago Tribune* on lynchings shows that 504 Negroes have been lynched between 1896 and 1900.
>
> **WELLS TWO (Addams):** Mrs. Wells Barnett, rape is a heinous crime.
>
> **WELLS ONE:** It is to be sure, Miss Addams. Can't you see that the South is using the excuse of rape to influence northerners—like you—to understand, even if you don't condone their actions? (Holland, p.313).

The choice of words was always direct and assertive, aside from any vocal tone added to them. The script portrayed Ida as a no-nonsense, frank woman. I inferred impatience in her and a low tolerance for views that did not align with hers. This observation was not a negative judgment, and if anything, it showed that Ida B. Wells had a strong understanding of the stakes of the battle she was fighting. There was no time to beat around the bush because people were being killed. I gained a sense of confidence from these thoughts on the script, and I wanted to strongly present this throughout my portrayal of Wells Two.

THE PHYSICAL BODY OF WELLS TWO

For building the physical qualities of Wells Two, I had to begin in a place of neutrality. During the time in which Ida B. Wells lived (1862-1931), women had a certain physical decorum undoubtedly influenced by the clothing fashion of the time, which included corsets, long skirts, hats, and gloves. This style has not translated into modern women's bodies. I did not study this in-depth in relation to the time period of the play, because the play spans Wells' entire life. Instead, I began by adding physical traits based on her personality as dictated by the script and source materials. In the process of inhibiting the habits of my own modern-influenced body to find physical neutrality, I had to be mindful of avoiding sinking my weight into one hip or the other, specific neck movements, and more animated hand gestures that I often use to emphasize important ideas as I speak.

As I explored what Wells Two's body could be, I used physical improvisation to find what felt natural. Instead of pre-planning movements, I allowed myself to be in the space and respond to the text on the page and to the stimuli of my acting partner. Wells One and Wells Two do not interact with each other for most of the script, but I could feel her energy on stage. I understood what she was giving to each moment by listening to her, and I responded to the energy with my own energy, whether that was to match it or counter it. After sufficient physical exploration, I eventually solidified gestures and physical transitions. For example, while improvising, I found a writing gesture that felt natural for the moment. We kept that gesture, modified it some, and solidified it into more than one moment in the script.

Ultimately, I found that moderate internalization of Ida B. Wells' experiences led to strong physical impulses that stemmed from my body's center. I chose specific open palmed hand gestures, shared with Wells One, and a symmetric placement of my hands on my hips throughout the portrayal. I found that these open gestures never pulled me from the grounded center I began with during the neutral physical state and my gestures maintained a natural quality. The balance seemed to be symbolic of my perceived nature of Wells Two in the script and the real Ida B. Wells who was firm in her beliefs and characterized as a "difficult personality," (as in unwilling to compromise) according to an National Public Radio interview with historian and Wells scholar Paula Giddings (Martin, 2008). I maintained an upright spine, exuding confidence, and took sure and solid steps as I moved about the stage as Wells Two. The word "confidence" was important to me throughout my physical performance as Wells Two because I know she could not have accomplished all that she did without confidence.

Wells Two was the easiest character that I developed for the production because this character is the most like myself. Despite the differences in time periods, I innately understood her southern qualities and what I perceived as a firm physical stance from researching her photographs and her formidable language. This related to my own cultural background and experiences. I am from the south and have extensive leadership experience as a drum major for my high school marching band. The drum major is often characterized as militaristic, a leadership position that requires a higher level of sternness. Vocally, I spoke in my own voice, unaffected, but lightened my natural dialect just a bit for performance clarity.

Per the style of the play, I found myself in multiple physical "freezes" as Wells Two and other characters throughout the production. The transitions into and out of freezes varied from quick stops to slow morphing movements into a new character, and sometimes they simply felt like small pauses. I knew that it would be important to maintain the sense of the character throughout these moments because I wanted the freezes and transitions to be smooth and seamless. Whether frozen or moving in slow motion I never "dropped" character for the sake of getting from one character's body to another. Even when maintaining the same character, I maintained strong awareness of my facial muscles and not just my body at large. Aside from the urge to blink (which I hope to overcome one day), I remained motionless while still renewing my thoughts and energy to my face and body in order to keep my balance and to prevent looking rigid. In those moments, I served as a living statue.

DYNAMIC CHARACTER; DIDACTIC CONTEXT

Though it eventually became apparent to me that personal identification with the subject would not be my immediate goal for this production, per the Didactic/Epic Theatre style that naturally developed, a certain level of research internalization was responsible for what became my construction of Wells Two. Initially, I was unsure of what emotional depths I would need to explore for this production. The script moves quickly from one situation to the next, rarely leaving time to sink into one emotion before it starts the shift to the next section. For this reason, I began to understand that my awareness of the situation from section to section was slightly more important than my awareness of my emotions.

A great example of this in the script is in the moment when Wells Two witnesses the lynching of her friends Thomas Moss, Calvin McDowell, and Henry Stewart. Research shows that she was not in Memphis when this incident occurred but I deduce that the playwright wrote it this way to create dramatic tension. Just prior to this moment, Wells Two is praying and is peaceful, as Wells One says that her prayers were answered. Immediately after a sigh of relief, the sound of fire crackling can be heard and orange lights begin to flicker representing flames. The script says that Wells Two "screams in horror" and then there is a short section of lines where Wells Two pleads for help from "imaginary" surrounding people. There are no preceding events to warrant feeling the depth of emotion seemingly required for such a moment. One of the defining elements of Brechtian, or didactic/epic theatre, is that the audience has a strong understanding that the performance is a show, as opposed to realism, which strives to create suspension of disbelief. When asking questions about the effectiveness of my performance in this moment I was told by both Joel Williams, chair of KCACTF Region 4, and Professor Carter that "it's not about what you feel, it's about what the audience feels." I have slowly come to understand that this means I cannot be so concerned with what I am feeling as an actor but rather what the audience is experiencing. If I tried to reach an emotional depth that quickly each night it would most likely be disingenuous.

Through work with vocal coach Professor Rachel Carter, we worked on playing the action. An action is "something you do" in a scene in response to the given circumstances of the moment (Brestoff, p.122). In the moment of the scream, Wells Two wants to stop what is happening in the moment of her circumstances, which is a lynching. As I vocalize, I think about the action "to stop" and my voice and body naturally fall into

the place I need them to be to play this section of the script. The work of acting teacher Stella Adler describes this technique: "If the actor playing this scene begins with clear circumstances and is committed to them, and is open to the shifts in those circumstances, the whole action of the scene will be believable and emotions will be truthful" (Brestoff, p.122). Having the one action to think about keeps me from overthinking and allows me to just be in the moment with my one goal: "to stop." This method parallels nicely to my acting improvisation work in which I listen and respond to other actors. In acting however, this listening and responding occurs within the contexts of a script, crafting truthful reactions to imaginary circumstances.

To address the thought that the audience's feelings are more important, I would like to return to the process of the research. Because each section is so short, it would be difficult to incorporate a large amount of research into each section. For the most part, I found that knowing just a little about the other person in the scene or about the situation was enough to play the section effectively. As I researched, I learned that it was not good to overload my thoughts with facts. It kept me from being present in each moment. I realized that just because I was not thinking about all that I had learned about each moment of the performance did not mean that the audience did not understand what was happening. I had to balance the amount of research I used and let the rest be a part of my subconscious.

Through finding ways to keep the actions simple and focusing on the immediate moments, I could express the emotional depth of Wells Two despite the fast pace and seemingly shallow structure that characterizes didactic theatre. My research, script analysis, and physical exploration worked together to allow me to express a full and

three-dimensional portrayal even though the structure of the play lacks the dramatic arc that audiences accustomed to viewing realism are used to seeing.

CHAPTER 3

CREATING HISTORICAL CHARACTERS USING A CRITICAL EYE

WHO ARE ANTHONY, ADDAMS, AND TERRELL?

Aside from Ida. B. Wells, Wells Two's other significant character transformations in *Miss Ida B. Wells* included the historical figures Susan B. Anthony, Jane Addams, and Mary Church Terrell. Each of these characters has a significant interaction with Wells One in the script in which their ideals are in direct opposition. Between women's suffragist Susan B. Anthony and Wells One, issues of the Women's Rights Movement come into question. Social work pioneer Jane Addams expresses personal views about the lynching epidemic and race that Wells One swiftly debunks. Wells One and Black civil rights activist, Mary Church Terrell, have a long history together, one in which Wells One openly chides Terrell for using her wealth to influence political events in her favor. In this chapter, I will explain how my research and script analysis aided in the creation of these three characters' internal lives. I will also use examples from each interaction to show how each character highlights critical thoughts about gender, race, and class in relation to Ida B. Wells.

RESEARCH METHODS

I knew that most of the choices that I made about the interpretation of these women had to be grounded in historical research. Within the play, each of these historically based characters has smaller scenes in which they interact with Wells One when she is playing herself at a younger age. I noticed that during this process I was unable to focus on just one woman at a time. I built them simultaneously to assure their differentiations. I needed to see them as parts of a larger whole to make it work for myself.

For these supporting character portrayals internet searches were my primary sources of material as depth of research was of less priority than breadth during the early part of the process. As development continued, I found that it was not beneficial to gather too much information about these historically based characters. I saw early in the process that an overabundance of facts would threaten the clarity of my character portrayals. Finding a balance of how much information to use was imperative. My search for information on these three women consisted of finding images of them and basic biographical information.

The photographic materials served two purposes: I found clues for their personalities from their photographs and I incorporated those clues into my portrayals of them. For example, I interpreted Susan B. Anthony's posture in several photographs as square and slightly brooding. From this observation I pondered what her demeanor might be like. The second purpose of the photographs was to aid in the development of each character's physicality. The process of using the photographs to influence my physical portrayal of them will be chronicled in detail in Chapter 5, Voice and Movement.

With the basic biographical information, I created character sketches that provided me with a "container" or boundaries in which to explore the possibilities of each character's personality. For each character, I listed key facts such as where they were born or grew up, when they were born, what they were known for, and any other special points of interest that I could find. These facts were used to create the foundation of each portrayal. Knowing where they were from lead me towards specific dialects for each character. Cross-referencing their birth dates with the year of their appearance in the script allowed me to pick specific ages. Knowing what they were renown for helped me to know what each character's inner passions were, what they cared about, and how they might have reached their goals. One special point of interest that I noted was the incident in which Susan B. Anthony was arrested for voting in a presidential election. This event indicated to me that Susan B. Anthony most likely had character traits of stubbornness and determination.

I understood that knowing information about the people Ida B. Wells interacted with would also inform my character development of Wells Two. Discoveries of Wells' opinions about the various people and their attitudes towards her (both in research and in the script) began to create the emotional component that, in my opinion, the script needed in order to be engaging for both performer and audience.

I wrote earlier about the necessity of balancing the amount of research used in character development (too much versus too little). To illustrate this need for balance I will use my experience developing the character of Jane Addams as an example. Addams was a figure for which I almost gathered too much information. During this process, I learned that research is certainly a valuable component but that too much of it clouded

my creation and caused me to be more cerebral than I would typically prefer to be while in development. It became apparent to me that if I tried to include the all of the information I had found, that I may confuse myself and run the risk of portraying a character that is unclear. Some of the various pieces of information that I gathered on Addams was that she was sickly, she suffered from depression despite her accomplishments, and according to production dramaturg Terry Tocantins (who became part of the collaborative ensemble later in the process), it was speculated that she may have been a lesbian (Schoenberg, 2007). Because the scenes where I portrayed these historical figures are relatively short (three minutes or so), I felt that it was near impossible and largely unnecessary to try to incorporate the expression of all of these characteristics into one small moment. I decided instead that I would attempt to focus on incorporating only a few elements of research to compose a more concise portrayal. I also realized that this "information trap" is an easy one to fall into when the source material for the lives of these extraordinary people is so vast.

INSIDE THE CHARACTER: A CRITICAL EYE

Though Anthony, Addams, and Terrell appear very briefly in the script, they all have distinct significance in the exploration of the life of Ida B. Wells. During the production run we offered nightly talkback sessions with the audiences. While participating in these discussions, I realized that Ida's interactions with Anthony, Addams, and Terrell could be analyzed through critical theories of gender, race, and class. These ideas could also offer insight into Ida B. Wells' specific social and political significance throughout her career. Wells One's section with Susan B. Anthony examines

both women's relationship to gender, feminism, and the Women's Rights Movement. The interaction with Jane Addams can be used to analyze the subtle racism that Wells One unabashedly criticizes in the script. The section with Mary Church Terrell delves into issues surrounding the influence of wealth and looks at the difficulties that Wells encountered in dealing with people of her own race.

Further examination of each of these critical aspects enabled me to learn more about Ida B. Wells, the other historically based characters, and the social climate of the period in which they lived. I was also able to draw parallels to these ideas in the current social climate and that enabled me to personalize them and portray what I hope was a clear tone of expression in performance.

Susan B. Anthony and Gender
b. February 15, 1820 (Addams, MA) —d. March 13, 1906

Applied Research: A brief biography of Susan B. Anthony revealed that she was known for her activism in several causes (e.g., labor reform, abolition, education reformation, temperance). She is perhaps most noted for her fight for women's suffrage. She was arrested for voting in the presidential election of Ulysses S. Grant in 1872 and convinced the University of Rochester in New York to admit women in 1900. Many Americans know her face from the Susan B. Anthony dollar coin. Anthony was born in Massachusetts to a Quaker family and she exhibited strong moral values. She has been characterized as both aggressive and compassionate (SBAH, 2013).

Ida B. Wells spent time in Susan B. Anthony's home during a visit to Rochester for a speaking engagement. Ida speaks candidly of her experience with Anthony in Chapter 27 of *Crusade for Justice*:

> These were precious days in which I sat at the feet of this pioneer and veteran in the work of women's suffrage. She had endeavored to make me see that for the sake of expediency one had often to stoop to conquer on his color question…I felt that although she may have made gains for suffrage, she had also confirmed white women in their attitude of segregation. I suppose Miss Anthony had pity on my youth and inexperience, for she never in any way showed resentment of my attitude. She gave me rather the impression of a woman who was eager to hear all sides of any question, and that I am sure is one of the reasons for her splendid success in the organization which did so much to give the women in this country an equal share in all the privileges of citizenship (Duster, p.229-330).

Though Ida B. Wells and Susan B. Anthony did not agree on everything, they had great respect and admiration for one another.

Script Analysis: Based on the dates given, Anthony was in her seventies by the time she and Wells met for the conversation that is dramatized in the script. The section highlights the two women's different opinions about family and its impediment to effective leadership. In the script, Anthony's single-minded nature is evident as the character states that she has "dedicated her life to women getting the ballot" (Holland, p.311). This dedication was so strong that she was willing to sacrifice having a family of her own. She even criticizes Wells One for having a husband and children, inferring that Wells could not be a good leader with "other obligations" (Holland, p.312). Susan B. Anthony, often associated with feminism, ironically still subscribed to the patriarchal idea that women with children should only be at home taking care of their family. She rejected the notion that women could be leaders and maintain a personal life.

Anthony also faltered on her abolitionist inclinations by excluding Frederick Douglass, her sole male supporter white or Black, from the Women's Equal Suffrage Association convention held in Atlanta, Georgia. She feared that his presence would derail her cause because of the opinions of southern racist supporters of the women's rights movement.

Interpretation and Critical Thought: Anthony certainly exuded traits of determination and strong will, much like Ida. B Wells. I surmise that this likeness in spirit contributed to the clash illustrated in the script. Though the two women were most likely congenial, according to Ida B. Wells' account, the choice for the production was to emphasize the conflict for dramatic effect.

Ida B. Wells was known as an activist for both women's rights and equality for Blacks. In direct opposition to Susan B. Anthony's single-minded focus on women's equality, Wells was not willing to compromise one cause for the other. The difference between the two women is that Ida B. Wells understood the intersectionality of the two causes in a way that Anthony did not. This understanding was probably influenced by Wells' mentor, Douglass, who spoke to the intersectionality of women's rights and abolition: "When the true history of the antislavery cause shall be written, women will occupy a large space in its pages, for the cause of the slave has been peculiarly woman's cause" (Douglass, 1881).

Jane Addams and Race
b. September 6, 1860 (Chicago, IL)—d. May 21, 1931

Applied Research: Jane Addams is known as "a pioneer social worker in America, a feminist, and an internationalist" (Lex Prix Nobel, 1931). She was born in Cedarville, Illinois to a family of nine children. Her father was a Civil War veteran and political leader associated with Abraham Lincoln. Addams received her Bachelor's degree from Rockford College for Women, but her early life was plagued by a spinal defect and illness. The illness prevented her from furthering her education but she did

spend an extensive amount of time travelling in Europe. Inspired by a settlement house she visited in Europe, Addams and her business partner Ellen G. Starr founded Hull House in Chicago. Hull House was a "center for a higher civic and social life" that served the underprivileged neighborhood in which it was built. The success of the philanthropic program propelled Addams into social and political prominence as she made a career of serving on education boards, women's rights organizations, and anti-war campaigns. In 1910 she received the first honorary degree ever awarded to a woman by Yale University and was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize shortly before her death (Lex Prix Nobel, 1931).

Script Analysis: Despite the glowing accomplishments of her career, the script portrays Addams as a member of the political elite who is less in touch with reality. Her language is very exacting and self-promoting. The interaction between Wells One and Jane Addams happens at an anti-lynching convention. My impression of Addams in this section is that she is not only trying to impress Wells One, but anyone else who might be listening. She is there in support of the cause, but it quickly becomes obvious that she is blind to the truth of the lynching epidemic. The telling line reads:

> **WELLS TWO (as Jane Adams):** "We will send this message to our fellow citizens of the south who are once more trying to suppress vice by violence. The bestial in man which leaves him to pillage and rape— can never be controlled by public cruelty and dramatic punishment— which too often cover fury and revenge" (Holland, p.313).

Wells One wastes no time in enlightening Jane Addams about the truth of the situation, supporting her argument with facts from a newspaper article. She calmly informs Addams that white mobs are falsely accusing Black men of rape in order to justify the lynching incidents. Despite the factual evidence, Addams refuses to budge on her opinion. From Addams' statement it is clear that she believes that the rapes are

actually happening, but that there is a less violent way to address the problem. After a short back and forth in a very public setting, Addams' abrupt ending of the conversation infers that she is embarrassed, offended, or both.

Interpretation and Critical Thought: Addams, though well meaning, is an example of white privilege and obliviousness to the racial problems plaguing America. She is aloof to the truth. Based upon my research and script analysis I inferred that because Addams was regularly exposed to persons of meager backgrounds (but most likely still white) she felt that she in some way understood the plight of Black people affected by injustice. She is much like contemporary white people who do not believe they are racist simply because they have a Black friend. Addams exhibited an indirect tolerance of the actions of the white mobs because the southern white men placed the focus of the issue on the rape, a concern that played heavily into her feminist sensibilities. References to her own racism exist subtly in her own language as she refers to "the bestial in man which leaves him to pillage and rape" (Holland, p.313). The term "beast" was often used to refer to Black men, especially during this time where they were perpetuating a savage-like stereotype by directly contrasting it to the perceived pure and virginal quality of white women. The racism compounds as Addams is more inclined to believe what she has heard from other whites than from a Black woman with published facts. She stubbornly refuses to even consider an alternative to her own opinion. In Addams' perspective, the lynching epidemic is a political problem, not a racial one. To quote American activist and author Tim Wise: "If you want to know if racism is a problem in your country, you might not want to ask White people" (Rayman, 2008).

Mary Church Terrell and Class
b. September 23, 1863, (Memphis, TN)—d. July 24, 1954,

Applied Research: Mary Church Terrell was a Black woman born in Memphis, Tennessee. Her parents were former slaves turned business owners. Terrell was known for her work as an advocate for civil right and suffrage. She attended Oberlin College, where in 1884, she became one of the first Black women to earn a college degree. In 1891 she married Robert Heberton Terrell who became Washington D.C.'s first Black municipal judge. She was the first president of the National Association of Colored Women (NACW) and a charter member of the NAACP (A&E, 2015).

Mary Church Terrell and Ida B. Wells knew each other from a young age but were not close. Both women were friends of Thomas Moss (previously mentioned) and his murder spurred both women's dedication to the anti-lynching movement. Their careers paralleled each other and occasionally intersected, finding them working in the same organizations (NACW). Like Wells, Terrell experienced the marginalization of Black women in the Women's Rights Movement, but continued to fight for both causes. The largest difference between Wells and Terrell is that Terrell's father was a wealthy man and she was afforded a higher standard of living than Wells, who single-handedly fought to keep her family intact at age 16. This single factor accounts for many of their differences in personality and their methods of activism (Giddings, 1996).

Script Analysis: Mary Church Terrell's lines in the script have an undoubtedly smug intent. The first thing she says is, "Ida, I hope you're not running for the presidency…because I'm going to run again and I don't want a fight on the floor between us" (Holland, p.315). It is important to keep in mind, however, that the historical

characters are written from Ida B. Wells' point of view and she may be making opinionated suggestions about their personalities. Regardless, an air of superiority reads clearly through Terrell's lines. The interaction written in the script is one you would most likely not read about in a basic biography of Terrell, as the script highlights her colluding to win the presidency of an organization (presumably NACW) despite the organization's restriction on the number of terms a president can serve. Terrell suggests that she is planning to use her influence (with wealth or intelligence) to persuade the organization to change the rules for her. Wells, keen to correct injustice of any kind, proceeds to reproach Terrell in a manner that one would with someone they are very comfortable with. The interaction is different than those Wells has with her white contemporaries. Wells' criticism is overt and not veiled at all (like with Anthony and Addams), exhibiting a sense of impatience:

> **WELLS TWO/TERRELL:** But who—who among us is better qualified to be President than me?
>
> **WELLS ONE:** Pretty soon, Molly, the women'll find out about you. Then you won't be able to get elected dogcatcher. All of your money won't be able to help you then (Holland, p.315).

The exchange ends in a huff, but I suspect it was not the last time they met or that this sort of confrontation was uncommon for the pair. Again, the conflict was emphasized for dramatic effect.

Interpretation and Critical Thought: This interaction mildly explores the dissonance of intra-racial relations between the Black elite and the Black lower to middle class. Terrell's attitude is one of entitlement and superiority based on her own superficial comparisons between herself and Wells who had less material wealth. Her knowledge of

Ida's background (less education and money) led Terrell to immediately assume that Ida would not be a challenging opponent in an election and that Ida should simply not waste her time. Despite doubting the competition, she was still planning to use her wealth to influence the election. Perhaps she was secretly worried behind her show of confidence.

Historically, the Black bourgeoisie and the Black lower to middle class have clashed in their ideals and been critical of each other. A classic example is the well-known debate between the principles of W.E.B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington. Though Ida B. Wells is not part of the upper class, based on my understanding of her moral perspective, it is not surprising that she was more inclined towards Du Bois' beliefs and critical of Booker T. Washington's proposals for industrial education (Holland, p.315). Despite their differences, the women were fighting for the same causes and were not enemies by any means. Paula Giddings compares them best:

> And the rude awakening [the murder of Thomas Moss] sent Wells and Terrell on a course that would change their lives. Their approaches were different—symbolized by Wells purchasing a pistol, situated as she was within the belly of the beast [the south], while Terrell, no doubt wearing her accustomed white gloves and expensive strand of pearls, went to the White House. Each would be effective in her own way; but Wells' radical response would have a more immediate impact (Giddings, P.26).

CHAPTER 4

THE REHEARSAL PROCESS

THE ARC OF THE REHEARSAL PROCESS

I was in the very fortunate position of having a director that I was comfortable with for my thesis role. Professor Nefertiti Burton and I had worked on two other productions during my graduate career: *Bloodline Rumba* by John Chenault (Spring 2016) and *Baltimore* by Kirsten Greenidge (Summer 2017). I also had the pleasure of taking two courses with Professor Burton: Theatre of the African World and Acting the Black Experience as a teaching assistant. Material taught in these classes influenced my work on *Miss Ida B. Wells.* We did not begin rehearsals as early as we had hoped. Therefore, I found that it was advantageous to be in a circumstance where I already had a sound understanding of how my director works. Our official first rehearsal happened on August 21, 2017. Professor Burton, my cast mate Mutiyat Ade-Salu, and I were all feeling the pressure as we discovered shortly before beginning of rehearsal that our designer run was less than two weeks away.

Blocking

Having already read through the script together at a previous meeting, we began to block the show at our first rehearsal. Professor Burton does what she likes to call

"sketching out" the play first or "creating the skeleton" followed by working through the details. This essentially entails solidifying the blocking of the show and ensuring that all stage movement works logistically. I have grown accustomed to this and have even adopted it into my own directing style. I was also happy to work this way because I had not yet completed the preparatory work I knew I would need to do for myself. Many people complete research far in advance of their rehearsal process, but circumstances had not afforded me this luxury. Therefore, during the first few blocking rehearsals, I used what I consider one of my more developed acting tools: improvisation. Making choices in the moment comes easily for me and it is markedly easier when there is already a script. I had not had a chance to premeditate characterizations, so I used the impulses I felt from the words on my script and from my acting partner to make vocal and physical choices that suited the immediate moment. It was important to make it clear in my own mind, and for the sake of my scene partner as well, that the focus of these first few rehearsals were strictly blocking and not characterization. It relieved some of the pressure that many actors and I sometimes feel to create perfection at the beginning of the process. Ultimately, knowing that these choices were inconsequential helped me develop a sense of "play" for myself, though I found that a few of the choices did continue to develop past this stage. This skeletal portion of the rehearsal process allowed me time to formulate what the character portrayals would be in my personal work outside of rehearsal.

Characterization

Initially, we did not have a dramaturg assigned to the show. It quickly became clear that my immediate need for information would be the impetus of my self-executed

dramaturgical research journey. With that research I created character sketches, which are lists of personality traits I was considering for each character. After our designer run, I tried the choices I made for each character during rehearsal runs. In the beginning, my characterizations were large and exaggerated until Professor Burton provided constructive critiques on which personality traits to emphasize and which to soften. As an actor I have learned that it is important to trust the perspective of the director, who can see the process from the outside in a way that actors in the immediate moment cannot. Lightening the affectation of my choices and grounding myself in the reality of each section — what is happening in the scene and how am I responding to my partner — enabled me to find the humanity of each character and give a truthful and genuine performance.

Dramatic Tension

After solidifying the blocking and the characterizations, Professor Burton began to work on the interactive scenes between Wells One and Wells Two playing various other characters. It was not surprising to me that what many would see as an essential undertaking came so late in our process because Wells One and Wells Two spend a majority of the script giving direct address to the audience and less time speaking directly to each other. The hardest section was the interaction between Wells One and Wells Two as Susan B. Anthony. The text is filled with underlying meanings. We worked with the text to combine the historical context of the lines with our own personal subtexts. To gain an understanding that would foster a natural delivery of the lines, we tried an exercise based on subtext. In this exercise we had the same conversation that Wells and Anthony were having but in our own words. One of the challenges of playing the various

characters that Wells Two embodies is that they are all written from Ida B. Wells' perspective. As an actor I had to fight the urge to make a personal commentary about how I felt about the characters and instead let the words alone provide the commentary in order to really speak through the characters' perspectives as if it were not filtered through Wells' thoughts.

We were running the show well before tech week and I felt that we had ample time to tweak and polish various moments of the show. Even though we started the process later than anticipated, the fact that we covered a large amount of material each night and that it was a shorter show with a small cast allowed us to proceed quickly and to dig into the work deeply. We were in such a good place by tech week that we had time to be very meticulous about smaller details like slight vocal inflections and transpositions of minor words. I can honestly say that I was word perfect for opening night, which was an important goal both Professor Burton and I shared as many of the lines are direct quotes from Ida B. Wells.

WARMING UP

As it relates to warming up, master acting teacher and theatre practitioner Stephen Wangh states: "A warm-up is not a regimen or a particular set of exercises. A warm-up is a process, one that can keep growing and changing, and one that you must constantly reinvent" (Wangh, p.37). Throughout this rehearsal process I found a fluidity to approaching my warm-ups and maintained the discipline of practicing nightly.

Two things that have been stressed throughout my graduate career are the importance of warming up and effective journaling. I was finally able to implement both of these activities into a consistent routine for my thesis performance. Most nights during the rehearsal process, I arrived at the theater between 20 to 40 minutes before our scheduled starting time to do a full warm-up. The goal of my warm-up was to find a physical and mental awareness that prepared me to execute creative work at a high level, or as Stephen Wangh expresses it: "A warm-up is a bridge between the conditions of mind, body, and voice you have been using in everyday life and the conditions of mind, body, and voice you need in order to act" (Wangh, p.36).

My warm-up consisted of exercises for relaxation, concentration, vocal preparedness and deep stretching. The specific exercises of each category varied from night to night. On the nights where I did not allow time for this preparation, there was a marked difference in my creative productivity for the night. When I did not warm-up, I found it difficult to focus and be present in the space. My voice would sometimes fatigue more quickly and sometimes my body would feel stiff and unnatural on stage.

Thorough warm-ups have not always been a part of my process as an actor. Previous obstacles to warming up for shows have been lack of time, lack of will, feeling insecure about warming up around others, and feeling unsure about what to do. While my consistency of warm-ups for this show was not perfect, I did considerably better than I typically do. I am also at a point in my graduate career where I have a better understanding of the warm-up activities that work for me. I know which exercises affect me positively as opposed to ones that frustrate me or do not adequately prepare me to work. I am also more comfortable completing my warm-up exercises because I have a

greater awareness of their purpose and I am more confident in my performance ability when I do them.

For our first rehearsal, I was not in this mindset and found myself inclined towards my older habits. Rehearsal was set to begin in the studio. There were several students walking around the hallways and in the lobby just next to the rehearsal studio as our rehearsal crew was setting up. I would much rather be social than endure the awkwardness of being the only person in the room warming up. In fact, since coming to graduate school I have felt awkward in the process of warming up. The warm-ups I learned in graduate school were far different than any I had encountered. Many of them called for what I perceived as strange sounds, peculiar body movements, and more patience than I was willing to muster. During my time in school, this self-consciousness is something that I have been working to move past for the sake of preparing my acting instrument to create. Minutes after following my impulse to socialize and aborting the idea of warming up, I received notice that rehearsal was being moved to the Thrust Theatre.

We rehearsed in the Thrust Theatre for most of our rehearsals, which is not typical for most of the department's shows. Because we were the first production of the season there was nothing in the space to restrict us from using it. For me, the Thrust feels like a sacred space, and I have always found it easier to warm up in there. It has a calming effect on me and I immediately feel more professional and obligated to proceed as such. I attempted to warm-up for the second time. In the dimly lit space, I found my own corner on the floor between a row of seats. I was comfortable knowing that I could

not readily be seen here by anyone entering the room and there was no one around to distract me. I would lay down on the floor and began my warm-up in earnest.

I remembered to use the lie-down exercise that I learned while studying the Alexander Technique with Voice Professor Rachel Carter. As I recounted this time I realized the pitfall of starting the warm-up on my feet in the rehearsal studio. I struggled to focus my energy when standing. I had not yet prepared my mind for the warm-up but attempted to immediately do something physical without bringing my full awareness to my actions. I felt like I needed to do something big and elaborate but was too self-conscious to do it. When I started my warm-up on my back in the theater, it was much easier for me to bring myself to stillness and focus on being present in the space. I remembered to think of warming up more as an "undoing" than a "doing" as I released the muscular tension I was feeling and brought my awareness to my body and the space around me.

Initially, my cast mate and I were asked to do warm-ups together. This was good for team building and getting to know each other since we had never worked together before and especially since we shared the same character. However, eventually I found that I gained more from warming up on my own. It may seem selfish but being able to address and focus on my own needs before coming to the group allowed me to be my best self during the process. I knew that I had specific needs in the area of vocal warm-ups, due to some voice trauma that I experienced, and I like to be able to take my time with them and not feel rushed to go into rehearsal. I think I also had trouble acclimating to warming up with my cast mate, because this show was a definitive energy change for me. I had just finished doing two shows with large casts and warming up in a large group

has its pros and cons. I am less likely to feel self-conscious in a big group and it is easy to glean from the energy of others, but I often neglect any nuanced attention my body may need. However, warming up with just one other person did not immediately fall into my comfort zone. We did not have any relational problems but found that often we just wanted to do different things.

As I continued to engage in my warm-ups more consistently, I developed the mental and physical discipline necessary to maintain my instrument throughout the production. I began to gather a greater understanding of my body and what it needed from day to day. My warm-up varied occasionally but I mostly engaged in exercises that fit into the previously mentioned categories of relaxation, concentration, vocal preparedness and deep stretching. I started to develop what dancer and author Twyla Tharp calls "the creative habit," meaning that if you consistently prepare yourself for creating it becomes easier to be creative (Tharp, 2003). Approaching each rehearsal with fresh ideas and open for collaboration was now more possible than it had been in previous rehearsal experiences because I was consistently prepared. The former occasional feeling of being "stuck" in the rehearsal room was replaced with focus and a freedom to give and receive creative stimuli.

JOURNALING AND LEARNING LINES

Benefits of Journaling

I committed to journaling every night after rehearsal and after most performances as well. It became another essential part of the discipline I was developing for myself as

an actor. Like warming up, journaling was not a strong skill for me as I began graduate training. I was very unsure about what I should be writing or why. I knew that journaling could be a good practice for me but struggled to make it part of my process. For this production, however, I knew I had a larger goal ahead of me. I committed to disciplined journaling so that I would have accurate and detailed notes for writing my thesis. Fueled by the ritual of the disciplined warm-up, journaling became a habit that I began to enjoy. The journaling process served me well for this show because Ida B. Wells was a writer and journalist. It was a connection that I began to draw between my character and me. Just as Ida trained herself to record details of events for publication, I was training myself to do the same. Essentially, it became another layer of character development, completing the action of writing that Ida B. Wells so diligently undertook as a means to try to understand the complexities of her mind. To play the role of a writer, I needed to experience the action of consistent writing.

I found that the rehearsals were much easier to write about than I thought because of the heightened awareness I was experiencing during the work. I documented what we did in rehearsal, how I felt about it, and what I planned to work on for the next rehearsal. I would also write down things that came up in rehearsals that I found I wanted to find more research on and I would go back and write down my findings. It was a way of immediate reflection that helped me to solidify in my mind what was working in the rehearsal space and what was not. I found that the main benefits that I gained from journaling were a sense of consistency for reflection and ample notes to aid in the eventual writing of my thesis. Journaling also became a source of research about my process and myself. This was an idea that many of my professors throughout graduate

school have attempted to instill in me. Through reviewing my own journal long after the process was over I learned what details most keenly captured my attention, how I handled emotions, and I discovered revelations that I had forgotten since the process.

As the process continued, I would type up my handwritten rehearsal notes from Professor Burton each night in my journal as a method of reviewing them. I wrote my notes down in a notebook as they were initially given to me because writing things down by hand has typically served me well in remembering information. In fact, writing is the one solid method I have for learning lines. Learning lines for a two-person show can be challenging because of the large amount of text involved. I use a specific system that I developed for myself. It works for every production I prepare for and I never change it. To read more about my method of learning lines, see *Appendix A*.

How These Processes Benefit the Rehearsal Process

When it comes to both journaling and learning lines the common factors that make both of these processes valuable are repetition, time, and personalization. I know my goals to retain lines longer and more accurately are more easily achieved when I have been *repeatedly* exposed to it. In addition to the repetition, *personalizing* the information aids in achieving the goal of memorization and the goal of understanding. To achieve either of these goals, it is imperative to allow an ample amount of focused and dedicated *time*.

Taking the time to repeat the process of journaling each night gave me a chance to reflect on all that I was learning and feeling during the rehearsal process. With these

reflections I began to look at the production as a whole and not just the details of my own character. I began to form my own opinions and perspectives on the content and the work at large. In this, I found my own purpose for doing the show and the work became more meaningful. This production was a special opportunity for me to honor a woman who had done so much and been so under-recognized, as well as to honor the memory of every lynching victim that Ida B. Wells honored through her work. Furthermore, the production was an opportunity for me to use all that I had learned during my time in graduate school to create something more meaningful than I had ever created before. The more I wrote, the more my passion grew. I brought that passion and positive energy with me to rehearsal each night. Because I was focused on the larger picture, smaller grievances that can often plague rehearsals such as frustration with a scene partner not being off book, poor energy in the rehearsal space, or dissonance between collaborators, became non-factors for me. Anything that did not serve us well in the rehearsal space was far less important than creating a work that made me proud.

I have talked about how time and repetition promote efficient line learning, but personalization is a large part of this as well. When I learn lines, I often use my imagination to conjure mental images of the words, phrases, and situations. Konstantin Stanislavsky, the father of modern acting technique, defined this method of personalization of the text as *visualization* (Carnicke, p.20). The images serve as "objects of attention" or points of focus onstage that promote memorization and *concentration*. When something happens on stage that I was not expecting or if I happen to lose focus, remembering the images brings my attention back to the present moment. Having images

for the text also aids in conveying meaning and understanding to the audience (Carnicke, 2000). (See the "Imagery" section later in this chapter for more details.)

These factors do not only apply to journaling and learning lines, but to effective communication in the rehearsal space as well. For example, when I receive a note from a director, I first write it down (repetition), and then I think about the note and plan how I will address the given direction next time we rehearse that section of the play. If I am unsure what the director means, I am always certain to ask for clarity at an appropriate time. The note becomes personalized when I begin to engage my problem-solving skills to create unique solutions. Taking the *time* to read over notes several times before the next rehearsal period allows for greater opportunity to understand what the director wants and to execute it effectively. This discipline and diligence fostered a smooth rehearsal process.

SHARING A CHARACTER

Mutiyat and I were in the rare predicament of playing characters that derived from the same historical figure (Ida B. Wells) onstage at the same time. We realized from the beginning that there would need to be some shared physical vocabulary and vocal phrasing. Professor Rachel Carter came to a rehearsal to assist with the vocal coaching for the production. The major thing Professor Carter suggested that we work on was rhythm.

Vocal Rhythm

Mutiyat and I have very different rhythms when we speak and move. She is from New York City and tends to put a lot of space between her words. She is slow and deliberate when she speaks, pronouncing each of her consonants very clearly. I, on the other hand, tend to string my words together like I am singing. I drop ending consonants and speak from the back out my mouth with less open sounds. Vocally, we began as polar opposites.

Since Ida B. Wells was from Mississippi, we knew that we would be using some version of a southern dialect. However, I must admit that I was pleased when I realized that this show would be the first show where I was not the person getting their dialect heavily critiqued by the vocal coach. For the first time, maybe ever, my natural southern dialect was the example. Because Mutiyat and I were coming from opposite ends of this dialect, the working thought was that we would "meet in the middle." I helped Mutiyat by recording myself saying some of her lines so that she could get a better feel for my dialect. We went through the script and noted words and phrases that we both said—both in unison and separately at different times—to make sure that we were saying them the same way. One phrase that was repeated more than once and drew our attention because of its uncommonness was "threadbare lies." We worked to give the same inflections and stresses to the phrase.

Physical Rhythm

Not only did we work on vocal rhythm but physical rhythm as well. Professor Carter had us do an exercise where we walked around the theater and tried to match each

other's tempo and energy. Our gaits were different, mine faster and heavy sounding in my costume boots, and hers slower and more relaxed. As we walked the space, we mostly used our sense of listening to match each other's pace. This exercise also proved to be helpful in developing our general awareness of each other in the space because throughout much of the production there are few opportunities for us to visually observe each other. As the older and reflective character, Wells One does occasionally get to watch Wells Two, but because Wells Two exists in Wells One's memory, Wells Two is largely unaware of Wells One's presence.

Professor Burton wanted the two Wells characters to have some shared physicality. For one of our shared warm-ups we did a mirroring exercise to explore how each of us moved separately (when one person leads) and how we could learn to move together (making movement choices simultaneously). Studying Stanislavsky encouraged this exercise as a means of developing concentration (Carnicke, p.19), but for us it served the dual purpose of observation for adaptation. As we studied each other's movements and worked through the script, we looked for moments where we could share the same gestures. One moment came in the section where Wells Two is planning to purchase part ownership of *The Free Speech Newspaper* in Memphis. We simultaneously mimed counting out a few dollars and raised a hand in acknowledgement of God. We deliberated about whether the gesture would be a single open palmed hand or two clasped hands as Mutiyat and I had different impulses. Details were imperative in conveying the message that we were essentially the same person and Professor Burton's observations in these moments were crucial. One simple gesture that recurred throughout the production was a wide-armed stance with hands on our hips and the backs of our hands facing forward. It

was simple but evocative of who the character was, a strong woman whose personality took up space in a room. It became a sort of neutral ground where Wells One and Wells Two mirrored and the audience could make the connection easily.

MAKING DISCOVERIES: Devising from a script

As previously mentioned, the *Miss Ida B. Wells* script was underdeveloped. The only other production of it that our ensemble was aware of is the one in which Professor Burton toured as Wells Two in the 1990s. There are no stage directions given and no notes from the author on how it should be played. For some, having few performance examples or even textual direction would be problematic, but Professor Burton saw it as an opportunity to openly create with many possibilities and few boundaries. She quickly helped me to understand that we could mold this play into any shape we wanted to onstage as long as the lines remained verbatim. Thus, the process of devising our unique production from this script began. We dug into the script looking for interesting things to play with in rehearsal.

Creating "New" Characters

There are several lines in the script that seemed to come from nowhere. These words may have referenced what was said directly before or after them, but I found them hard to justify as Wells Two. The first example of this occurs early in the script. Wells One is reciting a lengthy monologue about her childhood and how she became interested in writing when Wells Two interjects with the quick one liner, "Colored folks from Mississippi can't read or write" (Holland, p.303). Although Wells One continues her

monologue, it seemed odd to me that Wells Two would say this. It was obviously not a notion that she believed, because she was a journalist. I inferred that she was conveying what was likely a popular notion in post-Civil War Mississippi and that maybe she was even mocking someone who had said that to her. If I said it as Wells Two it would have to be delivered with a sense of sarcasm to make it clear that it was not her own words. Then I thought about what kind of person would say those words. Who might have said that to Ida B. Wells in this time? I made a choice to explore this possibility and leaned into improvisational play. Instead of saying the line as Wells Two, I imagined that I was the person who actually believed the line. In my mind a new character formed, one who thought the idea of Blacks being educated was preposterous. She was white, stout, and had an extremely thick southern accent to accompany her entitled attitude. I called her "White Lady." White Lady entered the stage in the middle of Wells One's monologue, stated her opinion firmly, and exited the stage just as quickly as she had come. Professor Burton was delighted with this choice and we kept it. I later went on to solidify the specifics of the character's walk and dialect. This experience opened the door for more uncommon and unique choices.

We began to look at the script a bit differently from that point forward. We started looking for opportunities to become the people Wells One and Wells Two were talking about instead of just talking about them. We justified awkward lines with new character creations. One such justification led to the creation of "Tell-it Lady," who got her name because I needed a way to justify an abrupt shift in the script in which Wells Two announces that Frederick Douglass has died. The lines come at the end of the section between Wells One and Wells Two as Susan B. Anthony. Wells One thanks Miss

Anthony for the tea and then Wells Two's next line is: "Who? Who did you say? Who? Frederick Douglass! You sure? They say Mr. Douglass is dead…" (Holland, p.312). The line does not fit into the cadence of most of the other Wells Two lines and it is abrupt and awkward on its own. I needed to create a new character to make the swift shift work. The interrogative nature of the phrase and exclamation point (rarely used in the text) in conjunction with the frank announcement of Frederick Douglass' death gave me the feeling of a gossiping woman. After some exploration, I decided that Tell-it Lady would be a southern Black woman in her mid-thirties. It also made sense for this to be another character, because Wells One reacts to the news immediately after the announcement. We did not need both Wells characters reacting to the same news. For our production we covered the transition into this section with a brief sound effect of drums (not listed in the script here but is listed for other parts) and I leapt from the table where Wells One and I were sitting, dropped the character of Susan B. Anthony and immediately transformed into Tell-it Lady. Tell-it Lady became a recurring character, appearing twice more in the script as a means to justify certain lines. Wells Two has a line later in the play about sweeping in a new era at the turn of the century. I reassigned this line to the character of Tell-it Lady and in turn discovered an occupation for her. The character became a domestic worker representing a common Black woman of the period. Anytime Tell-it Lady appeared on stage she was miming the action of sweeping, an action that made her distinct from Wells Two despite a similar vocal dialect. For further differentiation, I placed Tell-it Lady's voice at a higher pitch and allowed her line deliveries to be large and expressive.

Researching Smaller Characters

In addition to completing research on the historical characters that I portrayed, I found that there were several other characters that Wells Two interacts with. In chapter Two, I refer to them as "imaginary figures" because they are not portrayed by another actor but serve as the "other" in Wells Two's one-sided conversations. Though imaginary on stage, my research showed that a few of them were real historical figures. For the sake of being thorough in my research, I endeavored to find pictures of as many of the historical figures as I could. Because these imaginary historical figures never speak, it was not necessary to gather information about their lives. But I found photographs were extremely helpful to my process. The pictures gave me faces to keep in my mind as I had these conversations as Wells Two. There was no need to make up faces when in these moments I could use the real faces of these historical figures to focus my energy.

I found a photograph of Thomas Frank Cassel, who is mentioned in the script not by name, but as the "only colored lawyer in town" (Holland, p.304). Wells Two's interaction with him comes directly after the incident where she is thrown out of a train car because of her race and then threatens to sue the railroad company. I searched for the year of Ida B. Wells' court date (1892) in combination with "colored lawyers in Memphis" and Cassel's biography quickly emerged. Other photographs were easier to find as the script had already provided names. Images of Lady Henry Somerset, William Lloyd Garrison, Frederick Douglass, and others aided in making the "imaginary figures" very real for me as an actress.

USING IMAGERY TO CREATE PERSONAL ATMOSPHERE

Imagery, in the context of acting, can be defined as mental pictures that aid the actor in creating a vibrant and sensuous atmosphere in which their character lives. Many actors also pursue this creation through exploration of the other senses as well (Carnicke, p.18). For my purposes, I largely relied on sight-related stimuli because as I stated before, I am a visual learner. The images that an actor chooses to use must be based in the *given circumstances* of the script in order to be believable in performance (Brestoff, 1995). The given circumstances are the situations and facts laid out by the playwright. This need for connection to the given circumstances is also true for the physical activities and inner actions (goals or intentions) chosen by an actor. The careful delineation of each of these decisions made by the actor, which shift freely moment to moment, is the true craft of acting and sets it apart from the art of improvisation where the circumstances are completely imagined by the actors onstage. Imagery, therefore, is a supplement to the actor. If you can "see" it then you can express it.

I remember exploring imagery in an exercise I did in Dr. Baron Kelly's Shakespearean acting class. Dr. Kelly had the class break into pairs with a Partner A and a Partner B. Partner A was given a word on a sheet of paper to read silently, then told to close her/his eyes and quickly choose a mental image to accompany it. Once Partner A had the image clearly in their minds, Dr. Kelly had them say the word to Partner B three times with the goal of expressing the images they had through their voice. Partner B would then tell Partner A what images came to mind for them from listening to Partner A's delivery of the word. The rest of the class, also listening, would then say what images they saw as well. Nearly every time we went through the exercise, the images from

Partner B matched those of Partner A, especially the colors. My classmates and I marveled at the accuracy. This exercise solidified the power of strong imagery for me, and I used it throughout my development for Wells Two.

The concrete imagery that my research provided for me was invaluable. Completing this research on my own gave me a sense of ownership over the depth of my creative process. I compiled all of my photographic research into a Pinterest board (Edwards, 2017). For all of the images of historical faces that my research allowed me, there were just as many that came from my own imagination. This was typically true when Wells Two addresses crowds or simply more than one person at a time. I had to create for myself images of the train conductor that threw Wells off of the train, the superintendent at the school board meeting, and the several men who are called by name in the lynching scene, among others. These visualizations became a part of building the world in which Wells Two was operating, a world that changed quickly with the pace of the show. The images needed to be specific so that I could quickly recall them for each performance.

Not only was I creating images of people, but places too. Wells Two addresses several crowds of people in different locations throughout the script. Many times, I would "cast the audience" making them the crowds and speaking directly to them as if they were part of the show. In one moment I was in an intimate, yet dilapidated schoolhouse addressing my superiors and in another I was speaking to a large crowd outside at the Worlds' Fair in Chicago. I varied my approach to each crowd address by thinking about how large the crowd was, who they were, what their attitude might be towards me (as Wells Two), and what the occasion was. I imagined the colors that surrounded me, and

the time of day. I was effectively "using the where" (a phrase coined by Improvisation Scholar Viola Spolin) to give my character and the world in which she lives life on the stage (Brestoff, p.121). Knowing what setting I was in from moment to moment is what truly allowed me to find variations in the behavior of Wells Two.

There were times when the required imagery for a moment was difficult for me to cope with. At the suggestion of Professor Burton, I studied images in a book titled *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America* (2000) by James Allen. The large book is filled with graphic images of lynching victims and white mobs. Many of the images are in postcard form, as it was very popular during that period to send these photographs to relatives as souvenirs. I was surprised at how many of the photographs had been taken in the western part of the country as I had always viewed lynching as an exclusively southern phenomenon. Some of the photographs had names and dates but many did not. Several of them were accompanied by brief descriptions of the incidents surrounding the photographs. We were deep into the rehearsal process before I could gather the courage to pick up the book. I was deeply affected by each image. As I spent time with these photographs, the reality of what Ida B. Wells spent her entire life fighting against became stunningly clear. Again, my purpose for the show became even more defined. During the first weekend of the show, I dedicated each performance to one of the victims I had read about in the book. Each night as the lynching section of the play approached, I would recall the image of that person. Once I imagined someone that I knew was being lynched. This imagery triggered emotions for only a short time and eventually I had to approach this section as I described in Chapter Two (p.34). Though I

was no longer outwardly affected, the internalization of the images stayed with me throughout the run of the production and I never forgot my purpose.

Imagery and Movement

In this same realm of imagery of the lynching section, and with the spirit of devising still strong in the rehearsal space, I felt moved by Claude McKay's poem, "The Lynching", which was recited by Wells One during this section of the play:

> His spirit is smoke ascended to high heaven.
> His father, by the cruelest way of pain,
> Had bidden him to his bosom once again;
> The awful sin remained still unforgiven.
> All night a bright and solitary star
> (Perchance the one that ever guided him,
> Yet gave him up at last to Fate's wild whim)
> Hung pitifully o'er the swinging char.
> Day dawned, and soon the mixed crowds came to view
> The ghastly body swaying in the sun:
> The women thronged to look, but never a one
> Showed sorrow in her eyes of steely blue;
> And little lads, lynchers that were to be,
> Danced round the dreadful thing in fiendish glee.

Just before this poem, Wells Two gives an impassioned speech to what I had decided was a congregation at an emergency church meeting (the audience cast as the congregation). There are no specific actions noted in the script for Wells Two, but I as the actor felt strong impulses to do something. The words literally moved me. As the poem was recited, I began to move my body in the ways I was interpreting the words. I continued to play with this and eventually the idea began to grow on Professor Burton. She assisted me in developing this impulse into a short movement piece. Starting with my arms, I began moving slowly and beautifully, and I gradually shifted into more grotesque

and tense movement. As the phrase "gave him up at last" were said, all at once, the tension dropped and my body swayed limply with my arms crossed in front of me. My body mirrored an image being projected behind me of a lynching victim. Some may say the use of this movement was overstated, though it is not a sentiment I have expressly heard. At the beginning of our process, this movement piece was not something we could have anticipated happening and I am sure the audience was not expecting it either, but I believe it aided immensely in telling this story.

The ending of the play went through several iterations before we landed on what finally worked. The script ends abruptly and it was our mission to devise a strong conclusion to this show that felt complete. This was perhaps the mostly heavily devised part of the production. The final lines of Wells Ones' last monologue were said in unison with Wells Two. The script calls for drums here, not in a stage direction but in the dialogue as Wells One states, "That drum…I hear it all the time. Seems like nobody else hears it" (Holland, p.316). The drums represent an ancestral call, acknowledging the origin of the African diasporic tradition. Wells Two's lines at the end of the script, again, were non-descript. This time the created character used to justify them was simply a modern woman hearing Ida B. Wells' call to action from generations away. Wells One and the young woman (Wells Two) have a strong moment of acknowledgement of each other as the sound of the drums rises and then fades out. As the drums fade, Mutiyat and I drop character as we walk to places on either side of the projection screen and sing a version of the song "Strange Fruit", which we rearranged as a duet. Images from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Emmitt Till to Mike Brown and Trayvon Martin were projected onto the screen shaped in the silhouette of Ida B. Wells. The lights fade as the

last note is sung and the final image, a Black Lives Matter protester, dissipates into the darkness.

Throughout the rehearsal process I strove to maintain a standard of professionalism and openness. Rehearsal for this show was intense. My discipline and rigor as an artist and student were tested. The challenges and how I approached them as part of the creative ensemble and as an individual made it one of the most rewarding rehearsal experiences that I have ever been a part of.

CHAPTER 5

VOICE AND MOVEMENT:

USING THE ALEXANDER TECHNIQUE TO CREATE AND SUSTAIN

In this chapter, I will discuss the personal challenges I face with my acting instrument and how I used the Alexander Technique to improve my performance and health to develop distinct characters for the production of Miss Ida B. Wells, and to discover more awareness of my body. I will define what the Alexander Technique is and how I applied it to the production by focusing my research through the perspective of the Alexander Technique principles. Additionally, I provide a detailed examination of the vocal and physical compositions of my portrayals of Susan B. Anthony, Jane Addams, and Mary Church Terrell.

FORMER CHALLENGES

I struggled with the health of my voice for several years before my journey with *Miss Ida B. Wells.* Overuse and misuse over the last five years caused small swellings to form on my vocal folds. The main symptoms I experienced were frequent vocal fatigue and diminished singing range. Years of instructing summer camps, children's theatre tours, and poor technique while performing in musicals had damaged my vocal instrument. After the mainstage run of *Miss Ida B. Wells,* I was diagnosed with vocal

cysts. Throughout the rehearsal and performance process, I would often experience vocal fatigue. Occasionally my vocal tone would break, meaning that my voice would not produce sound on command or it would have a delayed onset. My voice had a breathy quality because air was escaping through my vocal folds, which were not coming together completely to phonate (McCallion, 1988). I cared for my voice throughout the process by implementing various exercises from the Alexander Technique (my primary technique), a few days of moderate voice rest, and vocal therapy exercises prescribed by my vocal therapist Justin White at the Louisville Center for Voice Care. Because my voice issue had frequently occurred over an extended period of time, I did not experience excessive anxiety about the situation. Ever since I became aware of the issue, I had been compensating for the problem and attempting to treat it to the best of my ability. With the use of these vocal practices, hydrating and resting to the best of my ability, and a regimented warm-up routine, I sustained my voice for the duration of the production run.

In addition to my experiences with vocal trauma, I have a misaligned neck (not uncommon in the modern times of cellphones and computers) and scoliosis. I have concluded, from my doctor's diagnosis and my knowledge of the Alexander Technique, that the misalignment of my back and neck greatly contributed to the deterioration of my vocal health, as the physical body's condition is directly correlated to the condition of the voice (Polatin, 2013). Though I have never let this diagnosis impede my decision to participate in physical activities, I have experienced pain and fatigue from it that sometimes impairs my experiences, but not my performances. Inactivity and fatigue tend to worsen the symptoms of my condition. There have been rehearsals where I remember being so fatigued that I could hardly stand up during the duration of the session, sitting as

often as I could, stretching and shifting my weight to relieve pressure in my hips and back. I have spent many years learning to "muscle through" activities with pure will. This began to change when I started practicing the Alexander Technique.

WHAT IS THE ALEXANDER TECHNIQUE?

Shakespearean orator F.M. Alexander (1869-1955) developed the Alexander Technique to address vocal fatigue and laryngitis during performances. Despite the consultation of doctors and the vocal techniques popular in his time, Alexander's issue persisted. Determined to solve his voice problem, Alexander began intensely observing and experimenting on himself. He used mirrors to assess himself as he spoke and eventually noticed a pattern. Whenever he went to speak his head pulled back and his neck tightened. This impulse was impeding him from vocalizing freely. However, when he tried to stop himself from tensing in this way, he found it nearly impossible to prevent the habitual action. Slowing down the process, he began to focus on the moment just before he wanted to speak. As he neared that moment, he paused, and made a conscious choice not to tense, which allowed him to speak with more ease. This process was a long one, requiring intense mental focus, repeated practice, and detailed observation. Alexander soon discovered that this method was even more effective when he incorporated the thought into his whole self and not just the head and neck. This is how the Alexander Technique was developed (McEvenue, 1994).

What Alexander discovered is that the physical usage of our bodies directly impacts our voice. In fact, the two are inseparable, which is why I have chosen to talk about my experiences with both voice and body in the same chapter. At its core, the

Alexander Technique is a method by which one uses thought to prevent the body from engaging in habits that prevent the voice from having full and unimpeded expression. After years of experimentation, Alexander developed the five principles of the Alexander Technique. I will define them here, as I will refer to them throughout this chapter:

- **Habit** – any physical involuntary response to the impulse to speak that impedes effective usage of the voice;
- **Primary Control** – the thought that the head and neck should be free of tension and aligned properly on the spine;
- **Inhibition** – pausing in the moment before an undesired habitual action occurs;
- **Faulty Sensory Perception** – when what you think you are doing with your body and what you are actually doing are two different things;
- **Direction** – consciously deciding to allow the body to respond in a way that is not habitual (Polatin, 2013).

Implementation of the technique has allowed me, through concentrated practice, to develop a self-awareness of my habitual physical behaviors that impede my best vocal performance. Through dedicated time spent in exploration guided by Alexander Technique exercises, I gained a new understanding of my body, my habits, and my ability to choose physical responses to stimuli (i.e., the desire to speak) that serve me best. Most of my habits are related to compression of my spine, tension in my shoulders, or general muscular tension when in stressful situations. I also have a habit of using inadequate amounts of air when speaking and singing, sometimes speaking too quickly to breathe properly. My heightened awareness of the usage of my body allows me to inhibit habitual responses that are harmful. I might tense my shoulders or hold my breath in response to

anxious feelings that I might experience in front of a crowd. Instead, I can choose to make choices that are beneficial for vibrant performance, like relaxing and breathing freely. When not locked into my own habits, I am afforded a great number of other possible actions that help me to create characters that are different from myself.

SPECIFIC EXPERIENCES WITH ALEXANDER TRAINING

Comparing Techniques

I began my training with the Alexander Technique in the fall of 2016 with Professor Rachel Carter. I began my first class with Professor Carter hopeful that I would find practices that could help my creative process, but skeptical about how relevant the work would be for me because of past experiences. My first experience with formal voice training (outside of singing) was with the Linklater vocal technique a year prior, and I did not adapt to it well. What I concluded, and have since heard echoed from other colleagues, is that the differences between the two techniques is that Alexander Technique is based on anatomy and its effects on the voice, while Linkater is a more abstract exploration of the voice.

With the Alexander Technique, learning about the voice through exploration of human anatomy allowed me to connect to the work and personalize it, as I was able to draw strong parallels between my own body and the lessons. Often, sketches, diagrams, and three-dimensional skeletal models were used in class to demonstrate an idea. My primarily visual learning style was supported by these concrete images.

Contrarily, with Linklater, mental images are based in colors, animals, and various objects for the purposes of finding freedom of expression (Linklater, 2006). Often

with this technique we would be asked to imagine that we were something outside of our human form (a puppy, a balloon, or the color yellow). I was not advanced enough in my acting experience as a first-year graduate to fully engage with this kind of imagery comfortably. I believe that because I had no prior knowledge of what formal voice training for actors was and little experience with imagery work at all, abstraction was not a good place for me to begin my training.

I feel that now, as a third-year graduate student, I could more comfortably engage with Linklater and I still use some of the exercises that I found more practical. However, Alexander Technique is now my primary method of preparing for creative work. Learning about physical usage and anatomy through the Alexander Technique enabled me to apply the principles directly to my own body, thus my understanding of my voice and myself was deepened.

Practicing and Developing Awareness

Professor Carter asks that we spend dedicated time each day implementing Alexander Technique into our thoughts. Sometimes this means doing specific exercises, but it can also mean simply being mindful of my head and neck while completing daily chores, or pausing to check in with my body as I sit down for a meal. For this reason, the Alexander Technique has been easy to incorporate because it can be done nearly anywhere and with any activity. Personally, I implement Alexander Technique thought as I complete daily spinal exercises prescribed to me by my chiropractor and vocal exercises from my voice therapist. Shortly after the close of our production run of *Miss Ida B. Wells*, I underwent vocal surgery to remove my vocal cysts. The Alexander Technique

assisted me through a successful recovery, as I used the principles to prevent myself from engaging in the same vocal habits that caused my vocal cysts.

More and more practice with the technique over time leads to a re-education of the body and voice. For example, after my surgery, I was still in the habit of using extra muscular effort around my throat to speak. Before the surgery, the effort had been necessary to produce sound, as my neck muscles had to work hard to bring my vocal folds completely together. Any time the vocal folds attempted to touch for phonation, they were impeded by the cysts, which caused a gap between the folds, releasing extra air (McCallion, 1988). My newly healed folds did not need the extra tension to create sound. Through practice, I retrained my muscles to relax at the stimuli of the desire to speak, consciously deciding to use less effort. This kind of mindfulness will prevent vocal injury in the future.

Connecting the Alexander Technique to Other Classes

In addition to voice class, the lessons learned in the Alexander Technique were directly applicable to the work in Professor Ariadne Calvano's graduate movement class. Class exercises like "The Motions" (Lendra, 1991) were prime opportunities to practice the Alexander Technique principles of giving directions and finding connection in my body. The Motions is a group exercise where participants transition between various poses, holding each pose for approximately a minute before slowly moving to the next while using self- and collective awareness. The group moves as simultaneously as possible while changing the direction that the collective is facing and maintaining individual physical integrity during the exercise, which lasts an hour on average. I learned while participating in The Motions that within the seemingly motionless poses,

there was actually constant movement and refreshing of directions and awareness like in Alexander Technique training. The class participated in the exercise several times throughout the Spring 2017 semester, and the times when I was mindful of my technique were the experiences when I was markedly less fatigued, both mentally and physically, at the end of the exercise.

I credit this exercise as the preparation for the many physical "freezes" that I performed in the production that became an essential element of its style. While paused in the various poses onstage, I was constantly directing my body to relax muscles and maintain energy. Maintaining relaxed musculature and remaining mindful of using opposition in my body and with my space aided me in keeping my balance and preventing injury. It was not only useful for my body, but my face as well, as I used these same principles to keep the "light" or alive energy behind my eyes and facial muscles.

My heightened awareness in the frozen moments was both of myself maintaining my body and of my scene partner (awareness of my cues). This directly related to awareness of self and of the collective group during The Motions exercise. With the guidance of Professors Carter and Calvano I was able to maintain my body and voice throughout the process and to cultivate vocally and physically distinct characters for *Miss Ida B. Wells.*

RESEARCH METHODS FOR VOCAL DIALECTS OF HISTORICAL CHARACTERS

A large part of my work for the show was developing the various voices for each of the historical characters. The general dialect choices stemmed mainly from the information gathered about where each character was born and raised. For instance, we

knew that Ida B. Wells was from Mississippi, therefore a southern dialect was used for her. The other characters vary greatly in geographic origin. Susan B. Anthony is from Massachusetts and so a Boston dialect was a suitable choice for her. An equal amount of dialect work was afforded to developing the voice of Jane Addams, who was from Chicago. I even studied a Minnesota dialect for the one line in the script when Wells Two portrays Judge Pierce, an older white man with a military background.

Occasionally, social class was a variable in the vocal choice. Mary Church Terrell was from Memphis, but she was from a very wealthy family and highly educated. Therefore, an inference was made that though southern, her speech should be a bit more elevated and refined because of her background.

Creating Voices for Created Characters

The voices for my created characters (White Lady, Tell-it Lady, and Mrs. McDonald) were based on region and class as well, but were also differentiated based on race and age. I chose to portray Tell-it Lady as a domestic worker in her mid-thirties. I made her southern and Black, but less educated than Ida. The portrayal of White Lady was southern and lower-class as well. I differentiated White Lady from Tell-it Lady by making White Lady's voice more nasal and by using stronger vowel emphasis. Mrs. McDonald is named in the script but does not seem to be a person who actually existed. I portrayed her as a 70-year-old woman who was also from Mississippi. I chose a slower speech pattern for her and her southern dialect was more drawn out, especially for words with the 'a' sound like "lawmaker," "talking," and "carrying." An audio clip from the International Dialects of English Archive (IDEA, 2018) was used to inspire the voice created for Mrs. McDonald.

I worked very closely with Professor Carter on fine-tuning each dialect after I had comprised the basic information. We had one concentrated work session, which I audio recorded for later referencing. At first, I listened and practiced the voices each day as part of my warm-up until I became more comfortable with them. Professor Carter also attended at least two runs of the show during tech week and offered feedback.

Incorporating Physicality

It was initially difficult for me to pinpoint the origin of my physical work methods. I know that Professor Calvano's teachings are interdisciplinary with a special interest in the work of Jerzy Grotowski, a pioneering experimental theatre director and theorist. However, I cannot say that Grotowski has had any direct influence on my work. I completed a project in Professor Calvano's class where we used art collages to inspire character movement, so I am familiar with using visual art as a starting point for creation. With this former project in mind, I used photographs of historical people to create characters based on their images. I also took detailed notes about their facial features and what might be inferred from them.

After obtaining and analyzing the photographs, my physical process began with creating "physical recipes" for each historical character. The idea of using physical recipes to create the bodies of my characters came from a voice mimicry and vocal/physical recipe project I completed during my Alexander Technique training (Estill, 2017). In Alexander Technique class, we assessed the usage of a person's vocal anatomy (i.e. where s/he holds tension, the condition of their velum and larynx, etc.) based on how they spoke and the quality of their voice. A vocal recipe is essentially a list of the nuances of a person's vocal anatomy that creates a person's unique sound. In the

same way that I learned to break down a person's vocal habits by listening to their voice, I dissected each character's body usage based on the photographs and information gathered about their lives. When assessing the bodies in the photographs I used some terms from my Alexander Technique training. I would note whether the person's shoulder carriage was in extension (shoulders arched backwards), fetal (shoulders slumped forwards), or neutral. Each character had a unique physical recipe and I listed each group of traits that I thought might be useful for my portrayals.

Professor Calvano and I also held two meetings about my physical work. I brought in my physical recipes and she assisted me in giving my ideas shape. Most of my original portrayals were very exaggerated as I attempted to search for where the various characteristics fit onto my own body. After working with Professor Calvano I felt comfortable bringing the choices I had made into the rehearsal space, where Professor Burton further guided me in shaping the characters and expressing their humanity.

RESEARCHED-BASED CHOICES: ANTHONY, ADDAMS, AND TERRELL

Susan B. Anthony

Vocal: Anthony's voice was perhaps the most memorable one from the show according to feedback. Professor Carter extracted several sounds for me to focus on while developing the voice. The phrase "park the car" with wide, flat "a" sounds is a common go-to phrase for feeling the Boston dialect in my mouth. I also used the character's line "expediency in order to conquer" to gauge the rhythm of the character's speech. Originally, the vocal pacing I chose for her was a bit slower to reflect her age, but I felt that it sped up unconsciously throughout the run of the show. I found this dialect, among

others, vocally taxing. I struggled at first to achieve the sound without straining my voice and neck muscles largely in part to the tension caused by the way I was holding my mouth. I was admittedly vocally fatigued at the end of the first few rehearsals where the dialect was used, but once I began to use my Alexander Technique thought to relax into it the speech pattern came more easily.

Physical: I was amused to find that younger pictures of Susan B. Anthony have the same stern, wide jawed expression as older pictures of her. I chose to pull the corners of my mouth down for my character portrayal in effort to mimic the pictures. This physical adjustment greatly influenced the speech of the character. The choice made the accent sound better but it was difficult to maintain the downward pull of the corners of my mouth while speaking. Eventually, I had to relax my mouth a bit, as it impeded some of the clarity (for stage speech purposes) and exaggerated the corners more heavily when I was not speaking

Photographs of Anthony show that she had neutral, square shoulders. In my attempt to embody this trait I lifted my own shoulders high. The high shoulders were something that came up more than once in the character creation process as a similar thought was used to create Judge Pierce as well. When exploring Susan B. Anthony's physicality for the first time, I experienced some faulty sensory perception. I thought that I was making my shoulders neutral and strong like Anthony's pictures, but in reality, my shoulders were awkwardly nearing my ears. Professor Calvano encouraged me to think of my shoulders as "held" instead of high and lifted. This also affected the arm swing. I was swinging my arms more than I needed to at first, but Professor Calvano helped me to

realize that someone as stiff and serious as Susan B. Anthony probably did not have a lot of arm swing.

I portrayed Susan B. Anthony to be about 70 years old. To convey her age, I curled my fingers to make my hands appear older and more fragile and moved them slowly and delicately. I also studied how to use my prop eyeglasses to suggest her age.

Jane Addams

Vocal: The Chicago accent used for Addams was challenging because it required extensive nasal resonance. However, when using too much nasal resonance the voice sounded cartoonish and the balance took time to achieve. Professor Carter's suggestion for the Chicago accent is that each syllable should receive the same amount of stress. Her example sounded very clipped, possibly robotic, and frank. Like the character voice of Anthony, the voice of Addams was also influenced by the shape of Jane Addams' mouth in pictures. In Addams' photographs her lips are a tight, thin line. I mimicked this by rolling my lips in and pursing them in a small smile that was held up by my chin, a bit higher than where my lips naturally sit. This created a smaller opening that aided in producing the clipped, precise tone and rhythm that Professor Carter and I were working towards. The practice phrase I used to warm up in this dialect was "My dear Mrs. Wells-Barnett," which is one of the character's lines. This was one of my favorite dialects to perform in the show. There was a tinge of comedy in it no matter how I tried to deemphasize that element.

Physical: As previously stated, Jane Addams was one character for which I almost gathered too much information, most of which lent itself to physical expression.

When I looked at Jane Addams' photograph, the most peculiar feature was her small straight-lined mouth. When Professor Calvano saw the photograph, she noted that Addams had tired eyes from working very hard. Assistant dramaturg Terry Tocantins' research revealed that Addams was often sickly and that she had spinal problems. The question for me as the actor suddenly became how much of this information do I want to squeeze into this 3-minute scene? For simplicity's sake, I focused on incorporating only a few elements of the observations and research.

The observation about Addams' mouth was used, of course. I chose to make her hips a bit uneven to portray her spinal issue. For this, I pulled from my own experiences with my back. I pushed my left hip out which affected the walk. Then, as a sort of "cover up," I crossed both hands on the left hip as I walked and stood to simultaneously present a high-class lady and to hide the defect. The attempt to incorporate the tired eyes became useless because personality choices made while rehearsing Addams' section required more energy. It was a great example of bringing choices to the table and being flexible enough to let them go when they did not prove useful.

Mary Church Terrell

Voice: Mary Church Terrell was perhaps the easiest character for me to portray out of the three main historical figures being discussed. Unlike Anthony and Addams, Terrell is a Black woman like me. Reading about her life and reading the interaction between Terrell and Wells in the script felt very familiar. Terrell was southern and high-class. She reminded me of many older sorority women I met in my community growing up. The voice I chose for her was of a lighter quality than Wells' and had only a touch of

the southern quality. I chose to emphasize her use of consonants to communicate her educational background.

Physical: Photographs of Terrell showed her dressed very primly. Her face was always pleasant but nearly blank. The choices for her stemmed more from her actions in the script. Physically, there is a moment in the script where I transition into Terrell very quickly. To achieve the transition, I would roll one shoulder back smoothly and place my hand on my hip, giving her an air of sass. My head would tilt upward slightly with a raised eyebrow and my lips puckered very neatly. I allowed the character of Terrell to walk as if she was gliding across the room. Her physicality is relaxed in comparison to Anthony and Addams. Even when Terrell is flustered and slamming furniture, I attempted to maintain a touch of sophistication in every movement she made.

The Alexander Technique has been a great benefit to my personal concerns and professional activities. In using it, I have learned more about myself and about the characters I portray. My positive experience with using the Alexander Technique in this production has solidified it as the primary method by which I explore the physical and vocal components of character development.

CONCLUSION

My discovery of self-executed dramaturgy placed me in the unique position of being both an actor and a dramaturg. Through my research, I deepened my understanding of the play and its characters. By finding photographs and biographies I was able to create detailed historical character portrayals for the stage that were grounded in facts and infused with imagination. The in-depth character development for Wells, Anthony, Addams, and Terrell is a process I hope to further develop and codify for continued personal and pedagogical use.

By identifying multiple theatrical styles in the script and incorporating various elements to emphasize them, we created a production that was multi-dimensional. It would be difficult to label it as just one kind of play. It stands, as Holland aptly named it, as a "dramatic biography" with many forms influencing its execution. It is perhaps the most complex piece I have ever worked on.

I learned about the legacy of Ida B. Wells and her tremendous contributions to Blacks in America. She was one of the first investigative journalist, travelling and seeking the truth about the lynching incidents throughout the south. Wells was a business owner, world traveler, activist, wife, and mother. She fought for both Blacks' and Women's rights. Telling her story is important because of her resilience in the face of

obstacles much like those we face in our society today. Her story is a guide for Black women fighting for equality in America.

My favorite part of this process was devising and crafting moments for the production that were not a part of the script. It fascinates me to think about all that we as an ensemble did with movement, text, and character without changing one word of the script. The bareness of the script gave the ensemble so much space for reimagining, interpreting, and brining ourselves to the telling of the non-linear story. What seemed to me at first to be a flat story on the page turned into an actor's dream playground.

Throughout most of my graduate career, the Alexander Technique has been of ultimate importance to my understanding of myself and my craft. The lessons that I learned from this technique were the bridge between my research and the execution of the research onstage. It is my hope that one day I can receive a certification in the technique so that I can help other actors gain the awareness and understanding of the body that has completely transformed how I approach acting.

This production was significant to me for several reasons. It was the opportunity that I needed to mentally solidify my ownership of my acting process. I pushed myself to meet the challenges of professionalism, discipline, and producing detailed work. Observing myself during the process along with the positive feedback from my colleagues and professors has given me confidence in my abilities. This confidence makes me feel ready for the challenge of pursuing non-academic work as I approach graduation.

Another aspect that made this show special was that I got to perform under the direction of my mentor and dear friend Professor Nefertiti Burton, whose light, work ethic, and passion for storytelling continues to inspire mine. Professor Burton is the first woman of color I have ever had as a mentor and in so, I have learned the value of being able to "see myself" in this profession. In this production we honor the legacy of Ida B. Wells and I honor the legacy of Professor Burton as she and I are the only two women of record to take on the role of Wells Two. I am eternally grateful for her influence in my life. It was an honor to reprise a role that she originated and to work in collaboration to retell this story to a new generation.

Lastly, this production was of importance because it bridged the gap of understanding between the past and the present. Through the carefully selected projected images, the production visually links the Anti-lynching Campaign, the Civil Rights Movement, and the current Black Lives Matter Movement. The atrocities faced by Blacks so long ago continue to plague them in new, but familiar forms. The fact that this production happened on a campus whose student population is mostly white is encouraging. This production opened the door for conversations about race for many college students who may not have encountered the history discussed. Likewise, the production contests notions that race is no longer a problem in our society.

Having never considered myself an activist, I found that working on *Miss Ida B. Wells* was one small way that I could speak out, bring awareness to, and educate others about the struggles that persist in the Black community. One example that I frequently mentioned during talkbacks is that of voting rights. The discriminatory voter laws that North Carolina's Generally Assembly attempted to have passed just last year (Blythe,

2017) parallel the struggles *Miss Ida B. Wells* illustrates as a problem in the 19th and 20th centuries. This show helped me to recognize my own civic responsibility. The means by which I speak out against injustice is through theatre and I am inspired to continue to make theatre that brings awareness to social issues and educates others about the world around them.

PRODUCTION CREDITS

Director: Nefertiti Burton

Cast: Sidney Edwards, Mutiyat Ade-Salu

Set and Lighting Designer: Kevin Gawley

Costume Designer: Zhanna Goldentul

Stage Manager: Megan Meyer

Assistant Stage Manager and Props: Will Thompson

Costume Crew: Adama Abrahms, Jacob Vallery (Tour).

Production Crew: Will Thompson, Ashley Lanham, Zach Paul, Jacob Vallery, Tyler Heib (Tour).

Set Build and Management: Charles Nasby and Garry Brown

Study Guide Dramaturg: Lois Abdelmalek (Tour Stage Manager)

Rehearsal Dramaturg: Terry Tocantins

Special Thank You:

Aukram Burton

Kentucky Center for African American Heritage

Joel Williams and Lisa Abbott

Kennedy Center American College Festival Region 4

Professor Rachel Carter

Professor Ariadne Calvano

Jessica Key

Blair Boyd

REFERENCES

A&E. "Mary Church Terrell." Biography.com, A&E Networks Television, 26 May 2015, www.biography.com/people/mary-church-terrell-9504299 (A&E, 2015).

Allen, James. *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America*, Twin Palm Publishers, 2000.

Benjamin, Walter. "What is Epic Theater?". *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1968, pp. 147-154. (Benjamin, 1968).

Blair, Elizabeth. "The Strange Story of the Man Behind 'Strange Fruit'." NPR, NPR, 5 Sept. 2012, www.npr.org/2012/09/05/158933012/the-strange-story-of-the-man-behind-strange-fruit.

Blythe, Anne. "Supreme Court won't rescue NC voter ID law; GOP leaders say they will try again with new law". *The News and Observer*, Raleigh North Carolina. 15, May, 2017. http://www.newsobserver.com/news/politics-government/politics-columns-blogs/under-the-dome/article150554992.html (Blythe, 2017).

Brestoff, Richard. *The Great Acting Teachers and Their Methods*, Smith and Kraus Inc. 1995. (Brestoff, 1995).

Burton, Nefertiti, Email Interview, April 1, 2018 (Burton, 2018).

Carnicke, Sharon Marie. “Stanislavsky’s System: Pathways for the Actor”. *Twentieth Century Actor Training,* Edited by Alison Hodge. Routledge, 2000. (Carnicke, 2000).

Davis, Angela Y. *“The Legacy of Slavery: Standards for a New Womanhood.” Women, Race and Class*. First Vintage Books Edition, February 1983, New York: Random House, copyright 1981, pp. 3-29 (Davis 1, 1981).

Davis, Angela Yvonne. *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism: Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday*. Pantheon Books, 1998. (Davis 2, 1998).

deLahunta, Scott. “Dance Dramaturgy: Speculations and Reflections.” Dance Theater Journal, vol. 16, no. 1, 1 Apr. 2000, pp. 20–25., sarma.be/docs/2869. Collection: Anthology Embodied Dramaturgies. (deLahunta, 2000).

“Distancing Effect (Brechtian Verfremdungseffekt) MIT Global Shakespeares.” Edited by MIT Collaborator, MIT Global Shakespeares, Global Shakespeare Video Archive, 1 Jan. 2010, globalshakespeares.mit.edu/glossary/distancing-effect/. (Distancing Effect, 2010).

Donovan, Patricia. “Endesha Holland Play to Begin National Tour Here.” *The Buffalo News*, 22 Jan. 1989. (Donovan, 1989).

Douglass, Frederick. *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass His Life as a Slave, His Escape from Bondage, and His Complete History to the Present Time.* Park Pub. Co., 1881. (Douglass, 1881).

Edwards, Sidney. “Ida B. Wells Photo Research. Images of people and places mentioned in the script Miss Ida B. Wells: A collection of photographs gathered from online sources.” Edited by Sidney Edwards, Pinterest.com, Pinterest 2018, 15 Sept. 2017, www.pinterest.es/smedwards91/ida-b-wells-photo-research/. *Also See Appendix C.* (Edwards, 2017).

Fox, Margalit. “Endesha Ida Mae Holland, 61, Dies; ‘Mississippi Delta’ Writer.” *The New York Times*, The New York Times Company, 1 Feb. 2006, nyti.ms/2jYgfvE. (Fox, 2006).

Giddings, Paula J. “‘To Sell My Life as Dearly as Possible’: Ida B. Wells and the First Antilynching Campaign.” *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America*. William Morrow, 1984, Perennial (reprint), 2001, pp. 17-31. (Giddings, 1984).

Holland, Endesha Ida Mae. “Miss Ida B. Wells.” *Strange Fruit: Plays on Lynching by American Women*, edited by Kathy A. Perkins and Judith Louise Stephens, Indiana University Press, 1998. (Holland, 1983).

International Dialects of English Archives. “Mississippi 2” (recording). Access March 30, 2018. http://www.dialectsarchive.com/mississippi-2 (IDEA, 2018).

Lendra, I Wayan. “Bali and Grotowski: Some Parallels in the Training Process.” *TDR* (1988-), vol. 35, no. 1, 1991, pp. 113–139. JSTOR, JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/1146114 (Lendra, 1991).

Les Prix Nobel. “Jane Addams—Biographical”. Nobel Lectures, Peace 1926-1950, Editor Frederick W. Haberman, Elsevier Publishing Company, Amsterdam, 1972. (Les Prix Nobel, 1931).

Linklater, Kristen. *Freeing the Natural Voice: Imagery and Art in the Practice of Voice and Language*. Drama Publishers, 2006. (Linklater, 2006).

Martin, Michel. “Biography Examines Life of Ida B. Wells.” NPR, NPR, 26 Mar. 2008, www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=89109212. (Martin, 2008).

McCallion, Michael. *The Voice Book: for Everyone Who Wants to Make the Most of Their Voice*. Theater Arts Books/Routledge, 1988. (McCallion, 1988).

McEvenue, Kelly, and Patsy Rodenburg. “F.M. Alexander Story.” *The Actor and the Alexander Technique*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2002, pp. xviii-xx. (McEvenue, 2002).

Mitchell, Koritha. “Black-Authored Lynching Drama's Challenge to Theater History.” *Black Performance Theory*, edited by Thomas DeFrantz and Anita Gonzalez, Duke University Press, 2014, pp. 87–98. (Mitchell, 2014).

Pavis, Patrice. *Dictionary of the Theatre: Terms, Concepts, and Analysis.* University of Toronto Press Inc., 1998. (Pavis, 1998).

Perkins, Kathy A. “The Impact of Lynching on the Art of African American Women.” *Strange Fruit: Plays on Lynching by American Women*. Edited by Kathy A. Perkins and Judith L. Stephens. Indiana University Press, 1998, pp. 15-20.

Polatin, Betsy. *The Actor’s Secret: Techniques for Transforming Habitual Patterns and Improving Performance.* North Atlantic Books, 2013. (Polatin, 2013).

Rayman, Noah. “Obama Election Transformed Racism?” *The Harvard Crimson*, 10, Dec. 2008. http://www.thecrimson.com/article/2008/12/10/obama-election transformed-racism-barack-obamas/ (Rayman, 2008).

Salisbury, Stephan. “A Life Transformed.” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 31, Jan. 1988.

Schoenberg, Nara. “Outing Jane Addams.” Tribunedigital-Chicagotribune, Chicago Tribute, 6 Feb. 2007, articles.chicagotribune.com/2007-02-06/features/0702060273_1_hull-house-mary-rozet-smith-lesbian. (Schoenberg, 2007).

Smith, Sid. “Delta Dawn: Play Captures One Woman's Struggle for Rights.” *Chicago Tribune*, 14 Jan. 1990. (Smith, 1990).

“Spirit.” Merriam-Webster.com. Merriam-Webster, n.d. Web. 30 Mar. 2018. (Merriam-Webster, 2018).

Spolin, Viola. *Improvisation for the Theatre*, Northwestern University Press, 1999. (Spolin, 1999).

Steinhauer, Kimberly, et al. *The Estill Voice Model: Theory & Translation.* Estill Voice International, 2017. (Estill, 2017).

"Susan B. Anthony House." Susan B. Anthony House: Her Story, 1 Jan. 2013, susanbanthonyhouse.org/her-story/biography.php. (SBAH, 2013).

Wangh, Stephen. *An Acrobat of the Heart: A Physical Approach to Acting Inspired by the work of Jerzy Grotowski.* Vintage Books, 2000. (Wangh, 2000).

Wells, Ida B., and Alfreda M. Duster. *Crusade for Justice: The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells.* Univ. of Chicago Press, 1970. (Duster, 1970).

Wells, Ida B. "Chesapeake, Ohio & Southwestern Railroad Company v Ida B. Wells." Trials and Triumphs, Digital Public Library of America, 1 Jan. 1885, cdm15838.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/ref/collection/p15838coll7/id/283. (Wells, DPLA, 1885).

University of Louisville Theatre Arts Department, Faculty and Staff. "History and Mission of Theatre Arts." Louisville.edu/Theatrearts, University of Louisville, 1923, louisville.edu/theatrearts/about/history. (University of Louisville Theatre Arts).

APPENDIX A

APPROACH TO LEARNING LINES (pg. 58)

I can be off book for a monologue in less than an hour if I focus my time efficiently. I write down all of my tines at least three times. I divide my lines into sections of thought that are usually no more than three lines long. Next, I read a section once or twice and then write it down from memory. After I write it down once, I go back to look at the line to see if I missed or changed any of the words, and then I write it down again from memory with focus on correcting the previous mistakes. Once I confirm that the line was written correctly, I write it down a third time for security. Then I will say the line once or twice to myself or out loud, checking back in with my handwritten notes between attempts for accuracy. After I have completed this for one section of lines, I repeat it for the next section of lines and then combine the two sections by both writing them and saying them together.

It is a tedious process but it has always worked. I know that as long as I set aside adequate time to do this I can learn my lines quickly. I spent the entirety of Labor Day weekend getting off book for this show and filled an entire notebook with my writing. I knew it had to be done quickly and I regrettably did not have enough time to learn the lines before we began the process. There have been times when I have tried other

methods such as recording my lines or simply repeating them several times. However, I have learned that I am more of a visual learner than one who learns by hearing (unless we are talking about music). From experience, I know that it is important to look up the definition of words I do not know and to research references that are unfamiliar to me. It is impossible to communicate effectively if I do not know the meaning of what I am saying.

APPENDIX B

PRODUCTION PHOTOGRAPHS

Photography Credit: Bud Dorsey


CLEVELAND
PITTSB
BALTI
OMA
MEMPHIS
JACKSON

Photography Credit: Tom Fougerousse

APPENDIX C

PINTEREST BOARD PHOTOGRAPHS OF HISTORICAL FIGURES

Ida B. Wells' Iconic Portrait

"File:Ida B. Wells.jpg." *Wikimedia Commons, the free media repository*. 21 Apr 2015, 19:09 UTC. 12 Apr 2018, 01:52 https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?title=File:Ida_B._Wells.jpg&oldid=158305111>.

Susan B. Anthony

File: BE061463-P *History Channel.* 11 April 2018, 22:02 EST <https://www.history.com/topics/womens-history/women-who-fought-for-the-vote/pictures/suffrage-and-the-women-behind-it/susan-b-anthony-writing-at-a-desk>.

Jane Addams

File: Jane_Addams.

ChicagoLiteraryHoF.org © 2017 Chicago Literary Hall of Fame. 11April 2018 22:09 EST <https://chicagoliteraryhof.org/inductees/profile/jane-addams>.

Mary Church Terrell

"File:Mary church terrell.jpg." Wikimedia Commons, the free media repository. 26 Dec 2014, 23:09 UTC. 12 Apr 2018, 02:18 <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?title=File:Mary_church_terrell.jpg&oldid=144245140>.

CURRICULUM VITAE

NAME: Sidney Edwards

ADDRESS: PO Box 17591
Louisville KY, 40217

PHONE/ EMAIL: (252) 676-2332
sidney.edwards@louisville.edu

DOB: February 27, 1991

EDUCATION AND TRAINING:

MFA Performance
University of Louisville - Louisville, KY. 20015-2018
-Graduate training in acting, theater critique and analysis, and theater pedagogy

BFA Musical Theater
William Peace University (Peace College) - Raleigh, NC. 2009-2013
-Training in vocal performance and dance

AWARDS:
-The Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival (KCACTF) invited my thesis production, *Miss Ida B. Wells*, to the region IV festival. Winter 2018.
- Nomination by the KCACTF for an Irene Ryan Award, semi-finalist in the regional competition.

CERTIFICATIONS:
Graduate Certificate in African American Theater from the University of Louisville. 2018.
Basic Pass in Unarmed Stage Combat from the Society of American Fight Directors. 2012.

RESEARCH AND PUBLICATIONS:
Self-Executed Dramaturgy: A Journey with Miss Ida B. Wells. The University of Louisville 2018.

INTERNSHIP:
Historic Locust Grove (February 2017-July 2018)
First Person Interpreter—researched and developed a composite character to represent the enslaved community on the historic property.

COMMUNITY SERVICE:
Sponsored by the Kentucky Center for African American Heritage, I researched and wrote a one-woman play about Georgia Davis-Powers; the first African American woman in the Kentucky Senate.

TEACHING PHILOSOPHY:

My philosophy is that learning the craft of stage performance enhances all other areas of study because it teaches presentational skills, team building, and responsibility. It is accessible to all because it has no physical requirements, fostering a sensitivity for inclusion in the learning environment. I believe an acting class should be mandatory at some point in one's academic career. Above all, the craft of acting teaches us empathy. Without empathy we do not learn how to relate to one another. With it, we can work together to make the world a better place.

EXPERIENCE:

Graduate Teaching Assistant
University of Louisville - Louisville, KY
August-2015 – May 2018
Undergraduate Theater Courses
-Teaching undergraduate courses in acting and theater basics.
-Assisting faculty members with various theater related projects.

Courses and Descriptions:

Enjoyment of Theater (5 classes)

An introductory lecture course about theater's origins, its various forms, and its application to student's lives.

Acting for Non-Majors (2 classes)

A course focused on educating non-theater degree seeking students about presentation, communication, and ensemble building through theatre games and acting exercises.

Acting the Black Experience (Assisted one class, teaching one class Summer 2018)

A course exploring performance from an African-centered perspective with focus on performance during the Harlem Renaissance Era.

Instructor
Kentucky Shakespeare - Louisville, KY
Summer 2017, Summer 2018
Camp Shakespeare's Revelers (2 sessions)
-Instructed middle school aged students in Shakespearean text and performance.
-Directed and produced a short public performance

Instructor and Camp Manager
The Justice Theater Project - Raleigh, NC
Summer 2014 and 2015
Youth Summer Theater Camp
-Instructed a self-crafted course called *Creative Dramatics* for students K-12
-Taught students acting improvisation to strengthen their storytelling skills

Tour Actor and Director
Missoula Children's Theater - Missoula, MT
Winter 2014
Hansel and Gretel Touring Production
-Produced the show *Hansel and Gretel* with a new cast of K-12 students each week in towns across the Midwest and Northeast.
-Taught in class workshops on dance, imagination, makeup, and storytelling.
-Responsible for directing up to 52 students, marketing, set, lights, costumes, and sound, and finances.