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CONTEMPORARY BLACKFACE THEATRE: EXPLORING *SPLIT SECOND* FROM AN  
AUTHENTIC BLACK LENS TO COMBAT WHITE STEREOTYPES

By

Lamar Alonzo Hardy  
B.A., Winston-Salem State University 2019

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

Masters of Fine Arts in Theatre Arts

Department of Theatre Arts  
University of Louisville  
Louisville, Kentucky

May 2022

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A Thesis Approved on

April 8th, 2022

by the following Thesis Committee:

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Dr. Janna Segal

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Professor Rachel Carter

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Dr. Bradley Campbell

## DEDICATION

This thesis is to all the black actors who are struggling with performing contemporary minstrel shows. I see you, I hear you, and I love you. I got your back.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Janna Segal, Professor Sidney Edwards, Professor Rachel Carter, Dr. Bradley Campbell, Professor Andre Minkins, and Dr. Derick Virgil for the many conversations and dedication to helping me write my thesis. Thank you, Dr. Janna Segal, the head of my thesis committee, for reading every document that I sent during my thesis process. Thank you, Professor Sidney Edwards, for directing me in the Fall 2021 UofL production of *Split Second* and the long nights we spent on the phone talking about my thesis and career plans. I thank Professor Rachel Carter and Dr. Bradley Campbell for serving on my thesis committee. I thank Professor Andre Minkins, who was responsible for starting my career in acting during my time at Winston-Salem State University. Professor Andre Minkins served as a mentor and a friend during my thesis, and my life. Dr. Derick Virgil, one of the best mentors in my life, gave me more perspective on blackness and the ways I can define it for myself. I specifically want to thank my colleagues Jahi Bogard, Candace Spencer, and Brandi Threatt, for showing me different perspectives on life during my three years in the MFA in Performance program. Thank you to my wonderful mother, Gale Keisha Hardy, who is the moon and the sun in my life. I would be nothing without you. Thank you to the wonderful staff and my classmates at the University of Louisville Department of Theatre Arts. Without UofL Theatre Arts, I would not be able to see the gems that life has given me. UofL Theatre Arts showed me how to pull my own strings, and now I am my own puppet master.

## ABSTRACT

### CONTEMPORARY BLACKFACE THEATRE: EXPLORING *SPLIT SECOND* FROM AN AUTHENTIC BLACK LENS TO COMBAT WHITE STEREOTYPES

Lamar Hardy

April 8th, 2022

This MFA thesis defines Contemporary Blackface Theatre as exemplified in Dennis McIntyre's *Split Second*, which was produced in Fall 2021 by the Department of Theatre Arts at the University of Louisville. Cast as Val Johnson, I aimed to find the truth within a Black character created from the white playwright's limited perspective. In addition to an analysis of *Split Second*, my study of Contemporary Blackface Theatre examines the racist ideologies from F.M. Alexander's point of view on black people and how I create truthfulness in my *own* black body. I detail how I used the *Black Acting Methods: Critical Approaches* to create my own technique for approaching a white man's black character. This study empowers black actors to identify problems in contemporary theatre, how they may contribute to modern-day minstrelsy, and expresses the truth of *their* blackness.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
ABSTRACT	v
INTRODUCTION: WHAT I NEEDED TO INVESTIGATE	1
CHAPTER 1: CONTEMPORARY BLACKFACE THEATRE: THE CULTURAL MASK	8
CHAPTER 2: F.M. ALEXANDER TECHNIQUE VS. <i>BLACK ACTING METHODS</i>	33
CHAPTER 3: <i>SPLIT SECOND</i> CONTEMPORARY BLACKFACE THEATRE	48
CHAPTER 4: TECHNIQUES USED TO PERFORM <i>SPLIT SECOND</i>	57
CONCLUSION: WE CAN STILL FIGHT IT	79
REFERENCES	83
CURRICULUM VITAE	86

## INTRODUCTION:

### WHAT I NEEDED TO INVESTIGATE

This thesis exposes that Contemporary Blackface Theatre does exist in our society, and how black actors can cultivate methods that show *their* black experience. Contemporary Blackface Theatre, or C.B.T., is the white cultural mask placed on the black body that white-washes what it means to be “black” for black actors in various forms of theatre. C.B.T. includes but does not limit to the following: colorblind productions of Shakespeare’s plays from a white lens and Shakespeare’s characters that purport to represent a “black” character, the whitewashing in color-blind casting, voice/body, and acting techniques, and contemporary theatre that portrays “blackness” through a blackface lens. This thesis defines C.B.T. as exemplified in Dennis McIntyre’s *Split Second*, which was produced in Fall 2021 by the Department of Theatre Arts at the University of Louisville. *Split Second*, written by Dennis McIntyre, a white writer, represents a generic black experience. This is done by driving the story only about violence between white and black people and depicting an angry black man in the main protagonist, Val Johnson. The objective of this study is not only to prove that C.B.T. is a cultural mask over the black body but also to depict what our white counterparts see as “the black experience.” That experience in most Black plays produced is that black people can only exist on stage by experiencing oppression from their white counterparts. The theory is that C.B.T. does not only affect the narrative of a story but how a black character is presented on the stage through stereotypes.

This thesis offers an acting technique to help combat Contemporary Blackface Theatre. I had to create methods and exercises that could bring the truth of my black

experience to Val Johnson's character in order to make an authentic black experience for the stage. While using my performance in *Split Second*, I dismantled a white-wash black character by creating my own method. Black actors will understand that *their* black experience can be shown on stage but they first must identify the problem, re-tool the problem to their benefit, and then they will receive liberation by representing *their* truth.

During my second year of my MFA, I noticed that I had created a character of myself. When the fall semester started in 2020, it was the peak of COVID with online classes and also the recent Breonna Taylor trial and verdict in Louisville, Kentucky. I was at my peak of not being comfortable from Breonna Taylor's death, and my own personal issues from the lack of fatherhood in my life as well. In Graduate Movement III, taught by Dr. J. Adriane Calvano, we were asked during a class session to do a basic lie down on our yoga mats and to inhale and exhale. Dr. Calvano reminded us to let the ground carry our weight and let go. Every inhale and exhale I took, I just cried laying on the mat. I started to realize that I have created a certain image of myself. At that moment, I realized why I was carrying my weight for so long in my life. I was scared that no one could fully support me. Fear is the biggest weakness I had as an actor. My fear of death and lack of leadership from my father made me become a liar in the work of acting. All these questions poured on me at that moment, and I could not carry them around anymore. That character was a way to protect me because of the abandonment issues I had from my father and my insecurities as a black male in America. I presented this character because I thought it would make me "strong" and "resilient" to the personal problems I had in my life. From this mold of myself, I literally carried weight and hid the personal issues in my life that limit my mental and truthful identity to not only acting, but to myself. I had

decided that it was enough of me trying to be a “black man”, that I was not. I had discovered that my “black experience” was constructed, and polished to other experiences that were put on my body, and what I thought I “should” be as a black male.

I came to my MFA thinking I lacked truth in myself, but there were gems already inside of me that I had to investigate. This revelation taught me that I needed to find out about *my* own black experience. This study is to show that Contemporary Blackface Theatre exists and to offer acting techniques that help activate one’s own black experience should one be cast as a white-washed character. The goal of this study is to not only prove that C.B.T. exists, but black actors should be creating tools to activate *their* true blackness and not depend on a white lens to tell them what “blackness” is.

In Chapter One, I argue that Contemporary Blackface Theatre is created from blackface minstrelsy. C.B.T. is problematic to the black actor, as it limits a true black experience from the actor's eyes in favor of whiteness's eyes. The idea was created in Advance African American History class, taught by Professor Sidney Monroe Williams when I discovered that blackface still affects how people see black people in America. I prove that C.B.T. exists with examples from plays such as the *Harlem Duet* and *American Son*, to identify that blackface is not only a physical form that masks black bodies but also a mental form that asks the black actor to conform to standards for employment. I also use *Blacks on Stage: Are We Still Replicating Stereotypes from the Legacy of Minstrelsy*, *Black Politics but not Black People: Rethinking the Social and “Racial” History of Early Minstrelsy*, and *Inside The Minstrel Mask: Readings in Nineteenth Century Blackface Minstrelsy*. All three books explain how black people are seen through blackface and white eyes on stage from the 19th century and into

contemporary life. I used Justin Emeka's critiques of Shakespeare and color-blind casting from *Black Acting Methods: Critical Approaches*, addressing the problems that arise when black actors are cast in white work. If C.B.T. is not examined, the black actor will only be exposed to what their white counterparts see as “black” rather than what they see themselves.

In Chapter Two, I argue that the racist ideologies informing F.M. Alexander's teachings are problematic to the Alexander Technique if not discussed with a black actor first. This lack of conversation with a black actor can potentially be Contemporary Blackface Theatre. I learned the Alexander Technique during my time at the University of Louisville MFA program by Professor Rachel Carter. *Man's Supreme Inheritance*, written by F.M. Alexander in 1910, outlined the founding principles of posture, physicality, the consciousness of guidance in movement, and habit (8). Alexander's racist text equates black people with being animals and distinguishes Primitive Nations from Civilized Nations (99). From the knowledge I gained from *Man's Supreme Inheritance*, I conducted an interview with Professor Carter because I did not feel valued from *Man's Supreme Inheritance*, and I wanted to see how the modern Alexander Technique has evolved. Professor Carter and I discussed how there should be steps in place to talk about F.M. Alexander's racist ideologies about black people, and to implement more exercises that give the black actor value within themselves. I also list steps that black actors and a practitioner can use to examine racist ideologies from a creator and see how the technique has or has not evolved.

Chapter Two also examines “The Hendricks Method” from the *Black Acting Methods: Critical Approaches*, a source I used to find answers for my black experience.

The essay describes Freddie Hendricks's method, which is divided into three components: Devising, Spirituality, and Hyper-ego (10). Using Devising and Hyper-ego, I then created the "depths of vulnerability" technique and "words of affirmation" for my own practice. The depths of vulnerability allows me to compare and contrast myself from the character, while using my own black experience to give a character humanity. This evaluation allows me to see the similarities and differences more so I can see what I need to gain more research for the character's truth. The words of affirmation exercise is a chart using the words "can" and "can't" to see how I think about my black experience and to gain acceptance for who I am. *Black Acting Methods: Critical Approaches* showed me that as an actor I do not have to rely on a white acting technique to reflect my body, but I can create one from *my* own black experience.

In Chapter Three, I argue how *Split Second* is a type of Contemporary Blackface Theatre and ways the black actor can investigate a play, and identify the blackface structure of a story. *Split Second* was my thesis performance for Fall 2021 and was directed by Professor Sidney Edwards. *Split Second* tells a story about a black cop, Val Johnson, who kills an unarmed white man, William H. Wills. The issue in the writing of *Split Second* is that Val Johnson's "black experience" relies on the fact that he was oppressed by white bodies his whole life. Dennis McIntyre purports the idea that race is a problem in America, but that is not the only issue in Val Johnson's story. I prove that *Split Second* is a C.B.T. by using the *Chicago Tribune* interview that Dennis McIntyre has as he states he created the story briefly off of one interaction he saw between a black officer and a white man (1986). From this interaction, McIntyre creates a story about how "blackness" is shown on stage and can only exist in the presence of oppression from the

white body. I use Suzan Lori-Parks *From New Elements of Style* to explain the construction of *Split Second* blackface image of the “black experience.” *From New Elements of Style* argues that in most plays that deal with black presence, there is also a white presence that is shown through oppression. That black drama is equal to oppression and this is the same formula that is used by Dennis McIntyre. McIntyre's *Split Second* is Contemporary Blackface Theatre because the story of “blackness” on stage is characterized by what whiteness sees as “black” like blackface minstrelsy.

In Chapter Four, I explain how the black actor must create techniques that will activate *their* blackness on the stage when confronted with a white-washed blackface character. I detail my preparation for the character Val Johnson in *Split Second* to combat the angry black man caricature that McIntyre wrote. I utilized the depths of vulnerability and words of affirmation exercise to activate an authentic black experience that was not written for Val Johnson's character in *Split Second*. I use books such as Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen's *Sensing, Feeling Action*, and *My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies*, written by Resmaa Menakem, as tools to activate Val's humanity. I close out the section explaining that from creating the depths of vulnerability and words of affirmation, I was able to forgive my father and create security within myself in society for my blackness.

It can be challenging to create methods for a white base piece like *Split Second*. It can also be difficult when you have to expose the teaching that is taught to you to activate blackness in your own experience. It is vital to my research that I identify Contemporary Blackface Theatre to gain liberation in my own blackness that whiteness can never do. I hope I offer black actors tools to investigate the gems within themselves and not rely on

the fallacy of what it means to be “black” from white writers, white acting methods, white theatre, and their white counterparts. That black actors reading this book will motivate and create what is needed from *their* acting and *their* truth.

CHAPTER 1:  
CONTEMPORARY BLACKFACE THEATRE: THE CULTURAL MASK

“he'll tell you he done ate your black ass and if you please I'm full up with you . . . so go on and get off the plate and let me eat something else..”-Toledo, *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, (Wilson 50)

As a black actor, I realized during my third year of graduate school that the “black experience” is created from blackface minstrelsy. I made this discovery while taking Advanced African American Theatre, a Fall 2021 class taught by Professor Sidney Monroe Williams. The class teaches students about black theatre from the early 1860s to the present. One assignment asked us to write an essay about what we thought black theatre was before taking the class, and how our ideas have changed since then. I initially defined black theatre as written for black people, and about *the* black experience. This expression universalizes *all* black life and experiences. No one can define the “black experience”, yet many theatres plays with black characters represent a universalized black experience. Eurocentric theatre often claimed that black life is all the same. I questioned, “Am I performing and conforming to what it means to be black and male, and how can I combat this?”

Blackness in America is often seen through the lens of white Americans, and that affects how black bodies are seen on stage. In Toni Morrison’s *Playing in the Dark Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, she argues that blackness is seen through what white Americans think it means to be “black.” Morrison elaborates that black people suffer from assumptions and misreading that are through Eurocentric eyes (6). I believe that the “black experience” started during the early days of minstrel shows, and blackface.

Contemporary Blackface Theatre, or C.B.T., is the white cultural mask placed on the black body that white-washes what it means to be “black” for black actors in various forms of theatre. C.B.T. includes but does not limit to the following: colorblind productions of Shakespeare’s plays from a white lens and Shakespeare’s characters that purport to represent a “black” character, the whitewashing in color-blind casting, voice/body, and acting techniques, and contemporary theatre that portrays “blackness” through a blackface lens. Like blackface minstrelsy, these different forms of white theatre paint black characters, black bodies, and the “black experience” from *their* viewpoint of what it means to be black.

Without understanding Contemporary Blackface Theatre, black actors may unconsciously perform minstrelsy and thereby conform to white conceptions of “black life.” In this chapter, I explain the history of blackface. As Eric Lott argues in *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class*, blackface minstrelsy embodied the blackening of black people, and that blackface is part of a black character’s identity. I use *Black Politics but not Black People: Rethinking the Social and “Racial” History of Early Minstrelsy*, and *Inside The Minstrel Mask: Readings in Nineteenth-Century Blackface Minstrelsy* to explain how blackface minstrelsy impacted modern-day theatre and the minstrelsy that black people have created as well. Djanet Sears’ *Harlem Duet* offers a theatrical examination of the cultural mask placed on the black body. I use Christopher Demos-Brown’s *American Son* as an example of Contemporary Blackface Theatre. Lastly, I discuss colorblind productions of Shakespeare’s plays from a white lens and Shakespeare’s characters that purport to represent a “black” character, can be a form of Contemporary Blackface Theatre. Justin Emeka’s essay, “Seeing Shakespeare

through brown eyes”, in the *Black Acting Methods: Critical Approaches* discusses his critiques of color-blind casting when it deals with black actors and his own experience in the production of *Our Town*. I want to find out how Contemporary Blackface Theatre is destructive to black actors in order to help black actors understand that black characters in C.B.T are created from blackface. So black actors will understand how Contemporary Blackface Theatre is part of the theatre today and has influenced their performances and their lives.

### **Let’s get down to it: Blackface**

“Blackness” in America is constructed from the fallacy of what it means to be black from blackface. Blackface started during the 19th century and is named after the theatrical makeup worn by the predominantly white male performers. Douglas A. Jones Jr argues in *Black Politics but not Black People: Rethinking the Social and “Racial” History of Early Minstrelsy*, that blackface minstrelsy became the identity for black bodies, and became part of American pop culture for “blackness” in America (34). Minstrel shows were used as a way for the white working-class to position themselves as a mistreated yet singular community (32). Jones explains that from blackface actors and audiences are created in a racial structure of white, “black”, and black (35). Jones defines this racial structure because whites performed in blackface, thus the words did not come out of black mouths before a white audience (35). The gestural and linguistic contortions that define early blackface minstrelsy show the exaggeration of the black body. Then the structure created the white performer in blackface that presented a “black” body through their white lens. This form of white, “black”, and black can be seen today in Contemporary Blackface Theatre as well. Jones exposes that the minstrel stage was

central in the process of developing “blackness.” Jones defines “blackness” as “equivocation, “coercion”, and “antagonism”. “Blackness” was created through the white lens to avoid the truth for the black body, and not allow black people to be part of their stories.

I argue that this same “blackness” can be seen in theatre today as a way for whiteness to benefit off black stereotypes. In some cases, blackface was performed by predominantly white men because they were amazed by black people. Jones uses an article from *The Baltimore Sun* that details Thomas Dartmouth Rice's experience in performing blackface. Rice claims he accurately depicts black people on slave plantations after an 1837 curtain speech in Baltimore. Thomas D. Rice is considered the “Father of Minstrelsy”. Rice is known for his singing and dancing in minstrel shows. Rice also created the “Jim Crow” from the black slaves in the southern states of America. Jones quotes Rice in *The Baltimore Sun*:

Before I went to England, the British people were excessively ignorant regarding “our free institutions.” (hear) They were under the impression that negroes were naturally equal to the whites, and their degraded condition was consequent entirely upon our “institutions”; but *I effectually proved that negroes are essentially an inferior species of the human family, and they ought to remain slaves*. You will never hear again of an abolitionist crossing the Atlantic to interfere in our affairs. I have studied the negro character upon the southern plantations. The British people acknowledge that I was fair representative of the great body of our slaves. (34)

Thomas D. Rice ignorantly explains that he is fit to portray and manipulate the black body on the stage that the white working-class wanted to achieve. Rice argues that black people are an “inferior species” and they “ought to remain slaves.” Rice also applauds himself for his blackface depictions because England has deemed him as a “fair representative” of black people in America. Rice points out how no “abolitionist crossing the Atlantic” will interfere in his ideas of “blackness” because he has shown black people in their “true” nature as they should “remain slaves.” This ignorant evaluation of how “blackness” is shown on the stage is the same ignorance that is portrayed in Contemporary Blackface Theatre. How a white man can show the “truth” of a black body to their own likeness is the “blackness” that Jones explains was created for the black identity. Because of Rice’s high praise of blackface and popularity, and him creating the “Jim Crow”, black people were only seen as inferior to their white counterparts.

Blackface minstrelsy created a double consciousness for black actors portraying a black characters. *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrel and the American Working Class*, written by Eric Lott, argues that blackface contributed to the political struggles leading up to the Civil War. Chapter One of the book, “Blackface and Blackness: The Minstrel Show in America”, Lott argues that blackness is used as an exhibition of the black body (37). Lott uses Frederick Douglas *North Star*, as Frederick writes his thoughts on blackface. Frederick Douglas explains that blackface is “the filthy scum of white society, who have stolen from us a complexion denied to them by nature, in which to make money and pander to the corrupt taste of their white fellow citizens” (15). Like Jones explains in the article above, the white working-class benefit from blackface performances. Frederick Douglas explains how blackface is a tool to show black people

as “the filthy scum of white society”, and that white people use blackface to profit from their stereotype of “blackness.” Douglas argues how blackface dehumanizes black people and black people are left to go back to a blackface identity because of the loss of *their* own identity :

Partly from a love of music, and partly from curiosity to see persons of color exaggerating the peculiarities of their race, we were induced last evening to hear these Serenades [In Rochester, New York]. The Company is said to be composed entirely of colored people, and it may be so. We observed, however, that they, too, had recourse to burnt cork and lamp black, the better to express their characters, and produced uniformity of complexion. (37)

What Lott and Douglas both argue is that blackface disguises “blackness” as what blackness is *said* to be rather than what blackness *can* be. Frederick Douglas is describing a performance in which he was told that the performance would be all black people. What Douglas saw was a double consciousness of what it means to play a black character. Lott says: “Douglas inverts the racist logic of minstrelsy and locates its actual function of staging racial categories, boundaries, and types even when these possessed little that a black man could recognize as “authentic” (37). Lott highlights that the “racial categories” and “boundaries” created limitations for a black actor to create or see themselves as authentic. This quote connects to Jones's theory that blackface theatre was used to create the racial structure of white, “black”, and black (35). Blackface became part of the black identity, and when blacks are asked to perform, they still play to stereotypes because they have never defined their own blackness. Because blackface is seen as the new race, black people are imagined as not knowing how to authentically create a black experience.

Blackface has still transcended into contemporary culture today. *Inside The Minstrel Mask: Readings in Nineteenth-Century Blackface Minstrelsy*, edited by Annemarie Bean, argues that blackface shaped society's depictions of black people. In the essay, "Ebery Time I Wheel About I Jump Jim Crow: Cycles of Minstrel Transgression from Cool White to Vanilla Ice", written by W.T. Lhamon Jr, argues how modern black people will make their own minstrelsy through stereotypes. Lhamon says: "whites playing blacks at being black and blacks playing at being black, whites have continually redrawn the longest lasting and the most expressive meeting ground in American life" (281). Jones shared similar ideas with Lhamon in that Jones believed that blackface was the central stage in creating "blackness" (35). White people have spent so much time playing black people, and black people not playing themselves. Black people sometimes put on a cultural mask for their "blackness" which is the same mask used for blackface that whites created. Lhamon argues that Black youths play race roles professionally without blackface but with inverse implications (282). Lhamon's analysis of blackface and modern culture is reflective of blackface from the 19th century:

And perhaps the best example during that movement was Public Enemy's video "Can't Trust It", with its multiple narratives with its same actors in varying historical periods swapping foreground and background, proceeding simultaneously through violence, and rape, betrayal and complicity, slavery and industrial factory, confrontation and masked evasion. "Yo! MTV Raps" were to continue in high visibility, when then we might draw a novel conclusion. Black culture will have persisted, rising within minstrelsy and regaining moot, root images. (283)

Lhamon points out that blacks in modern culture will make their own minstrelsy. Lhamon argues that black people will manipulate their own self-identification to “fit” into society. Those images are “slavery”, “rape”, and “betrayal”. All of these descriptions are the same ideas that whites placed on blacks to remind black people they are inferior to their white counterparts. This same device is used in Dennis McIntyre’s play *Split Second* and many other Contemporary Blackface Theatre plays. That device is the playwright makes their own ideas for the black body, and benefits from the oppression of the black body on the stage. McIntyre’s idea of “blackness” is that “blackness” exists only from oppression from the white body. McIntyre stresses that the “black experience” is in response to the white ruling class like blackface minstrelsy. It will take the black actor to understand that C.B.T.'s play are destructive to their “blackness” because “blackness” is defined from another lens other than the black actor.

### **Blackface and Shakespeare**

The process of producing Shakespeare’s plays from a non-white character, like *Othello*, can be Contemporary Blackface Theatre if the work is crafted from a white lens for what it means to be “black.” William Shakespeare is produced around the world. Shakespeare is usually taught in most English-language acting classes, as it is “fundamental” acting work. The problem I always had with Shakespeare is that every time I saw a production of a Shakespearean play, the majority of the cast is white. When I saw Shakespeare commercials, billboards, flyers, or advertisements, all I saw was white, white, white, and yes, more white. When Shakespeare's work was written, his work was performed by white men only. Now Shakespeare is produced all around the world and we see different ethnic groups and identities in these roles. The issue is when black actors are

cast in a Shakespeare role, they sometimes are cast to show a white character and not their blackness.

For a time in history, black people could not perform in Shakespeare, or even Shakespeare's black characters. Ira Aldridge is the first known black actor to perform the role of Othello in Europe, Shakespeare's most famous black character ("Metabolism"). In 1942, 100 years later, Paul Robeson would be the first black actor to perform the role of Othello in America ("Metabolism"). But once again, the production of *Othello* was blackface for film in 1965. The famous blackface was portrayed by white actor Laurence Olivier ("Metabolism").

The first step to combat a potentially Contemporary Blackface Shakespearean character for the black actor is to choose if this Shakespeare character can be represented in the black actor's experience. Shakespeare's *Othello* is too much of a problematic play for a black actor to portray. *The Blackface Bard: Returning to Shakespeare Leaving Him?* by Ayanna Thompson, argues how Shakespeare's characterization of Othello still reflects blackface. Thompson explains how *Othello* is problematic for black actors to portray, and how scholars during the 1990s believed blackface should be used for *Othello* productions. Thompson cites Sheila Rose Bland, a freelance actor, and director, to comment on how there should be a "real" black actor in the modern performances of *Othello*:

blackface Othello would be seen by the audience, both white and alike, as "other"-an outsider-a caricature. This would alienate and cause discomfort to the audience. By casting "real" blacks to play...Shakespeare's original intent writing in *Othello* may well have been cloaked...To see an actual black man kissing an

actual white woman on stage is powerful image-but one that misrepresents an even more powerful image on stage intended by Shakespeare: to see a white man blackface kiss a white man in woman's clothing. (438)

Bland argues that a "real" black actor should be used for *Othello*. Bland also believes that Shakespeare's intent to write *Othello* is to show a message that love can be found in different races. The issue with Bland's statement is that she says by casting "real blacks" to play Othello. I do not believe there is a way to say a black actor is "real" or not for the part of Othello. There is no way to say that this black actor is "real" enough to play this white-washed character. This idea of a "real" and "black" actor should play Othello can also be seen in the character Desdemona. When *Othello* was first written, Desdemona was played by a young white male actor. In that case, an adult woman would be playing Desdemona through what it means to be "female" from a man's lens. Also, Bland says that "to see an actual black man kissing an actual white woman on stage is a powerful image." I would argue that the only thing powerful about seeing a black man kiss a white woman is that it is entertaining to the white audience. To see this black man be in love with a white woman is amusing for the audience to see because what it means to be "black" or "real" still remains through the eyes of whiteness.

*Othello* is problematic for black actors to portray because there is the fear of putting on a white cultural mask to play the part. There is a risk of playing racial stereotypes to be "black" on the stage. In the story *Othello*, it is easy for a black actor to be seen as an angry black man. This stereotype hinders the black male actor's experience to find the character from *their* black experience. Thompson uses Hugh Quarshie's quote, a black British actor, who made a similar statement about blackface as well:

If a black actor plays Othello does he not risk making racial stereotypes seem legitimate and even true? When a black actor plays a role written for a white actor in black make-up and for predominantly white audience, does he not encourage the white-way, or rather the wrong way of looking at black men....Of all parts in the canon, perhaps Othello is the one which should most definitely not played by a black actor. (438)

Quarshie exposes how a black actor playing Othello “risk making racial stereotypes” because the character still exists through the lens of whiteness. From this analysis, the black actor can choose not to perform Othello as it represents the idea of a “black” man from a white man's point of view. There is also the conflicting thought about encouraging the “white-way” when approaching Othello’s character. I believe to combat this there needs to be a discussion on how the message of the play will be shown. To go against the “racial stereotypes” there must be a discussion with the black actor about how he feels playing Othello and what triggers come up. This framework can also be used for women in Othello as well. As the adult female actor, who plays Desdemona, how does she feel to represent a woman from a young white man's body? The honesty of this discussion will allow the actors to use *their* experience rather than combating the false experience that can be created during the process of *Othello* and other Shakespeare plays.

### **Sears’s *Harlem Duet***

The black actor must be able to explore that modern-day minstrel does exist when being cast for certain C.B.T. characters. Djanet Sears’s *Harlem Duet* explores how the blackface cultural mask is passed down to black bodies and suggests that blacks must

make a choice to put the mask on or not. *Harlem Duet* tells a modern adaptation of the play *Othello* from Othello's life before he meets Desdemona....he story unfolds in three different time periods: the 1860's, 1928, and present-day Harlem, New York. Billie, a young graduate student in Harlem, deals with her husband Othello leaving her for a white woman, Mona. The play shows how Billie and Othello's relationship is slowly torn apart by racial tension in the United States. In this section, I will focus on the character He in *Harlem Duet*. I explore the character's downward spiral to conforming to white standards and eventually conforming to blackface in order to be "seen" in society. The character does this by literally putting on whiteface to be seen in a character, and by his white peers. This focus will expand on why black actors are still confronted to put on a cultural mask to be seen in today's society. This subsection expands on how the black actor will confront the idea of either their "blackness" or a blackface lens to portray a character.

He character in *Harlem Duet* is a product of whiteness when he does not realize he is performing and conforming to be seen. Act 2, Scene 6, She, Billie, is shaving He, Othello. They discuss how his white lover, Mona, is giving him the opportunity to play Pericles, Prince of Tyre, in Shakespeare's *Pericles*. At this moment He does not see that him considering playing a character in blackface is conforming to white ideas. In the text, He explains how he is "an actor" and needs to do this work "for his soul" (Act 2 Scene 6). The character He is an example of a black actor conforming to white standards to be "seen" and approved is like blackface minstrelsy. He unconsciously does not realize that he is reaching standards of what "blackness" looks like for the stage through whiteness:

HE: (*referring to the handkerchief.*) White, red, black, green, indigo... What difference does it make? That makes no sense...makes no difference. "If virtue no

delighted beauty lacks, Your son-in-law is far more fair than black. “ Far more fair than black”. I want...I need to do this..For my soul. I am an actor. I-

SHE: (*Kindly.*) A minstrel. A black minstrel...

(*He places the towel on the counter beside the toiletries*)

HE: It's paid my way.

(*She caresses the towel.*)

SHE: Stay, my sable warrior...

(*Her hand stumbles upon the razor.*)

HE: I'll not die in black-face to pay the rent. I am Ira Aldridge stock. I am a classical man. I long to play the Scottish king. The prince of Denmark. “The slings and arrows of outrageous...” Or...Or... “There's a divinity that shapes our ends, Rough-hew them how we will”...Those words...I love those words. They give me life. Mona sees my gift. She's cast me as the prince of Tyre. She's breathed new life into a barren dream. She...She...She has serene calmness about her. That smile...I bet they named her Mona because even at birth, she had that constant half-smile, like the Mona Lisa. Skin as smooth as monumental alabaster...As warm as snow velvet. (Act 2, Scene 6)

He explains that he does want to be in the show that Mona has cast him in, but not the price of playing the role in blackface. The problem with Othello's logic is when he recites the line from *Hamlet*, “The slings and arrows of outrageous...” Or...Or... “There's a divinity that shapes our ends, Rough-hew them how we will.” Hamlet is referring to how he slipped into Rosencrantz Guildenstern's cabin in search of his packet. Hamlet explains that the act was in rashness but may turn out to be part of a divine plan for their good. He

is using that quote as if he does blackface; it may be used for good. He also explains that Mona “sees [his] gift” and how “she has serene calmness about her.” He continues and says how Mona is “Mona Lisa” and that her skin is “smooth as a monumental alabaster.” He appreciates how Mona “sees” him for what he thinks is his talent in acting. He praises Mona's appearance of her whiteness and she is “warm as velvet snow.” He is so white-washed in Mona's beauty that he does not see that she is the one using him to represent “blackness” in blackface. What is interesting about He's monologue is that he acknowledges there is a problem with him playing the role of Pericles, Prince of Tyre in blackface, but he does not see the issue that Mona is asking him to play the role as blackface. Her tries to explain to He that he will be practicing in black minstrelsy, but He is too stuck in his opportunity to perform.

The character He conforms to the standard to be seen through blackface. He does in fact put on blackface toward the end of the play because he feels that it is the only way that he can be “seen.” In Act 2, Scene 9, which is set in 1928 Harlem, He does put blackface on his skin. He is offered to play *Othello* in England, and during the scene, he is covering his face with black paint:

HE: It is more true, true, I have married her.

It is most...

It is most true; true, I have married her.

For known, but that I love the gentle Desdemona,

(She) questioned me the story of my life

From year to year-the battles, sieges, fortunes,

That I have passed. These things to hear

Would Desdemona seriously decline;  
But still, the house affairs would draw her thence,  
Which ever as she could with haste dispatch  
She'd come again, and with a greedy ear  
Devour up my discourse. Which I, observing,  
Took once a pliant hour...  
And often did beguile her to her tears,  
When I did speak of some distressful stroke  
That my youth suffered...  
*(In the background we can hear a children's song. HE begins to add a white  
greasepaint to his lips, completing the mask of the minstrel.)*

...My story being done,  
She gave me my pains a world of sighs.  
She wished she had not heard it, yet she wished  
That heaven had made her such a man. She thanked me,  
She thanked me...  
She thanked me...  
She thanked me... (Act 2 Scene 9)

He has finally conformed to the white ideas that the only way he can be seen is blackface. During the monologue, He says "it is most true" which reflects that he has finally conformed to blackface. When He is saying the word "true", it reflects how it is true that He can finally be "seen." He continues and says: "it is most true, true, I have married her", which means how He has also married Desdemona. He defines "true" as this

blackface is his identity. In his monologue, “HE begins to add a white greasepaint to his lips, completing the mask of the minstrel.” He is practicing Othello’s speech to Desdemona’s father while He is putting on “white greasepaint,” which is the final part of Othello’s culture mask. At the end of the monologue, He repeats and says “She thanked me”, which means Desdemona thanked him for putting on this white mask to be seen for her liking. Because He was offered to play the part of *Othello*, the only way he believes he can be seen is in blackface. Othello in *Harlem Duet* is a product of the black body having to conform to be seen because blackface is all that Othello knows is part of his identity. Othello’s character in the *Harlem Duet* is a representation of the cultural mask that black people are asked to put on in order to be seen by the public. That cultural mask is to mentally and physically paint the black body over what whiteness sees as blackness.

### **Color-blind can reflect C.B.T.**

Color-blind casting can be detrimental to the black actor, and the ineffectiveness of color-blind casting can reflect Contemporary Blackface Theatre. Color-blind casting affects Shakespeare productions and other white productions if the core of color-blind casting is to see an actor of color portray a white experience. In today’s theatre, color-blind casting is used to bring more people of color to the stage. The problem with this process of color-blind casting is that the idea of bringing a person of color to white circumstances is not specific enough. Their bodies are not celebrated but rather the white character’s bodies they are portraying. Like blackface, if the color-blind casting is not used to see the actual black body on the stage, their black body will be molded to reflect what “blackness” is from a white lens. “Seeing Shakespeare through brown eyes”, by Justin Emeka, argues the shortcomings of color-blind casting or non-traditional casting.

This article supports color-conscious casting if the black actor can show *their* black experience to the audience. Emeka defines three directing approaches that are often used when casting a black actor in a part that was written for a white actor:

1. Attempt to create a race-less color-blind reality onstage where racial distinctions bare no biological or cultural significance. An example would be casting a White family with an Asian mother, a black father, and a white child.
2. Maintain the character is still White even though the actor is not. All theatre is a game of pretend so onstage anything is possible—a woman can be cast to play a man, a man can be cast to play a child; a Black person can be cast to play a White person.
3. Change the race of the character. That is, invite the audience to recognize the character as a Black person within the world of the play and incorporate this dynamic into their understanding of the story. (94)

From reading this, some will believe that these three possibilities can work in an ideal theatre. Emeka points out that all three approaches could be used if the world was equal, but the first two approaches are problematic. Emeka says: “In my experience, most times when a White director casts Black actors or other actors of color in White roles, they believe they are implementing color-blinding casting; when they are actually implementing the second approach creating a White culture experience using Black and Brown actors” (94). The problem with color-blind casting in America is that the identity of casting color-blind still comes from the lens of whiteness. Emeka says how color-blind casting “attempts to create a race-less color-blind reality”. This notion can be achievable in America if only the black actors can celebrate themselves on the stage, and not put on

a cultural mask to be seen as “black.” Emeka also says: “invite the audience to recognize the character as a Black person within the world of the play and incorporate this dynamic into their understanding of the story” (94). This means in order for color-blind casting to work for black actors and others of color, their identity must be shown and shared in the story. Emeka explains that in color-blind casting the “character is still white even though the actor is not.” Emeka argues that the issue is that in most color-blind productions, white culture is implemented on the black and brown actors. The black actor is used to meet a quota, and like blackface, to entertain the audience through a white perspective rather than the culture of the black actor.

### **Justin Emeka’s Experience in *Our Town***

When color-blind casting is not evaluated for the actor of color experience, their experience and identity will be washed away in favor of a C.B.T. production. Justin Emeka was cast in a production of *Our Town* that was geared toward color-blind casting but was a problematic production. The director used a multi-racial cast, and the theatre developed marketing promoting the multi-cultural production as a way to explore the complexities of what it really means to be an “American” (95). During Emeka's first day of rehearsals, he walked into a room filled with photos of the turn of the New England century. All the actors were asked to walk around the space and examine the photos. But there was one issue with the photos. They were all pictures of white people only. Emeka waited for the right time to ask the director how a multi-racial cast was going to approach a white production:

After we finished our first read-through, everyone left except the actors and the director. At that point, we sat around the table and the director began to talk more about his vision and the world of the play-never mentioning race at all. He invited

us to ask questions or share any comments. For about an hour, the other actors praised the writing, the profundity of the story, and what an extraordinary opportunity it was to be in the cast. Finally, I asked, “Does race exist in Grover’s Corners?” There was immediate silence in the room while the director hesitated. As a white man, he was genuinely confused by my inquiry. I continued “Do the characters of this town recognize or reflect cultural distinctions based on race?” The rest of the cast waited attentively in anticipation of his response. Still unsure, his tone became slightly defensive and he began talking proudly about how the race had nothing to do with any of his casting decisions—he only saw our tremendous talent as actors. (96)

What Emeka realized was that his black experience was washed away to show the white character's experience instead. Emeka states how the production only talked about the “vision” of the play and “never mentioning race at all”. The actors seem so amazed to be cast in *Our Town* that only Emeka saw how the race was not part of the play’s vision. Emeka explains that after he asked the director about race, the director “was genuinely confused” by the question. The director said how “race had nothing to do with any of his casting decisions”, which is the problem in the director's color-blind casting. Like blackface, this director's color-blind casting has this multi-race cast to reflect the white experience and what *he* believes their bodies of color should look like on the stage.

Emeka explains that the rehearsal process was a struggle for certain actors to shape a “cultural mask” (96). Emeka defines the cultural mask as “used to hide or minimize any ethnic flavor the actor naturally possessed” (96). This cultural mask is the same mask that has been passed down since blackface. There is no way that race can not

be discussed in America, and that is what the director of *Our Town* was trying to do. The director wanted to not approach race so the story of *Our Town* can still remain in whiteness with black performers. Emeka explained that the director told the actors to not talk with too much “drawl.” That the characters' laughs had to be “joyful”, and not too “loud” or “boisterous.” The walks had to be “loose” but not too “bouncy” (96). While the 19th-century blackface minstrelsy projected white constructions of blackness as true for black people and thereby tried to envelop or erase black people. Contemporary Blackface Theatre productions, like this *Our Town* production, projected white constructions of whiteness as true for all people and thereby sought to erase the actors' racial identity. To drop the makeup of a particular black actor's body to represent the mold of what whiteness sees as a “black” person. The only way to combat C.B.T. is for black actors to be able to immerse themselves in who they are. There also needs to be a vision where the audience can see the black actors as themselves and not living in white circumstances.

### ***American Son...Blackface Son***

*American Son*, written by Christopher Demos-Brown, is Contemporary Blackface Theatre because the story reflects the perspective of a “black experience” from the generic lens of “blackness.” *American Son* is about Kendra Ellis-Connor, and Scott Connor, an interracial couple, who waits at a Florida police station for news about their eighteen-year-old son. There are two moments in the script that are problematic to the *American Son* story. Those two issues are dialogue from Kendra's character and also Scott's character. Christopher Demos-Brown, who is a white writer, says “ It's about the American family” (Stevens 2018). Demos-Brown was moved to write about an interracial couple waiting for word about their missing teenager at a Florida police station by both the book *Between the World and Me* by Ta-Nehisi Coates and by “several incidents

involving African-American children being victimized by our system in various ways” (Stevens 2018). There is not a problem that a white writer is bringing awareness to black issues in America. It is all about how the story is crafted from his white perspective.

*American Son*'s representation of a black mother is stereotypical and falls into Contemporary Blackface Theatre. Kendra's dialogue from Act 1 Scene 1 is problematic for the character. The issue is how this black female character is handled in this particular situation. During the scene, Kendra and her husband, Scott, are discussing how Scott would never understand how a black mother would feel about her black son leaving home at night. The writer uses Kendra's monologue as a generic lens to what black mothers feel for their sons:

KENDRA. This time of night I always get agitated. You have no idea. I'm usually awake about this time. I don't know I've had a sleep filled night since that boy was born. Most nights...my eyes fire wide open out of a sound sleep. My heart is beating so hard I feel it throbbing in my ears. Always right bout this time...Too late to go back to sleep, too early to get on with the day. You just snoring away. Usually, I go stand in the door to his room and listen to him breathe. Sometimes I go in and touch the muscle on his neck or shoulder. Stand there and bullshit myself: "Don't worry Kendra-he's big and powerful. This world can't touch him." Till that nagging feeling comes back and I dwell on how fragile he is. Whatever nightmare it is just woke me up: Someone texting in an SUV...an errant punch in a bar fight..a ruptured appendix in some third-world country. Most mothers can sit there in the dark and get rational...go back to sleep. But sometimes...in my nightmares...I see nooses and crosses and White men with

Brylcreem crew-cuts. Last summer when Jamal wanted to drive with Jeff to Bonnaroo...I was...I just..(41)

From Kendra's monologue, she explains that as a black mother Scott will never understand what it means to be black and scared for her black child. Kendra says "you have no idea" and how Scott is "snoring away" at night while she is worried about her son. Kendra is saying that Scott will not understand because he is a white father and does not know what it means to be black. Kendra finishes her monologue and says "I see nooses and crosses and White men with Brylcreem crew-cuts." Kendra is explaining that Scott has the privilege of a carefree attitude in life because Kendra and her son do not have the same luxury because they are black. This monologue fails at describing what it means to be "black" and "female" from the playwright's view. This monologue is generic to the black female experience because of Demos-Brown's white lens. The problem within this story is that Kendra is saying her "black experience" only exists in the abuse and oppression from the white body. This notion is generic to how "black" life is portrayed in modern theatre. The other issue is that Kendra's "black experience" is being examined by the reception from her white husband. Kendra's husband, Scott, serves as the mirror for the offstage target audience as a way to explain that "black life" is affected by white oppression only.

Demos-Brown's *American Son* is a C.B.T. play that benefits from black oppression. As Frederick Douglas said in his *North Star* speech: "he filthy scum of white society, who have stolen from us a complexion denied to them by nature, in which to make money and pander to the corrupt taste of their white fellow citizens" (15). Demos-Brown does this by creating "blackness" from the experience from one novel and other

stories that deal with the oppression from white bodies. There are not many details that explain how Demos-Brown wrote a black woman's dialogue other than the reading stories from Ta-Nehisi Coates *Between the World and Me*. Demos-Brown created Kendra's dialogue for feeling sympathy for a black woman's pain, rather than understanding the idea of *this* woman's black experience.

Demos-Brown writes dialogue for Scott's character that is insensitive to the black lives that were lost to police brutality. The scene continues as Stokes, the Lieutenant, explains that Kendra's and Scott's son was killed by police officers during the incident. Instead of Kendra saying "she can not breath", which shows the life of black lives being taken away from police brutality the line is given to her white husband:

STOKES. Either a stray shot or a ricochet...we don't know which yet...CSI is at the scene now...strikes Jamal Connor in the head killing him instantly.

KENDRA. No, no, no, no/no, no, no, no...(Continuing intermittently through lights out.)

STOKES. I am..terribly sorry for your loss. There will be a full inquiry. I'll give you a moment.

(LIEUTENANT STOKES exit.)

SCOTT. I can't breathe. I...I can't breathe. I can't breathe-

( Rapid lights out.) (74)

When Eric Garner was murdered, Garner's last words were "I can't breathe." Eric Garner said these words 11 times when multiple police officers were pinning him down. This phrase was captured on footage before Eric Garner's death and used for the BLM movement. Demos-Brown's choice for Scott's character to say "I can't breathe" is an

appropriation of the black body. The repetition of Scott's white body saying "I can't breathe" takes away the issue of Eric Garner saying those exact words when he is dying. Scott saying "I can't breathe" is C.B.T. because the white body is still speaking from the perspective of a black body. Yes, Scott's son, Jamal, was killed by police officers but it would make more sense for Kendra to say she can not breathe as a black woman. Demos-Brown was given the freedom to write a story dealing with the black situation, he should know the weight of a white character saying "I can't breathe." Demos-Brown says he wanted to write "an American story." The story is centered around what he believes he means to be "black" through his white lens. This culturally insensitive line takes away from the scene because this white character, Scott, does not know what it means to not breathe because the white perspective has never been televised as endangered like a black body.

Contemporary Blackface Theatre is alive in our country. This tradition has been passed down since blackface existed. Black identity is crafted from the white perspective and is asked for black people to act on such demands. We discovered that Contemporary Blackface Theatre can exist in the process of Shakespeare plays being created through a white lens, whitewashing color-blind casting, and white authored plays as a way to cast black actors but from a white perspective. Contemporary Blackface Theatre is used to take away the cultural perspective of a black body, and like blackface, put on a show that white people believe a black person "should" be.

To my black actors, you must take back your identity. This chapter explains how your identity was crafted from the whiteness of blackface, but the cycle can be broken. As a black actor, you must examine white acting techniques that are taught to you. In Chapter

Two, we will examine how white creators, when not questioned, will lead black actors into performing and conforming to C.B.T. when the race is not discussed first. Not examining a white practitioner's racist ideas is a type of C.B.T. because although the technique has evolved, the question of race remains. My black actors may have heard comments from their white practitioners that you are "not black enough" or "you are not angry enough." Black actors must understand their *own* experience and not rely on white techniques or a white lens.

CHAPTER 2:  
F.M. ALEXANDER TECHNIQUE VS *BLACK ACTING METHODS*

This chapter argues that F.M. Alexander's racist ideas potentially make the Alexander Technique Contemporary Blackface Theatre if race is not discussed with the black actor first. I contend that if Alexander's racism is not openly discussed with black actors or all BIPOC actors, Alexander's beliefs about black people serve to praise whiteness instead of celebrating the black actor. I was first exposed to the Alexander Techniques during my first year at the University of Louisville Theatre Arts Department's MFA program. My Alexander Professor, Rachel Carter, taught the Alexander Technique as a foundation for Graduate Voice II Spring 2020. Professor Carter stressed that the actor should have a 50/50 awareness, which is a tool that modern Alexander Technique practitioners teach today. The 50/50 awareness exercise comes from *The Actor's Secret Techniques for Transforming Habitual Patterns and Improving Performance*. Professor Carter stressed that actors should know themselves and their habits.

The actor understanding more about themselves and their habits allows the actor to do less and perform efficiently with less effort. I was able to understand my habits in that I walked with the lead of my head first and held weight in the lower half of my body. Recognizing these habits, I became more aware of my body and in return allowed me to stay connected and free the lower half of my body. Professor Carter explained that the Alexander Technique teaches the actor to do less and to perform with the thought in mind and then to do the action. The Alexander Technique did help me to see the use of

physical and vocal habits that I put in performances. I become aware of the line of dialogue before saying it, and attentive to doing less on stage.

During the Fall 2020 semester, Professor Carter informed my MFA class that F.M. Alexander was a racist. Professor Carter also told the class that we would not be reading F.M. Alexander's earlier books because of his racist comments toward people of color, and we would focus more on modern Alexander Technique practitioners. This information would have been shared with the MFA group that F.M. Alexander was a racist earlier in my first year of graduate school; however, Professor Carter was out on maternity leave. Some may ask after reading this section from Alexander's chapter: "If Alexander's work is based on racist ideologies for the black race, why should the work be taught to black actors"? That is a great question. When race is ignored in Alexander's teaching, the black body and skin of black actors are ignored in the process.

If a creator of a technique has racist ideas and is not discussed, this is a form of Contemporary Blackface Theatre. The technique may have evolved but the racist ideas remain the same and their depiction of "blackness" is shown rather than the black body speaking for themselves. In the first section of this chapter, I discuss a few of F.M. Alexander's racist quotes that are found in *Man's Supreme Inheritance*. From Alexander's racist ideas toward blacks, I did not feel valued in his work because his ideas do not reflect my body. In the second section, I discuss an interview that I had with Professor Rachel Carter as we discuss the problems with Alexander's ideas about race. From this conversation, I list steps that the black actor and a practitioner can use to evaluate voice/body and acting techniques and to show how the technique has or has not evolved from the racist ideas that the creator of the technique comes from. I used the term

“Experience Up”, so the black actor can celebrate their idea of blackness rather than the creator of the technique. Lastly, I will discuss how the essay from *Black Acting Methods: Critical Approaches*, on the Hendricks Method, helped me create choices to activate my black experience because I did not feel valued by F.M. Alexander's ideas toward black people. My objective is to create a framework for other black actors to question their own white techniques that may lay in racism and cause confusion for the black actor. This framework will allow the black actor to research, have a conversation with a practitioner, and create a method that ignites *their* blackness. So that black actors will then create a technique that better reflects their needs as an actor, and also create a framework to investigate predominantly white voice/body and acting techniques and the creators.

### ***Man's Supreme Inheritance***

F.M. Alexander's comments about black people directly connect to the caricatures of blackface minstrelsy, and his ideas about race must be discussed with the black actor before approaching the Alexander Technique. There are many reasons why racism in F.M. Alexander's ideas are not approachable for a black actor. For this reason, I began to do research on the teaching that F.M. Alexander studied. *Man's Supreme Inheritance*, F.M. Alexander's first book written in 1910, argues the foundation's principles are to use posture, body, conscious guidance of movement, and habit (8). *Man's Supreme Inheritance* is one of four books and F.M. Alexander's last book was published in 1941. In each book, Alexander was evolving and growing new ideas. And since his death in 1955, there have been many books and works that contribute to the evolution of the Alexander Technique.

F.M. Alexander's thoughts about black people are the same stereotypes that were created from blackface minstrelsy and must be discussed with the black actor before teaching the Alexander Technique. In part one of *Man's Supreme Inheritance*, Alexander talks about applied control consciousness. Alexander argues that applied control consciousness begins when someone is a child and must be on a conscious plane of coordination, reduction, and readjustment, which will establish a normal kinesthesia (44). Kinesthetic sense is the ability to perform the simplest task-sensing weight and thereby regulating the effort it takes to move physically. Alexander continues and says that abnormal conditions are controlled by sub-consciousness and that is through physical action (44). Alexander breaks down that the animal stage of evolution gradually moves in favor of the mental and says this about black people: "The controlling and guiding forces in savage four-footed animals and in the savage black races are practically the same; and this serves to show that from the evolutionary standpoint the mental progress of these races has not kept pace with their physical evolution from the plane of the savage animal to that of a savage human" (45). F.M. Alexander is making ideologies about the black body that he has no knowledge of. This misconception is the same device used for blackface minstrelsy. F.M. Alexander argues that the lives of black people, who he says are "savages", are no different from when they were savages as an animal. This idea of a "savage" is the same caricature that was created from blackface minstrelsy. That the black body will only "sing" and "dance" and does not have the mental ability to think. How F.M. Alexander is able to create his ideas of "blackness" and stereotype black people as "savage four-footed animals", and they have not "kept pace with their physical evolution". That black's sub-consciousness will only be from an animal and because

evolution happens from the physical, black's races will not grow beyond a savage mindset nor to civilized growth and development (45). Alexander continues his argument on how black people are a disappointing result of evolution:

The inadequate relative progress of the mental evolution of the black races as compared with that of their physical evolution, when considered in relation to their approximation to the savage animals, cannot be considered other than a most disappointing result. It surely does not furnish any convincing evidence that mankind is likely to advance adequately on the evolutionary plane in civilization by continuing to rely upon the original subconscious guidance and control. (45)

Alexander says that the black body's "mental evolution" and "physical evolution" comes to a disappointing result. Alexander says that the black race will have to rely on being controlled in order to receive guidance. This blackface statement is problematic and the black actor should know about Alexander's ideas on black people. If a conversation is not made, the black actor's identity is still created from whiteness, and the black actor never has the chance to define *their* own blackness.

**He has a racist quote. Let us erase it!**

Removing a racist quote from a creator's ideologies is a type of Contemporary Blackface because the black body is still not able to speak to *their* blackness. I expose racist comments toward blacks that were erased from the 1996 sixth edition of *Man's Supreme Inheritance* edited by Jean. O. Fischer. This exposure will show how the removal of a racist conversation from Alexander's text is the same when a discussion is not had about Alexander's racist attitudes toward blacks. In Chapter 8, "Evolutionary Standards and their Influence on the Crisis of 1914", Alexander explains the processes

adopted by different nations, how to gauge their different stages of evolution, and the possible growth and development of real individuals and national processes (97).

Alexander divides the nations into Primitive Nations and Civilized Nations (99). This quote comes from the 1996 edition:

The compelling forces were chiefly physical and subconscious. The very essentials of life depended almost entirely on brute forces. Daily experiences gave a keen edge to savage instincts and unbridled passions, to an automatic development which opposed the cultivation of the faculty of adaptability to new environments. Even the spheres of courage were limited, and when confronted with the unusual these peoples quaked like cowards and fled, panic-stricken from the unaccustomed...(99)

I add an ellipsis at the end of the quote because the book I have is from a newer edition that was written in 1996, and removes Alexander's racist comment toward the end. In *Man's Supreme Inheritance* 1918 copy reads: "Even the spheres of courage were limited, and when confronted with the unusual these people quaked like cowards, and fled panic-stricken, from the unaccustomed, as in the case of negroes in the Southern States of America when the men of Ku-Klux-Klan pursued them on horsebacks dressed in white" (161). F.M. Alexander compares black people to "quaked like cowards" when faced with "the unaccustomed." Alexander is missing that anybody not in the Klan, black or not, would run away from the KKK who is riding in on horses. Alexander includes black people in Primitive Nations because he sees black people as an inferior race, and explains why black people experience racism from their white counterparts because they are weak. Alexander uses the word "men" for the KKK and "them" for black people because he

does not see black people as people but rather animals. The removal of the last line from Alexander's initial quote is important to identify because Alexander's attitudes toward blacks are then written as he never said them. This full examination of F.M. Alexander's first thoughts need to be discussed with black actors so they can have a discussion about *their* race. Erasing F.M. Alexander's racist ideas about black people is deflecting from the problem that his original thoughts are based on racism. The dismissal of Alexander's racist attitudes toward blacks is the black paint smeared over the black actor. Alexander's ideas towards black people are the same stereotypes that were placed on black people during minstrel shows and blackface.

F.M. Alexander's thoughts on black people do not reflect his thoughts on "Civilized Nations", which I did not feel valued in his work after reading. Alexander's thoughts about Civilized Nations are different from Primitive Nations. At first reading, the difference between "primitive" and "civilized" showed me that my black body does not fit his ideology. Alexander describes the Civilized Nations as more physically and mentally competent than the Primitive Nations:

The compelling forces have become less and less physical and less subconscious than in the class of primitive nations, but the advance from the physical to the mental and from the subconscious to the conscious has not been adequate or sufficiently comprehensive to establish the mental and conscious principles as the chief compelling forces in the progress of the nation or even the individual. The essentials of life do not depend on brute force, and daily experiences become less and less associated with factors which make for the development of savage instincts and unbridled passion, or automatic development. (99)

Alexander connects black people to a Primitive Nation that needs to be controlled and depend on “brute force” to live in life. Black people's “savage” qualities make them accessible targets for racism because they are the weak race. Black people also rely on “physical” qualities and the inability to think and process on their own. Alexander argues that because black people are part of the Primitive Nation, and have “savage instincts” and “unbridled passion”, are animals and lack passion for further development in life. There is also no evidence that Alexander uses to talk about black people as part of Primitive Nations. Alexander is just saying things from his white beliefs. He imagines that Civilized Nations do not rely on “brute forces” to live in life and are “less physical and less subconscious” than Primitive Nations. The Civilized Nations advance from “physical” to “mental” strength.

F.M. Alexander's ideas about black people made me uncomfortable and I was lost about the Alexander Technique. I did not see how I could erase F.M. Alexander's name from the Alexander Technique even if Professor Carter does not teach F.M. Alexander's racist philosophy. Alexander's ideas about how nations are separated by Primitive Nations, an animal, and Civilized Nations, white people, show Alexander's Eurocentric thoughts on how black people are represented in America. Like blackface, where black people are seen as archetypes and caricatures, Alexander sees black people as nothing but animals and inferior to themselves. Alexander's whiteness is the black paint smeared over the black actor's body because it tells the black actor that you are an animal, and there is nothing you can do about it but be an animal. I needed to discuss this with Professor Carter because I did not see how F.M. Alexander's ideas about black people could not be discussed, and how the Alexander Technique evolved.

## **Rachel Carter and I Discuss Alexander**

To avoid Contemporary Blackface voice/body and acting techniques, there needs to be a discussion with the black actor and a practitioner when the work is problematic to racist comments from the creator. I asked Professor Carter about F.M. Alexander's racist comments toward black people in an interview. Professor Carter and I had a discussion about Alexander's ideas that brought clarity to me as a black actor. Professor Carter did not teach *Man's Supreme Inheritance* and used more modern Alexander Technique tools. Before our discussion, Professor Carter shared information from *NASTAT & AmSAT Resolution and AmSAT Statement on Diversity and Anti-Racism*. The American Society of Alexander Teacher's recognizes that F.M. Alexander's racist ideas disagree with the modern Alexander Technique.

The *AmSAT Statement on Diversity and Anti-Racism* explains that F.M. Alexander's thoughts from *Man's Supreme Inheritance* come during the time of "white supremacy" and "race culture"(1). The document elaborates on how F.M. Alexander's thoughts about black people are "pseudoscientific", and it is difficult to point out which "social evolutionary" theory that F.M. Alexander ascribes to (2). The Alexander Society created the "Member Resolution Adopted at 2021 AGM" in that they "resolve" and identify Alexander's racist comments toward black people in *Man's Supreme Inheritance*. The document says: "Be It therefore Resolved, that this Society hereby expresses its disagreement with the above-cited sentences as expounding or defining the body of practice and theory that has come to be known as the Alexander Technique" (2). The Alexander Society expresses their "disagreement" and do not teach Alexander's

racist ideas from *Man's Supreme Inheritance*, but I do not see how they have “resolved” from those racist comments that F.M. Alexander makes.

The problem that I have with the *AmSAT Statement on Diversity and Anti-Racism* document is that there is no step-by-step conversation on how F.M. Alexander's racist comments can be discussed with a black actor. The word “resolved” is used frequently throughout the document as the Alexander Society knows that F.M. Alexander is a racist. There is a difference between you *know* that F.M. Alexander is a racist rather than how we can *talk* about his ideas about black people and *show* that the technique has evolved.

The last step to solving the potentially Contemporary Blackface technique is to have an honest conversation with a practitioner. I interviewed Professor Carter to talk about the *NASTAT & AmSAT Resolution and AmSAT Statement on Diversity and Anti-Racism* documents that were sent. I explained to Professor Carter that the document uses the word “resolved” but I still do not see how a conversation about race can be discussed with the black actor from this document. One question that I asked Professor Carter was: “When the word “resolved” was introduced to you in your Alexander classes, was the word used as the following: “We have identified Alexander’s racist beliefs, we will discuss them to actors of color, and describe the modern Alexander Technique”, or “we *resolved* and *ignore* his racist ideas?” Professor Carter would explain that there were no exact steps to take to talk about F.M. Alexander racist comments:

You know, I do not know. The word “resolved” is what we believe. I think your question of, “are there steps laid out”, I think since the 2021 Resolution there are steps laid out. I trained in 2013-2016, so there were no steps laid out, no. I do not know if we “ignore” his racist ideas but we disagree with this. But I think there

was this step missing where we can teach this to the actors of color. Okay, now how can we teach this to the actor of color? I think there is work now in that direction. This society has had a lot of conversations about how we approach the racist ideas in our teachings. Now we must create conversations with our teachers to discuss with our students. (Rachel)

Professor Carter points out how there is a “missing step” to talk about Alexander’s racist ideas toward black people. Professor Carter explains that teachers must be able to create “conversations” about how race can be discussed with actors of color.

Professor Carter was able to learn how F.M. Alexander’s racist ideas should be discussed more to actors of color. Moving forward, Professor Carter wants to find a way to share F.M. Alexander’s racist ideas and give the actors of color a choice to read certain works by him (Rachel). Professor Carter believes that there is still a balance of sharing F.M. Alexander’s ideas while also creating a safe space for actors of color to feel validated in who *they* are. Professor Carter would also explain how she appreciate our conversation:

No, I mean...I want to say I appreciate our conversation. It has made me...I think every year I learn from my students. And I grow. I appreciate your feedback, your openness, and honesty. It had not struck me, and again this is from my privileged position, that.. how jarring it would be to not be able to say “ this is not valid” but “this stuff is”. It would be difficult to have those two things true and not the other be true. (Rachel)

Professor Carter points out how she was not able to realize, at first, how important it is to say that “this is not valid” and “this stuff is” regarding F.M. Alexander’s ideas and the

technique. Professor Carter is referring to how it is essential to discuss how F.M. Alexander's name is still in the Alexander Technique, and also how important it is to discuss his ideas while explaining how the Alexander Technique has evolved for the black actor to use. From this conversation, Professor Carter wants to implement more affirmations exercises to show that the black actor is valued and should celebrate themselves.

We can not ignore that F.M. Alexander was a racist. We can not also ask a black actor to ignore F.M. Alexander's ideas toward black people because his name is still in the Alexander Technique. If black actors are not exposed to the truth of every creator's racist ideas, then black actors do not have the choice to use the work from *their* black experience. From Professor Carter and my conversation, I saw how the Alexander Technique had evolved from F.M. Alexander's racist ideas toward black people. Professor Carter teaches the actor that they are valued and to know about themselves to give themselves choices. I offer a step-by-step framework to investigate a creator's technique that a practitioner and student can use. These steps are called "Experience Up", as the black actor can fully evaluate the creator's ideas and then have a conversation about *their* own blackness and *their* experiences:

1. Acknowledge the technique and where their ideas come from
2. Examine all of their beliefs
3. Speak to a practitioner about the work
4. Discuss how has the work evolved or not
5. Discuss the next steps to make the work more approachable
6. Make your *own* work that can complement or help validate you.

This framework will allow a practitioner and actor to discuss the evolution of a technique and problems that may lay in the creator's beliefs. Understanding the creator's beliefs and where these ideas come from allows the black actor to have choices where they can find validation within themselves that the technique may not give. This choice allows the black actor to see the racist white creator at face value, and then they can create a technique that fulfills *their* black experience.

### ***Black Acting Methods and My Creation***

Before I had a conversation with Professor Rachel Carter about F.M. Alexander's racist ideas, I decided to devise a technique that would give affirmation to *my* blackness. I used the *Black Acting Methods: Critical Approaches* to help me understand what It means to devise a technique for my black experience. *Black Acting Methods: Critical Approaches*, edited by Sharrell D. Lockett and Tia M. Shaffer, offers to honor Black to create more culturally and racially diverse perspectives in acting, classroom, and performance. The book writes about black actors who are robbed of having a culturally diverse education rather than predominantly white work. One of the main topics that the book discusses is "Black students as co-creators in theoretical underpinnings of what it means to perform" (2). After reading this section, I understand that as a Black actor I need to be able to co-create while learning other methods like the Alexander Technique.

*Black Acting Methods: Critical Approaches* helped me understand I can create my own work, while also creating a safe place for myself, and seeing a balance with the modern Alexander Technique. I used the Hendricks Method, offered in the "The Hendricks Method" essay, to create my own technique that allows me to create confidence from my black experience. The essay describes the Hendricks Method, which

was created by Freddie Hendricks at the Youth Ensemble of Atlanta (YEA) in Atlanta, Georgia. YEA is a free professional acting company that primarily focuses on black actors to devise socially and politically charged musicals dealing with the Hendricks Method (Lockett and Shaffer19). The Hendricks Method is divided into three components: Devising, Spirituality, and Hyper-ego (Lockett and Shaffer 23). I focused on the Hyper-ego section of the Hendricks Method to help create confidence within myself as a black actor. Lockett and Shaffer explain: “Ultimately when enacting the Hendricks Method, one must cultivate actor’s Hyper-egos and nurture them. When that Hyper-ego is in full swing, actors begin to confidently challenge reality, asking, “In whose reality are they unable or ineffective at completing what is being asked of them?” (31). The Hyper-ego gives me self-confidence that I can question the reality of F.M. Alexander's works and identifies racist issues about his ideas. The Hyper-ego allowed me to see that even though F.M. Alexander has those ideas about black people, I can gain and create confidence about myself and what it means to be black to me. I can “confidently challenge the reality” of F.M. Alexander’s pseudoscientific ideas and answer them from *my own body*. The Hyper-ego created a “you can Lamar” rather than the “you can not Lamar” that was created by F.M. Alexander's ideologies. The Hyper-ego shows that I can not limit myself as the performer but I am the creator. From this, I created the words of affirmation exercise and depths of vulnerability to gain confidence in my own blackness as a performer. The work that I created will be described more in Chapter 4. The words of affirmation exercise are to remind me that I am valued but I can also create work that is truthful to my experience. The depths of vulnerability is a method that can give me

ownership over me to make a character from my self-identity when the character lacks their own.

To avoid potentially Contemporary Blackface voice/body and acting techniques, there needs to be an honest conversation about where the beliefs of the creator come from. From this honest conversation, the black actor and a practitioner can create a framework to investigate every creator's technique so the black actor can answer *their* own blackness and not from the creator. The truth is that F.M. Alexander is a racist, but that does not mean the Alexander Technique is. The conversation I had with Professor Rachel Carter showed me that she wants black actors to feel value in themselves and know their habit to take ownership over who they are. From this, I lean into “The Hendricks Method” essay from the *Black Acting Methods: Critical Approaches* to create self-confidence in my work that I can create a method that will show my black experience. There is a balance that I created between The Hendricks and the modern Alexander Technique. Both methods teach the actor to take ownership over themselves and celebrate themselves.

To my black actors, who are living in white America, there are white techniques that may not be solved from my examples. You must identify what the racist creator is, and then create a system that works for you. As an actor, you are not only a performer, you are a creator. When choices are not created for you, at any PWI, or at any white theatre school, you give yourself choices for your black experience while learning acting. Do the research and create what you need for the work of acting. In Chapter 3, we will discuss how *Split Second* is a type of Contemporary Blackface Theatre, and how black actors should research the show they are performing in.

CHAPTER 3:  
*SPLIT SECOND* IS CONTEMPORARY BLACKFACE THEATRE

This chapter argues that *Split Second* is a Contemporary Blackface play and gives the black actors tools to recognize other Contemporary Blackface plays. *Split Second* is Contemporary Blackface Theatre because the playwright projects his ideas of “blackness” on the characters from his idea of “blackness.” In the first section of this chapter I give more context about *Split Second* and the white writer Dennis McIntyre. I use the *Chicago Tribune* interview between McIntyre and Douglas J. Keating, and I describe *Split Second* as Contemporary Blackface Theatre from the problematic dialogue that is written. Lastly, I use Suzan-Lori Park’s *From Elements of Style* equation on how “black” plays are written, and that the “black experience” only exists through the presence of whiteness on stage. This equation will articulate how Dennis McIntyre used the same equation with the “black experience” existing in the presence of oppression from whiteness. I aim to explore how *Split Second* is Contemporary Blackface Theatre, so black actors can have a framework to understand how a play can be part of Contemporary Blackface and ways to combat it.

**The Origins of *Split Second***

Dennis McIntyre’s *Split Second* is an example of Contemporary Blackface Theatre because of the playwright's inability to craft an authentic black experience for the stage. *Split Second* is about a black cop, Val Johnson, who kills a white man, William H. Willis, while he is handcuffed. From this situation, Val has to make the decision to either lie at the police hearing that Willis came at him with a knife, or that Val actually killed

Willis because of racial slurs said to him. McIntyre uses the idea that the main protagonist, Val Johnson, has been oppressed his whole life by white people. From this, Val Johnson's character is seen as a caricature of an angry black man on the stage.

*Split Second* is praised by other reviewers because of Dennis McIntyre speaking to a “black experience.” This idea of a “black experience” was also praised during blackface minstrelsy. Predominantly white men would dress up and put on blackface, and would be celebrated for their “true” depiction of “blackness.” During a *Chicago Tribune* interview with Douglas J. Keating, Dennis McIntyre explained his inspiration for the play ahead of the production Victory Garden Theatre:

There was a white guy sitting down from me. A black cop--a uniformed guy-- came in and started to sit down near him. Something was said--I never heard what--but the white guy said something. All of a sudden the black guy straightened up and the white guy said something else and the black guy put his hand on the gun. . . . They stared at each other with incredible hatred, and the black cop backed out of the shop, never taking his eyes off the white guy and never taking his hand off the gun. The storm had blown over, but not before the wind had stirred. I asked the question, "What if you have a situation in which somebody goes too far?" (1986)

McIntyre would also admit during the interview that he did not know why a black playwright did not write the play. McIntyre says: “ I’ve always been amazed that this play was not written by a black man. It should have been written by a black man because it is his feelings the play deals with” (1986). McIntyre states a black man “should have” written it, but he still did. During his interview, McIntyre says “ I never heard what--but

the white guy said something ". There is no other research that says how McIntyre created a "black experience" for *Split Second*. McIntyre creates *Split Second* from one encounter between a black police officer and a white man and thought of a black cop shooting a white man from it. McIntyre's *Split Second* is his version of what it means to be a black cop in America and that is racism. McIntyre's white cultural mask over the black body presents the "black experience" as only existing and responding because of oppression from the white body which is C.B.T. There is more to a black experience than black people dealing with racism from their white counterparts.

Keating's piece on *Split Second* supports my argument that it is a form of Contemporary Blackface Theatre. Keating reveals Dennis McIntyre's assumptions over a black cop's interaction with a white man, and admittance that a black man should have written the story. Keating says "The main characters-the police officer, his wife, his father and his close friend-are black. The only white in the play is the criminal-unless you count the playwright"(1986). The "criminal" that Keating points out is William H. Willis. Keating is applauding a white writer, McIntyre, for being able to write the "black experience" for the stage. Keating proves how it is great that a white writer can talk about a "black experience" as it is the same blackface minstrelsy speaking for the black body. Keating makes this statement after McIntyre explains that a black playwright should have written the story because it is about feelings that deal with black men (1986). McIntyre explains that the play "exposes racism" and not about how black men feel toward racism, but how everyone deals with it: "The play exposes racism. It's something no one wants to talk about. . . . I think in all of us there are racial feelings. As a result, you go to your darker side and pull it out and find that you are just like everyone else only you write it

down. . . . It's there, it's really there”(1986). From this interview, McIntyre says how everyone has “racial feelings” which are the same feelings created in *Split Second*. McIntyre explains how “ you go to your darker side” and “ find out that you are just like everyone else.” McIntyre admits that he also had to pull from his “dark side” to create a story. However, his dark side is a depreciation of a situation in which he never heard the conversation between the black police officer and the white man at a diner. It is not that McIntyre is a white man and he does not deserve to write a story about black men. The problem is that McIntyre writes about a black man who can only have issues because of racism in America which is C.B.T.

### **Problems with *Split Second Script***

The generic idea of a black experience has been passed down in many writings and *Split Second* is one of them. There are two problems that exist in the play *Split Second*. One is that Dennis McIntyre creates a story that is crafted off whiteness as the core problem. Two, McIntyre crafts the “black experience” through his eyes of whiteness that makes blacks only respond to the white ruling class. As said in Chapter One, Contemporary Blackface Theatre is the white cultural mask placed on the black body for what whiteness sees as “black”. A scene that shows this is between Val and his father, Rusty, in Act 1 Scene 4. Val and Rusty are discussing if Val should tell the truth about Val staging William H. Willis's murder and Val talks about race:

RUSTY. Then maybe you should have picked cotton for a living. There are rules!

VAL. Sure there are! White rules!

RUSTY. Rules, buddy boy!

VAL. And sometimes they apply, sometimes they don't, right?! (54)

The problem with this scene is that Val tries to validate himself for murdering William H. Willis. Val does this by mentioning that there are “white rules” and these rules do not apply to black bodies. Rusty counters Val’s argument and explains that there are rules in general. I argue that McIntyre attempts to make the story about race and fails to show the humanity in Val’s character and Willis' character in this scene. Val’s humanity is lost because his reason for killing Willis is convoluted in his own reason for why he is right because “white rules” do not apply to his body. Willis' humanity is lost because although he was saying racist slurs to Val, he was gunned down because of Val’s ideas of what is fair. Willis is a human just like Val is and it does not give Val the right to kill a man because of his own traumas. Val states “And sometimes they apply, sometimes they don’t, right”, which is an example of Val saying that yes, there are rules, but those rules did not exist for Willis. This contradicts McIntyre wanting the audience to understand what is the right thing to do. Val is explaining that he is justified in killing someone who is white because the white world is up against him. However, Val makes it seem that these rules can still apply when someone is handcuffed, like Willis.

The issue with the formatting of this *Split Second* is that McIntyre insinuates that Val has experienced so much trauma from his white counterparts in his life, that he has had enough and decided to kill a white man because of this. The play structure is that Val Johnson retaliates against his white aggressor, Willis, but the play shows that Val has also had an experience with bullying from white children when he was younger (38). In Act 1 Scene 3, Val tells his wife, Alea, about when he was bullied by white kids: “No, it’s mine. I learned it early-starting at six-starting in Pittsburg. I got dragged off the Hill. I got tied to a tree. I got my clothes ripped off with a knife. I got poison ivy rubbed all over

me. I hung there for five hours. It got dark out. I was still there. That's when I learned it" (38). Val explains that from this incident when he was a kid he also "learned it". I argue that Val learned how to deal with situations like being bullied in a harmful manner. The problem with Val explaining this is that he was unarmed like William H. Willis was when he shot him. I do not see the connection between the trauma of him being a child and him killing Wills. The play makes it to this one event of racism in Val's life as a child and was the trigger event, but it is not the only thing. There are differences between Val being hanged to a tree and Willis being shot while in handcuffs. Val did not use verbal assaults to get attacked and Willis did. The play fails to show Val's humanity because his "black experience" is still tied to what white people did to him. The story is not about *his* black life or his black experience. McIntyre tries to exploit the "black experience" so much that Val's character is a contradiction to the character's own argument. Val Johnson is saying there are "white rules" that do not apply to the black body. But Val makes rules that are no better than what he is saying from his white counterparts.

### **Remaking Black Life Made for the Stage**

The dilemma in "black" stories from a narrowed-minded white perspective is that it is not presented to authentically represent a black experience without the bases being created from white supremacy. *From Elements and Style*, by Suzan-Lori Parks theorizes an equation for black people on stage. Suzan-Lori Parks is a well-known African American playwright. She was the first African American woman to win a Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 2002 for her play *Topdog/Underdog*. Parks argues that for many plays that

deal with the “black experience” there is the norm that in order for black people to be on stage, they must deal with oppression:

I wonder if a drama involving Black people can exist without the presence of the White-no, not the *presence*- the presence is not the problem. As Toni Morrison writes in her essay “Black Matters”, the presence of the White often signifies the presence of the Black. Within the subject is its other. So the mere *presence* of the other is not the problem. The interest in the other is. The use of White in the dramatic equation is, I think, too often seen as the only way of exploring our Blackness; the equation reduces Blackness to a merely state of non-Whiteness. Blackness in this equation is people whose lives consist of a series of reactions and responses to the White ruling class. ( 18)

Parks explains that “presence” is not the problem in a “black production.” The issue is how the product is created to fit the idea of what “blackness” is through whiteness. Parks argues that “blackness” is people who live in response to a “white ruling class.” This equation makes a “black experience” a reflection of blackface because “blackness” is created from how white people see black people. Parks creates an equation for how the black life is shown for the stage:

BLACK PEOPLE + “WHITEY”=

STANDARD DRAMATIC CONFLICT

(STANDARD TERRITORY)

*i.e.*

“BLACK DRAMA”=the presentation of the black as oppressed

so that

WHATEVER the dramatic dynamics, they are often READ to EQUAL an explanation or relation of Black oppression. This is not only a false equation, but this is bullshit. (20)

This is the same equation that Dennis McIntyre follows to make *Split Second*. I will use my own equation to explain McIntyre’s Contemporary Blackface play:

VAL JOHNSON + WHITE OPPRESSION AS A BOY=SHOOTING WILLIAM H. WILLIS, A WHITE MAN

(VAL JOHNSON IS SHOWN AS AN ANGRY BLACK MAN WHO DEALT WITH WHITE OPPRESSION HIS WHOLE LIFE AND IS JUSTIFIED TO KILL WILLIAM H. WILLIS BECAUSE OF IT)

*SPLIT SECOND*= an “accurate” representation of a black cop dealing with oppression in America.

Because the “black experience” has only been seen as experiencing pain from white people, it is only right that the character experiences the same generic oppression from a white man that he also experienced as a child. Val Johnson's character is that depiction. Since McIntyre forces the issues of race in America, he does not create a conversation for the audience to have. McIntyre does not answer what the “black experience” is for black males in America, and only uses his assumptions.

Dennis McIntyre’s *Split Second* is a Contemporary Blackface play because his whiteness is a mask that avoids how black people *can* be seen on the stage. This is done by portraying Val Johnson’s “black experience” in that his life and trauma can only exist

from white oppression. Like blackface minstrelsy, the white-ruling class defines their ideas of what it means to be “black” in front of predominantly white audiences.

McIntyre’s play shows that black life is inescapable for white supremacy and there is no hope for the black life in America.

It is vital for black actors to see what Contemporary Blackface plays are so they can create a character through *their* black experience and not conform to white ideas. For my black actors, you can not lean on the knowledge of every playwright to answer the “black experience.” If black actors do not challenge the norm of the “black experience”, they will only represent a false life that Eurocentric eyes believe every black body goes through. The actor should do research on production first. Look at reviews about the play they are approaching. Gather research on why the playwright wrote the play, and what is the purpose of the show. After doing the research, ask yourself “should I take this job?”, “what will happen to my black experience?”, “how can I create an authentic experience for a black character that I am portraying?” Let these questions guide you for your *own* truth, not the white truth. Chapter 4 will show how I crafted techniques to make a more authentic black character for the stage.

## CHAPTER 4: TECHNIQUES USED TO PERFORM *SPLIT SECOND*

The only way to combat a Contemporary Blackface play is for the black actor to perform the character in an authentic experience. This chapter will dive into how I created techniques to showcase an authentic black character for the stage by crafting the depths of vulnerability and the words of affirmation exercises, to lean more into *my* genuine black experience that was not created for my character in the show *Split Second*. In *Split Second*, we see Dennis McIntyre create “the black experience” off the norms and stereotypes that black bodies deal with, and rely on the oppression from their white counterparts to drive the message of the story. McIntyre’s interpretation of Val Johnson is a Contemporary Blackface character. McIntyre smears the black paint over Val Johnson’s identity from his narrow-minded whiteness that takes away Val’s black experience, but rather a reflection of McIntyre’s assumptions of a “black experience”.

In this chapter, I will first explain what personally limited my performance as Val Johnson. Then I will explain how I used the depths of vulnerability technique and words of affirmation exercise, to see my truth, and gain the confidence to play McIntyre’s blackface character. The depths of vulnerability reveal the similarities and differences between a black actor and the character, and thereby help one craft a character through an authentic black experience. The words of affirmation counter the negative thoughts about oneself that can limit a black actor. These two methods allowed me to truthfully create Val Johnson’s physicality, character arc, and humanity by leaning into *my* black experience to present an authentic truth to a black experience. From this, I will discuss

the steps taken between Dr. J. Ariadne Calvano and me to create a safe space for tapping in and out with our characters. I discuss how I used Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen's *Sensing, Feeling Action* to gain a better insight into how to create Val Johnson's physicality through activating physical organs. To find Val Johnson's humanity, I discuss *My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies*, written by Resmaa Menakem, to create a sense of why Val Johnson shot William H. Willis other than the racial slurs said to him. This was a corrective to McIntyre's surface-level representation of a black experience stemming solely from black oppression and anger. Lastly, the chapter will highlight how the depths of the vulnerability technique and the words of affirmation exercise led to personal healing and growth. I will explore how I approach a Contemporary Blackface play, and how I use my own black experience to create an authentic black male character for the stage. The techniques I offer are corrective to the Contemporary Blackface plays that other black actors may face, so the black actor will not have to perform and conform to the lens of what white people *think* the black experience is.

### **My Truth vs Val's Truth**

I noticed that Val Johnson is similar to my personal relationships and I needed to create work that would be truthful to his character and mentally sustainable for me. When I first began to read the script for *Split Second*, I realized that I had been holding on to abandonment issues and insecurities I needed to confront before approaching the role of Val Johnson. Some of these issues have been a part of my life since I was young. I first needed to be honest with myself before I could create Val Johnson's honesty, regardless if we are similar. The personal problems I had in my life were the abandonment issues

from my father, and not being comfortable as a black male in America. I never met my father. I have been told in conversation with my mother about my father, and his name. But I never met him in my life or spoke to him. The lack of guidance from my father did affect me as we discuss in Chapter 2 that I had to craft what a “good” black male looks like emotionally, physically, and mentally from assumptions about black masculinity. Not being comfortable as a black man *is* my black experience. From the time I started high school in 2011, and until my departure in 2015, I was not sure if I was going to live past 18. The case of Trayvon Martin and other cases dealing with black men dying from white police officers put fear in my mind that my body was not meant for this white society. I aim to develop a tool that I can confront the truth of myself and the truth of Val Johnson’s character.

I first had to examine the relationship between Val Johnson and his father, Rusty, to understand the truth of my relationship with my father. I did this to not only compare myself to Val and his father's issues but to also celebrate his own abandonment issues and *his* experiences that are important to the story. Without this examination of Val’s truth, I will make his abandonment issues universal to my own and then take away the value from Val’s story. In Act II, Scene 1, Val Johnson is having a conversation with his father, Rusty, about what happened the night he killed William H. Willis (45). After an argument explodes, Rusty tells his son that he did not ask him to be a cop. In this piece of dialogue, Val explains that when he grew up as a child, there was nothing but cops in and out of their house and how his father never got out of his cop uniform:

The hell it was! You loved it. Being a cop, that was special. The world couldn’t get along without cops. In fact, cops ruled the world. That’s how society

functioned. I remember, Mom and me, we must have spent two thousand hours waiting for you to change your goddamn uniform. And where the hell were you? Drinking your “Rolling Rock” with the boys, that’s where you were. Cleaning your gun, loading it, unloading it. (48)

From the piece of Val’s conversation with his father, I gathered that Val has abandonment issues from his father that continued into his adulthood. In the monologue, Val says words and phrases such as “ waiting” and “ where the hell were you”, which shows that Val's father was never around. Val ends the monologue by saying that his father was drinking “ Rolling Rock” with his friends. Val sees that Rusty was too busy being with his friends and not Val's father.

Val displays the need to have approval from his father. Because Val's abandonment issues from his father caused him to long for approval that affected him and his father's relationship. After Val tells his father, Rusty, that he was never around the family, he explains that because of his father's absence he sought approval from his father:

What are you talking about “you didn’t ask me to be a cop?!” I started being a cop at five. The first Christmas I can remember, under the tree, a fingerprint kit. A goddamn fingerprint kit. And a black and white, made out of tin, with your name painted on the hood, “Rusty”, and the number of your squad car, “183.” I broke it Christmas Day, winding it up, listening to the siren. My God, you had me in uniform when I was 10. All those precinct blasts in “ Oakland”. Fake ribbons. Fake medals. All the ribbons and medals I was supposed to earn when I grew up. (49)

There are two sections of Val's monologue that show he longs for approval from his father, Rusty. Val says when he was a little boy, his father bought a cop car with his father's name on the hood, "Rusty". From this statement, Val explains that his father always had him in a uniform and from that wanted him to be just like his father. Val states how he was disappointed in himself for not receiving "medals" like his father did when he was working as a cop.

Val's need for his father's approval did not stop but also became worse during his time in Vietnam. Val discusses that because he idolizes his father and is searching for approval, he spent his time in the Vietnam War thinking about his father's judgement. Rusty believes that Val wasted his time in Vietnam because he never fired his weapon:

I had you in mind, half the time I was over there-And that's all you think? I wasted a lot of ammunition? One time-One time, I got across a paddy on "point". But all of sudden, it seemed wrong. "Charlie" was real close. All around me. He hadn't bought the "bait". He'd let me get across. He knew what he had behind me. I couldn't get anybody on the radio, so I started back. I was doing a number on "Charlie's" trap, so I expected a bullet in the back. And the only thing that went through my mind, the one thought, waiting for that bullet, "What's Rusty going to think?" His son took a fucking bullet in the back. "What the hell was he doing to get a bullet in the back?" Just thinking about you, it must have made me run faster, because when "Charlie" finally squeezed, he missed me by ten feet. I didn't waste ammunition. I heard it coming at me nine long months! (52)

Val explains in this monologue that regardless of his relationship with his father, Rusty, he still had his father on his mind. Val explains that the main thing he thought about was

his father being disappointed in him if he were to be shot in the back and not fighting.

This “disappointment” is the same search of approval that Val wanted from his father his whole life.

I can see myself in this similarity to Val Johnson and his father, Rusty because I long for approval from my father as well. Because I never had interaction with my father, I made a caricature of my own black identity because I did not know how to be a “black male” in America. This caricature was me pretending to be “strong” and “resilient” because I did not have a father figure to look up to. I had a missing identity just like Val does, and I also had to see how Val and I have problems with white society as well.

Val also does not feel comfortable as a black male in society. When cornered by Rusty’s accusations, he learns that Val fixed the crime scene to look like William H. Willis comes at Val with a knife. Rusty wants Val to tell the truth to his superior about what actually happened. Val then tries to justify his actions because he lives in a white world and his rights are not equal to his white counterparts:

VAL. When are you going to realize-When are you going to learn-It’s not our fucking world! When are you going to understand that?!

RUSTY. Then maybe you should have picked cotton for a living! There are rules!

VAL. White rules ! (50)

From Val's abandonment issues from his father, and the lack of respect he receives in the world for his black body, he is left with searching for his truth after killing William H. Willis. In the dialogue exchange between Val and Rusty, Val says to his father that they live in “white rules”, and “it is not our fucking world.” Val states that how can he as a

black cop live freely when he lives in a world that is only for white people. Toward the end of the play, Val is in an argument with his father Rusty about whether he should tell the truth that he shot and killed William H. Willis, or lie:

RUSTY. You lost control buster! You snapped! That's not why they gave you a badge"!

VAL. That's right! I lost it! I finally lost my "cool". I snapped and it was all out front. And do you want to know how long I've been waiting to do it? All my life.

The "chip" just got too heavy, and I didn't want to carry it around anymore. (74)

Val is not comfortable as a black male in America and was finally able to lose control, to be in his "truth", when he shot Willis. Val explains that he could no longer long to be "cool" to live in society and could no longer carry the expectation for how he "should" act in society. That expectation was that Val must be able to take abuse from anyone in society. This specific connection is to my discomfort as a black male in America. Because there are times I am unsure of my blackness, I carry a certain way of being "cool" and non "confrontational" to live in my white society.

Val, who has abandonment issues from his father, and who lives in his father's shadow as a police officer, lacks respect as a black male in society. When I noticed the similarities between Val Johnson's character and my personal experience, I questioned how the performance can be truthful to Val's experience and mine. I had this question: "how can I show the experience of Val Johnson's abandonment issues from his father, and insecurities as a black male when I have not yet answered my own abandonment issues from my father and my insecurities as a black male?"

As said in Chapter 2, the black male actor must lean into their own experience in order to create an authentic black male character for the stage when the work is based through a white lens. Now that I have identified that Val Johnson's character and I have similarities, but I do not want to lean into Dennis McIntyre's whitewashed writing, I had to devise and make my own methods that are true to *my* black experience for the stage. I used "The Hendricks Method" essay, from the *Black Acting Methods: Critical Approaches*, as a way to create my own techniques that can answer my personal experiences and the lack of respect I had in myself to fully be in the truth of Val Johnson's black experience for the stage.

### **The *Black Acting Methods*: The Hendricks Method**

From the essay on the Hendricks Method in *Black Acting Methods: Critical Approaches* I developed the depths of vulnerability technique and the words of affirmation exercise to recognize my black experience to make an authentic black experience for Val Johnson's character. From this, I identify my personal issues and Val's to see the similarities and differences so I can find humanity through my black body and not McIntyre's white lens. The Hendricks Method created a framework to create Val Johnson's character from my black experience. The method also told me that my own personal experience is important in the process of not only creating a character but gaining healing and self-confidence.

I specifically used Devising and Hyper-ego from the Hendricks Method to create a character from *my* black lens and to gain value in my black body. The Hendricks Method contains three components: Devising, Spirituality, and Hyper-ego (23). "Devising is a theatrical process in which the actor(s) create their own script or

performance based on an idea, picture, theme, object, or some other form of inspiration. Within the Hendricks continuum, devising by nature is political, demands authorship from participants, and cultivates a collaboration, communal space, sans a written script” (24). Hendricks explains that devising is a tool that the black actor can use to receive inspiration. The foundation of devising is something that I needed for my performance in *Split Second*, and to combat a white-washed black character. I used devising as a way to create the depths of vulnerability exercise to craft Val Johnson’s character. I did this by understanding the similarities and differences between myself to celebrate Val’s own black experience, and my black experience. This celebration allowed me to see that Val’s black experience should be seen for who he *is* and not the universal “black experience” as McIntyre shows in *Split Second*.

Hyper-ego gave me value within me because of the lack of value I had in myself that I needed to examine before approaching Val Johnson’s character. Hyper-ego is created so that "he or she can learn and accomplish any and everything of what is being asked of him or her in a production"(Luckett and Shaffer 30). Hyper-ego is created because the majority of blacks deal with racism, prejudice, and oppression in their daily lives, and building self-confidence is integral to their success:

How one goes about building the Hyper-ego is tricky, albeit attainable. Plainly put, developing a Hyper-ego is getting someone to believe they are “the sh\*t”, even when they might not be at the moment. The idea is that, upon believing he is amazing, the actor will begin to embody or “try on” amazing, perfecting a future for him to walk into, and no one can convince him that he isn’t already phenomenal, and attractive. (31)

It is important for me to have confidence within myself before approaching the work of acting. I have to believe that I am “amazing” and then I can embody this ego into my performance as Val Johnson. I lack the respect that I receive from society and my abandonment issues with my father. To combat these insecurities, I must create a Hyper-ego that will help my confidence to be in the truth of a white-washed character like Val Johnson. Val Johnson's character is C.B.T. and I want to take authority over my blackness and not the idea of “blackness” from a white lens. I did this by creating a chart that has the header “can” and “can’t”. This allowed me to write down things I believe I can or can’t do. The observation showed me how I can limit myself while also taking ownership of my body.

What I gained from the Hendricks Method is that I do not need to rely on a white writer, and or a white technique, to help me cultivate a black male character’s story. I see that as an actor I must have confidence within myself, and also be able to devise work that is part of my experience.” The Hendricks Method” essay allowed me to understand that in order to create an authentic black character, I must lean into my own truth for who I am. From the Hendricks Method ideas of devising, I can create a tool that is based on an idea that is important to me, which is how to make a technique that activates my black experience in a white story. Hyper-ego is what I needed because of my abandonment issues with my father, and not being comfortable in America. I can create a tool that will give me affirmation in predominantly white work like *Split Second* when a character relates to the same issues I have. Using the Hendricks Method template, I created two techniques to activate my black experience for Val Johnson’s character in *Split Second*.

**The Words of Affirmation Exercise**

The words of affirmation exercise is created to give me respect for my own personal needs and to approach McIntyre’s *Split Second*. On a sheet of paper, I put the words *can* and *can’t* at the top of the page. At the bottom of each word, I started writing things that I believe I can do and things that I believe I can not do related to the performance for *Split Second*. I choose the words can and can’t after reading “ The Hendricks Method” essay, from *Black Acting Methods: Critical Approaches*, after Lockett and Shaffer say “can’t is limiting” ( 31). I then created the words of affirmation, and used the words can and can’t, to see how much power I give myself and how I limit myself in my work as well.

For example:

Can	Can’t
I can perform.	I can not perform <i>Split Second</i> black experience through Dennis McIntyre’s white eyes.
I can have intimate love with my fellow actor who is playing Rusty.	I can not be intimate with my father that I have never had in my life before.
I can pretend racial slurs do not bother me when said by my fellow actor who is playing William H. Willis.	I can not handle the racial slurs as my personal self.

I noticed from the *can’t* side were things that I believe I can not handle, and I did not know how to handle them because I never confronted them before. The *can* side was my default side as a way to get by in the theatre space as a way of being safe. The words of affirmation exercise allowed me to see that I limit my mind by what I believe I can not achieve because of the lack of respect I experienced before. Now the exercise gives me

ownership over who I am because I have acknowledged what is holding me back from my performance, and how my personal issues hold me back outside of the theatre space.

### **Depths of Vulnerability**

The depths of vulnerability is a method that can give the actor ownership over themselves to make a character from *their* self-identity when the character lacks their own. The first step to this method is the actor must admit who they are before approaching a character. For example, I am a black actor who does have abandonment issues from my father. I am insecure as a black male in white America. This honesty will allow the black actor to evaluate themselves from their point of view, and take ownership over how they view *themselves* before approaching a character. From my self-evaluation, I wanted to create a system that highlights Val Johnson's character similarities and differences from myself to get a true sense of the character. Then I can create from my black experience from what lacks in Val Johnson to create an authentic black character for the stage. From there, The depths of vulnerability is where I start to evaluate how I think about myself, life, ethics, race, and family, and see how these values compare to my character. Afterward, I go over their discoveries and see where I need to dig deeper into the character so the character is presented on the stage and not the actor. This self-identification will give the black actor a sense of who they are, rather than depending on a white writer to write a story that reflects an authentic black experience.

To use the depths of vulnerability method, first, be honest about who you are and the insecurities that you have. Then, list the similarities and differences that you have with the character. After, notice the similarities and see how those similarities can be used to make an authentic experience for a character that is a stereotype or flawed.

Lastly, notice the differences between you and the character and see what you as the actor need to achieve to make the character truthful to the script. The chart I developed for *Split Second* exemplifies the technique:

Val	Lamar
Abandonment Issues with his father	I do too
Always reminded to remain cool as a black male	I do as well
Trigger words/racist slurs	I do too
In their 30's	I'm 25
War veteran from Vietnam	Never been in combat
Married	Never been Married
Insecurities about himself and seeks approval from his father	I do as well

Now that I have created the depths of vulnerability, for what I feel the playwright's lack in Val Johnson authentic black experience, I can lean into my own experience to show humanity for Val Johnson's character. Two major similarities between Val Johnson and I are the following: abandonment issues from the father and insecurities about being a black man in America. I did not know how to solve these issues during my rehearsal process. I did focus on the difference in age, lack of fighting experience, and not being married as ways to build the character.

### **Val Johnson's Character in Performance**

I noticed that *Split Second* story has violence that affected me emotionally, and I needed a tool to release Val Johnson's trauma. For our first table read of the script, I became emotional toward the end of the script after Val Johnson had a violent outburst

for the way he shot William H. Willis (74). I told my intimacy director, Dr. J. Ariadne Calvano, and my director, Sidney Edwards, that I need to find a way to tap in and out of character so I do not bring the weight of Val Johnson's character home. Dr. Calvano did have an intimacy workshop with the group of actors to discuss race and violent situations in *Split Second*. As a group, we all devised a way to tap in and out of character with hand shakes and movement before we started a scene and ended a scene. This intimacy for tapping in and out helped leave the weight of Val Johnson's life after rehearsals and performances ended.

In order for black actors to combat Contemporary Blackface characters, they must understand the physicality and explain why they move the way they do. This will actively engage in the specifics of your character's physical body that is reflected onstage. I spent time finding Val Johnson's physicality with Dr. Calvano to establish that he was older and was a Vietnam veteran. I then look at the character's occupation. Val is a police officer, and he was also in the Vietnam War for nine months (52). From the sessions I had with Dr. Calvano, we discovered that Val walked with his chest coming first, his arms and gestures were light but always direct and not casual. Val also walked in a way that he was looking for a target and followed through like a police officer and a soldier. To practice this in the rehearsal space, I would slightly adjust my arms, rolling them back and focusing on a destination within the space to walk to. This choice of physicality gave Val Johnson's character a sense of urgency.

To have a better understanding of Val's physicality, I looked at Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen's *Sensing, Feeling Action*. I gained a better insight into Val's internal organs which can be shown through bodily expressions. Cohen gives examples of how

someone can explore their organs by processing the applications of emotions. Cohen says “we began to observe congruency between physical function and psychological function. Our perception of their interrelationship opened up and deepened. We began to be directly aware of how our emotions and our physical embodiment of our organs reflected each other”(38). The congruence of Val’s physical function and psychological function is that he internally holds emotions that affect his body. This congruence can be shown physically by choosing specific organs within Val’s body to show his true emotions. To activate Val’s physicality I thought of how Dr. Calvano and I decided that he walks with his chest coming forward, and his arms are direct. The organs I choose to represent Val’s expressions are the heart, spleen, stomach, and lungs. I choose the heart for Val’s organs of expression because Cohen says the heart is "being open/ closed to others; love/hate”(39). The heart constitutes how he is not open to hearing the truth of his actions for killing William H. Willis, and the hate he has for not being able to control himself. Cohen says "the spleen showed a defense, or destroying is harmful or lost its value" (39). The spleen represents how Val is in defense after he shoots William H. Willis. Cohen continues and says “the stomach can be acceptance/rejection of nourishment”(39). Val has to accept that he killed William H. Willis and does not accept guidance from his father who was also a police officer before him. Lastly, the lungs show suffering loss of life, and grief (39). Val suffered from the fact that he took his life away, and did not know how to respond. Understanding Val’s congruency allowed me to not work as hard as putting on Val’s emotions. When I understood that the organs within Val’s body make up his physicality, like the heart, spleen, stomach, and lungs, I was able to actively engage within my body to represent Val’s. The physical and mental awareness of Val

Johnson's character also allowed me to be mindful of how I physically move. Val is in his 30's and I'm 25 years old. Val does not move with so much bounciness that I have for him moving his arms freely as I do.

Understanding the character's arc combats against a Contemporary Blackface role because the actor is specific in answering the character's experience from the text, and doing research from it. The more the actor can define, the less of a Contemporary Blackface character they portray because they are portraying a human and not a caricature. The congruency for Val allowed me to understand his character arc throughout the story. Val's character arc moves from his heart where he shoots William H. Wills and hates to hear about his actions. The spleen shows how Val is in defense when explaining to his father Rusty, his friend, Charlie, and his wife, Alea, about shooting William H. Wills. The stomach shows how Val is wrestling with the fact that he shot William H. Willis. And lastly, at the end of the script when Val has his violent outburst about why he shot William H. Willis, he takes a breath to explain the pain he has suffered his whole life and can finally release.

To combat a Contemporary Blackface role, black actors should spend time with the community of their castmates. The more time that is spent, the more of an authentic experience that can be created from the black actors' lives. Like the Hendricks Method, this process is similar to Hyper-ego in that the black actors build confidence within each other's experience. I would spend time with my co-star, Brandi Lashay, who played Val's wife Alea, to create an authentic relationship for the stage. Brandi and I would go walking around the city of Louisville, KY, and talk about things that were not related to the story. We both wanted to gain a better sense of the other person and not so much of

the character. This allowed us to actually celebrate one another for who they were, rather than us working to make a character. The time we spent talking about life, and ourselves, allowed Val's and Alea's relationship to be real for the stage because we both investigate our experiences of life first.

### **Val's Lack of Humanity**

In order to combat a Contemporary Blackface character's lack of humanity, the black actor must create one. If humanity is not created, the Contemporary Blackface character will only exist because of oppression from the white body rather than *their* black life. I noticed that Val Johnson still lacked humanity in his character. I now have to create a word that will allow the organs to respond to Val's physical and internal needs. I discovered that Val's number one trigger word that affected his physicality was the word *control*. Val has to be in control in every situation, and when he is not, he doesn't know how to remain calm or see the problem rationally. The revelation is apparent in Act II, Scene 2. Val's wife, Alea, tells Val that he can not tell the truth that he shot William H. Wills, and it was not out of self-defense: "And I'll tell you one thing, Val Johnson, you go to prison, you won't survive it. The guards are going to hate you. You're the ex-cop who couldn't control himself. The whites are going to hate you. You're the ex-black cop who couldn't control himself. "Control"...(58 ). Alea explains that Val will be labeled as the "ex-black cop" who "couldn't control himself" from whites. Alea says to Val that because of his inability to "control" himself, he is a reminder of how black men are labeled in society as those who can not "control" their rage. The word *control* is a word that reminds Val that he has expectations as a black cop and that he can never lose his cool because he is a black cop. The word *control* is a way to activate the organs for Val

Johnson's character to show the inner and outer conflict for his mistake after killing William H. Wills. When portraying Val Johnson, I would walk away from when the word *control* was said by a character, or activate Val gestures such as pulling with his ring or shaking his legs as a way of escaping the situation. The word *control* is the biggest piece of Val's character arc because Val has never fully been in control of his life.

I leaned into more research on how trauma can be passed down and what that trauma can look like in a police officer's body to find Val's humanity. Rather than McIntyre's singular notion that Val Johnson's oppression in his life is justified in murdering Willis, I wanted to find what other reasons Val shot Willis. *My Grandmother's Hands : Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies*, written by Resmaa Menakem, presents tools to notice trauma in the bodies of whites and blacks in America. The body knows how to fight, flee, or freeze (5). Menakem highlights that those who are born in America, are directly affected by white supremacy as it is embedded in all our bodies. Menakem argues that the police profession has a set of rules, codes, and norms. Regardless of the race of the police officer, chronic stress is created by dealing with traumatized people and can be traumatizing to the police officer:

In many towns and neighborhoods- parts of Baltimore, for example, or Ferguson, Missouri,-police are no longer expected to act like police. They must instead act like soldiers. It is not a role many police have been trained to fulfill. Neither is it the role that offers much job satisfaction. It rarely reflects officers' reasons for becoming public safety professionals in the first place. All of this creates enormous chronic stress on police bodies because a police officer and a soldier need to live by completely different rules. A police officer's body needs to be

calm and settled 90 percent of the time and activated 10 percent of the time-when he or she is responding to a call or making an arrest. But when a soldier is in combat or some other potentially dangerous situation his or her body needs to be activated and alert at least 90 percent of the time. These changing (often contradictory) demands, as well as the chaos and confusion that make up contemporary police culture, are wreaking havoc on police bodies and psyches. It's no wonder our police have high rates of domestic violence and alcohol abuse. Police bodies are visibly suffering from their own form of trauma, in turn, inflicting unnecessary harm on the less powerful, including some of the people they have pledged to protect. ( 118)

These same ideas that the police body can get stuck in the mindset of combat rather than in a neutral/calm mindset are the same thoughts Val Johnson had when he was triggered. Val Johnson has been trained as a soldier and a police officer. Like the statement, police bodies are "suffering from their own form of trauma," and soldier bodies are on 90 percent alert at all times. Val Johnson is afraid to lose *control* of any situation and because of this, his percent alert will stay at 90. Val does not know the difference between an alert or calm situation because his mind is ready at any situation for the risk of losing *control*. When Val was called numerous racial slurs and insults by Wills, he decided that he was in a combat mode. This fight or flight situation was created not because Willis was white, but because Val had never stood up for himself at this point. The only way Val could protect himself from William H. Wills was to kill him. Val had to protect what was left of his black experience, which was his lack of *control*.

Val's humanity is that he, like many humans, wants *control* over their lives. He was in a high-risk situation of losing his black experience. The *control* that he tried so desperately to create and have his whole life was threatened by William H. Willis, the Vietnam war, and when he was hung up on that tree. Val never had *control* and he could not afford to give away his power anymore. The lack of *control* for Val is seen in the final scene of the play. In Act 2 Scene 5, Val is telling his side of the story about the murder of Willis before a hearing (77). In this scene, Val is maintaining his *control* by keeping up with the lie that Val was confronted by Willis rather than Val murdering him. The lie is asking the audience to consider whether they agree or disagree with Val's decision to try to finally take *control* over his life. From my point of view, Val's idea of lying to take *control* is the same mental problem that he never healed from as a child. This trauma of his lack of *control* makes Val make bad decisions like shooting Willis and lying at the hearing.

### **My Personal Problems Healed**

The techniques I created healing with my personal problems as well. From the depths of vulnerability and the words of affirmation exercises I created, I could admit my abandonment issues concerning my father, and those same feelings came up during *Split Second*. At the end of Act 2, Scene 4, Rusty decides to leave Val and Alea's apartment after he hears that Val will lie about the murder:

RUSTY. If I could-If there was any way, Val-If I were still in uniform-If I could convince anyone-I'd take credit for the guy you shot. I'd claim it. I would. I'd make it mine.'

VAL. I know. Rusty? You keep in touch, okay?

RUSTY. Sure, son. I'll try to do that. You know, the funny thing, I moved out of Pittsburgh to get closer to you. (74)

In the last dialogue between Rusty and Val, Rusty lets Val know that if he “were still in uniform”, he would “claim it” for Willis's murder. When Rusty says “to get closer to you”, those words affected me because I never had a man in my life say those things to me. For my fictional father, Rusty, to say that he would go to jail for me and move to an area for me, it made me think about my own father and him not being around. I realized that everyone makes mistakes. Yes, Rusty and Val's relationship was not perfect but Rusty still loves Val. I would not be able to approach this scene without creating the depths of vulnerability and words of affirmation exercise to forgive my father. These two methods allowed me to take ownership over my personal problems so I could be in Val's truth at that moment of the play. I was forgiving my father on the stage at the same time that Val was. This moment in the play always took over me, because in a way, I found healing through a fictional father that I never received from my real father. That healing would have never existed if I did not identify my personal problems and how these issues could potentially hinder me in my performance as Val Johnson.

There is a way to combat a Contemporary Blackface play with the authentic performance from the black actor. Regardless if a white script does not reflect your black body or a white technique, you have the ability to devise a method that best represents *your* black experience. You must first grab resources that allow you to create work that will benefit your experience, and see how that truth can translate to the stage. As black actors, you do have the ability to create work for yourself, and you should be creating that work for the world to see *your* black experience. In my conclusion, I will discuss my

discoveries since my theory on contemporary blackface theatre and what I am working toward for my own black experience.

## CONCLUSION:

### WE CAN STILL FIGHT IT

Regardless of a white-authored script, a problematic creator of a technique, or a white production that does not reflect your black experience, you as the black actor can create work that reflects *your* black experience. To all my black actors who read this book, I will explain to you that *you* are a gem. Life, the world, and whatever higher power you may believe in have given you everything you need in life. I challenge you to not go to an MFA, BFA, BA, or conservatory program thinking that you lack something. You do not lack anything. What you all need to know is that you need to take more time investigating who you are.

From Contemporary Blackface Theatre, which may affect voice/body and acting techniques, black actors must be able to create work that reflects *their* experience. In Chapter 4, we discuss how I used the depths of vulnerability and words of affirmation exercise to craft Val Johnson in *Split Second* through my black experience. These two methods challenged Dennis McIntyre's representation of a white man's a black man, and my own issues inhibiting my truthful portrayal. The black actor should be creating voice/body and acting techniques that best reflect them. It is fine to have other perspectives of voice/body acting techniques but these perspectives are predominantly white. Understand that their cultural beliefs may not always reflect your black body.

Contemporary Blackface Theatre can fully be examined in the process of how equity, diversity, and inclusion statements, EDIs, are made in modern theatre. In today's society, most theatres have an EDI statement that reflects how the theatre wants diversity and inclusion from everyone who joins. The problem I see in EDI statements is that an

all-white staff, sponsors, and a white narrative for the company cannot fully understand what “diversity” means. I offer a step-by-step process to investigate if an EDI statement is being properly used in a company's mission statement:

1. Look at your sponsors/donors and see if they fully support your EDI statement.
2. Look at your theatre and question the narrative for how a “black” play is chosen and what ideas and components are you choosing for a play. Do these ideas stem from stereotypes of “blackness” ?
3. Examine your color-blind casting to see if a black actor can immerse themselves in who they are or if it is in favor of a white character.
4. Examine if your staff fully understands that the EDI statement is beyond just color, but if personality and beliefs can fully be supported.

This examination of how the EDI statements will combat Contemporary Blackface Theatre because the company is questioning what they see as “black.” The company also challenges who their sponsors are and if they fully understand the purpose of their EDI statements. This step-by-step process challenges all-white theatre on how they are culturally sensitive to the topics they are producing, or if they are trying to reach a quota.

The knowledge from Contemporary Blackface Theatre will help the black actor articulate if they are contributing to modern-day minstrelsy. Referring back to the racial structure of white, “black”, and black, black people, in searching for their own identity create a caricature of blackface for themselves. Because of this, sometimes, black people play to their own stereotypes because of the lack of identity and ownership they have for themselves. Those examples could be the following: criminalizing black people, referring to black women as angry, offensive nature to black women in hip hop videos, or the idea

of the “black” male in the house household. These ideas of stereotypes are the same images of blackface because it is our deception of “blackness” rather than who that black body *is*. I am guilty of stereotyping my own race. I did this because of the lack of understanding of what “blackness” is. To combat this, we first must identify that there is no way to define a “black” body and celebrate ourselves as individuals. That every story is different and there is no black image. From this knowledge, the black actor will celebrate who they are coming into a performance rather than “blackening up” themselves up for a part.

I offer books that explore ways to give liberation to the black actors to avoid Contemporary Blackface Theatre. *12 Steps to Changing Yourself and the World: An Abolitionist's Handbook*, written by Patrisse Cullors, offers 12 steps for those to be abolitionists. Cullors define abolitionists in the first chapter “The Handbook”, as not abolishing slavery. Abolitionists in the fight against prison, jails, the police, courts, or the social justice movement (6). Cullors offer ways that a person is wanting to receive freedom, which is a type of abolitionist. Patrisse Cullor's book may offer, to the black actors reading this book, ways that they can be abolitionists to Contemporary Blackface Theatre and a white-dominant industry. The black actor can receive liberation for their own minds by creating steps for themselves to be abolitionists against C.B.T. *Blackface: Reflections on African-Americans and the Movies*, written by Nelson George, argues six parts that explain how African-Americans are seen in movies. George explains that he chooses “Blackface” as the title of his book to highlight that African-American artists have to find their image (Prologue). George continues and explains that African-Americans put on the cork mask, blackface, to present themselves in a way of

acceptance. Nelson George's book may offer black actors to notice their own "cork mask" they have adapted to be part of a predominately white institution or theatre to obtain education and work.

The University of Louisville Theatre Arts MFA African American Theatre program gave me a sense of myself, and the truth of who I am. I believed that I lacked how to craft a performance. Rather, I lacked self-awareness and cultural awareness in my life. I did not understand that *my* black experience is important to the roles that I play. We can not let white authors, practitioners, or theatres decide our black future. You decide and take care of your needs. Remember, life has given you a voice, mind, heart, ears, and soul. You do not have excuses, only a testimony to share with others. Peace.

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## CURRICULUM VITAE

NAME: Lamar Hardy

EMAIL: lahard11@louisville.edu

DOB: July 7th, 1996

### EDUCATION

MFA in Performance

*University of Louisville, Louisville, KY*

*May 2022*

B.A. Mass Communications

*Winston-Salem State University, Winston-Salem, NC*

*May 2019*

### ACADEMIC TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Department of Theatre Arts, University of Louisville

*Graduate Student Instructor*

*August 2020-*

*July 2022*

Instructor of record for five sections of Theatre Arts 224 (Acting for Non-Majors) over five semesters.

Planned and taught undergraduates a fundamental course for contemporary acting.

Utilized theatre games, warm-ups, group projects, yoga, monologues, scene work, and job interview style situations.

Completed a course in Acting Pedagogy prior to teaching.

*Graduate Teaching Assistant*

*August 2019-*

*May 2020*

Served as a Graduate Teaching Assistant for Professor Geoffrey Nelson for Theatre Arts 207 (Enjoyment of Theatre).

Taught two separate sections of undergraduates for the Fall 2019 semester.

Recorded grades, and attendance, and helped grade tests, quizzes and papers.

### COACHING

Actors Center for Training, Louisville, KY

*May 2021-August*

*2021*

Coached children, teens, and adults on the fundamentals of acting, scene work, and other acting techniques.

ACTING EXPERIENCE

Regional

<i>Twelfth Night</i>	Duke/Toby	Cincinnati Shakespeare	Crystian Wiltshire
<i>Threads of our History</i>	Various Characters	Actors Theatre Of Louisville	Erica Denise
<i>DragonSoul Online</i>	Hamid	StageOne Theatre	Janelle Rene Dunn

Professional Theatre

<i>A Raisin in the Sun</i>	Walter Lee Younger	D.C. Black Theatre Festival	Adriane O'Pharro
<i>Enslaved Perspective</i>	Alfred	Locust Grove	Crystian Wiltshire

University Theatre

<i>Split Second</i>	Val Johnson	University of Louisville (UofL)	Sidney Edwards
<i>Love Among the Ruins, U of L Theatre Arts and Philosophy Department</i>	Pausanias	UofL	Janna Segal
<i>#Hashtag</i>	Various Characters	UofL	Sidney Edwards

<i>The Birds</i>	Nathan	UofL	Geoffrey Nelson
<i>Detroit 67'</i>	Sly	UofL	Johnny Jones
<i>Beatin' The Dark Home</i>	Tribble	<i>Kentucky Theatre Association</i>	Baron Kelly
<i>Fires in the Mirror</i>	Al Sharpton, Dr. Angela Davis, Michael S. Miller	UofL	Ari Calvano
<i>Never Been Home</i>	Brother Brother	Winston-Salem State University ( WSSU)	Andre Minkins
<i>When the Chickens come Home to Roost</i>	Malcom X/ Satan	WSSU	Andre Minkins
<i>Sticky Fly</i>	Flip	WSSU	Andre Minkins
<i>Broke-ology</i>	William	WSSU	Andre Minkins
<i>Brothers &amp; Sisters, Husbands &amp; Wives</i>	Cortez	WSSU	Andre Minkins
<i>Fences</i>	Troy Maxson	WSSU	Andre Minkins
<i>The Nacirema Society</i>	Bobby	WSSU	Andre Minkins

<i>Flyin West</i>	Frank	WSSU	Andre Minkins
<i>Don't Call me Brother</i>	Hassan	WSSU	Andre Minkins
<i>Tied Up</i>	Curtis	WSSU	Andre Minkins

## RELATED THEATRE EXPERIENCE

### Summer Teaching

*Kentucky Shakespeare Summer Camp* *Jun 2021-Jul 2021*

Taught three different groups of children about the basics of Shakespeare and directed them in *Romeo and Juliet*.

Age Group: 7-10

*Stage One Summer Camp* *Jul 2020-Jul 2020*

Taught one age group of children how to create short films, commercials, and games. In the second group, I taught basic theatre through Marvel characters.

Age Group: 7-11

*Arts Series Camp* *Jul 2019-Jul 2020*

Taught teenagers how to create YouTube channels and short films.

Age Group: 12-15

### Teaching Artist

*Actors Theatre of Louisville* *Oct 2021-Oct 2021*

Taught children and teens the basics of acting and stage combat for three weeks.

Age Group: 13-17

### DIRECTING

*Afromemory, Assistant Director* *Nov 2021-Feb 2022*

Focused on giving actors direction toward warm-ups and acting critiques for their performance.

*The Ultimate Field Trip, KCACTF REGION IV* Feb 2019-Feb 2019

Gave actors direction to perform a staged reading before the 10-minute play festival at KCACTF Region IV.

*Fences, Actor, and Assistant Director* Nov 2017-Dec 2017

Was responsible for gathering the actors together before rehearsals started and did scene work.

*Garage Sale and For Colored Girls* Mar 2017-Apr 2017

Was responsible for directing student actors for the Play Festival at Winston-Salem State University.

#### ACTING STAGE READINGS

*To Him to Her, National Black Theatre Festival* Aug 2017  
Acted as a reader for a new workshop play for a festival.

*I am Grace, National Black Theatre Festival* Aug 2017  
Acted as a reader for a new workshop play for a festival.

*Sheltered, National Black Theatre Festival* Aug 2017  
Acted as a reader for a new workshop play for a festival.

#### STAGE MANAGER

*Single is the New Black, Stage Manager* Sep 2018  
Was responsible for gathering the actors for rehearsals.

#### SERVICE

Department of Theatre Arts, University of Louisville  
*African-American Theatre Program Committee* Aug 2021-Dec 2021  
Helped with organizing events and making flyers

#### AWARDS & AND NOMINATIONS

Department of Theatre Arts, University of Louisville  
*Warren Oates Scholarship Award* 2022

Department of Theatre Arts, University of Louisville  
*Favorite Faculty Nominee* 2021

Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival (KCACTF)  
*Irene Ryan Finalist Runner Up, Partner to Xavier Harris* 2020

Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival (KCACTF)

<i>Irene Ryan Nomination, Fires in the Mirror</i>	2020
Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival (KCACTF) <i>Irene Ryan Nomination, Broke-ology</i>	2019
National Association of Dramatic Speech and Arts (NADSA) <i>Superior Monologue, Never Been Home</i>	2018
National Association of Dramatic Speech and Arts (NADSA) <i>All-Star Cast Member, Excellent Monologue, Flyin' West and Don't Call Me Brother</i>	2017