Transforming into a politically engaged actor through Gem of the Ocean.

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TRANSFORMING INTO A POLITICALLY ENGAGED ACTOR THROUGH GEM

OF THE OCEAN

By

Tajleed Steven Hardy
B.A., Norfolk State University, 2020
M.F.A. University of Louisville, 2024

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of the
College of Arts and Sciences of the University of Louisville
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
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A Thesis Approved on

April 12, 2024

by the following Thesis Committee:

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Janna Segal, Ph.D.

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Catron Booker, MFA

____________________
Tyler Fleming, Ph.D.
DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated God, my Mom, my Dad, Lola, Taelor, Tylin, and the rest of my family.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my thesis committee chair, Dr. Janna Segal, for her guidance and patience in my process. I would also like to thank my other committee members, Professor Catron Booker and Dr. Tyler Fleming, for being a part of my growth in my last year in my MFA program. I would also like to express my gratitude to Professor Anthony Stockard for pouring his time, effort, encouragement, and knowledge into me, for without him I would not be here today. I would also like to thank my MFA cohort, Nicholas Wills and Nyazia Martin, for filling every day with laughs and creating a family for me. I would also like to thank Sarah BE. and Lamar Hardy mentoring to me on this thesis and during my entire time in graduate school. Also, many thanks to my family here in Louisville and all over the rest of the world for constantly checking on me and securing my way to a brighter future. Finally, I want to thank God, my mom, Theresita Augustine, and my dad, Byron Augustine, for always being there for me in the darkest of times and shining a light for me to always find my way.
ABSTRACT

TRANSFORMING INTO A POLITICALLY ENGAGED ACTOR THROUGH GEM

OF THE OCEAN

Tajleed S. Hardy

April 12th, 2024

This thesis explores my transformation into a politically engaged theatre artist through my performance as Citizen Barlow in the University of Louisville's Department of Theatre Arts’ 2024 production of August Wilson's *Gem of the Ocean*. My thesis defines the characteristics of a politically engaged theatre artist and proposes specific ways actors can prepare to perform in any production of any play. My transformation into a politically engaged theatre artist resulted from a combination of the skills I gathered as an undergraduate student at Norfolk State University and the new analytical and acting techniques I learned as an MFA in Performance student at the University of Louisville. By combining these preparatory and performance skills for this production of *Gem of the Ocean*, I became a more politically engaged theatre practitioner. My thesis demonstrates how actors can support social justice through performances that hold space for critical thinking.
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INTRODUCTION

I did not initially become a theatre artist to change the world. I never saw myself as an agent of social change. I started acting because it allowed me to transform myself. When my family lost our home in Hurricane Katrina, we were forced to relocate, and I had to do what I could to fit in. All the kids knew each other already and I looked, dressed, talked, and thought differently than them. I quickly developed a chameleon-like personality to fit in. I picked up sports to fit in with the athletes. I also collected video game magazines and sat with gamers at lunch. All of this was done so that I could find a place to fit in this new environment. I did not realize it at the time but the thing I was searching for was my identity. In searching for my identity, I developed an artistic personality and over time as I developed my art, I would develop my identity. This thesis discusses the development of my artistic identity as a political theatre artist through the process of working as a Master of Fine Arts candidate on the University of Louisville’s Spring 2024 production of August Wilson’s *Gem of the Ocean* (2004). Directed by the chair of the University of Louisville’s Theatre Arts Department, Shona Tucker, this production ran from February 23rd to March 3rd at the University of Louisville’s Playhouse Theater.
*Gem of the Ocean* is a play that explores the ways one searches to find oneself. *Gem* starts when a man named Citizen Barlow comes to the home of Aunt Ester, seeking her assistance to cleanse his soul. There he meets Eli, who watches the house, and Black Mary, who cooks and cleans for Aunt Ester. For Citizen to cleanse his soul, Aunt Ester, with the assistance of Eli, Black Mary, and her friend and suitor Solly, takes him to the City of Bones, a place in the middle of the ocean, where we are told, African slaves who never made it across the ocean have built a kingdom of bones. By confronting his past in this site and admitting his guilt, Citizen Barlow is able to move forward. In the University of Louisville’s production of *Gem of the Ocean* (2004) I portrayed the role of Citizen. As Citizen embarks on a journey of self-discovery that will lead to his transformation into a citizen of the people, I transformed myself into a more politically engaged theatre artist.

My ability to transform to fit in led me to study theatre as an undergraduate student at Norfolk State University. It was there I met my mentor, Professor Anthony Stockard. His study of theatre was influenced by August Wilson, an African American playwright most known for his series of ten plays called The Pittsburgh Cycle. The Pittsburgh Cycle “remaps the history of the black experience of the 20th century on the powerful canvas of the theatre, through poetry, imagination, everyday language, rhythm, and song of African Americans of the Great Migration, capturing the tragedy, the triumph and the resiliency of everyday people who fled the violent South and wound up in cities like Pittsburgh” (Scott 16).

Professor Stockard’s work as an artist and educator was influenced by the “marvelous realism” of August Wilson’s drama. Marvelous realism is “a mode of representation that seeks to expose the extraordinary in ordinary life by materializing the
immaterial, the supernatural, and the magical" (Shannon and Richards 56). Professor Stockard was the first to introduce me to August Wilson’s work and even directed me in my first production of an August Wilson play: *Fences*. The process that was done for that play taught me essential things as an actor, like research, character building, and imagination work. Professor Stockard would always ask his Norfolk State students, "Who are you as an artist?" and "What is the mark you want to leave behind?"

I have transformed into an artist who holds himself accountable for change. After I graduated from Norfolk State, I realized that I still did not know who I was as a theatre artist and therefore sought further study. This led me to the MFA in Performance program at the University of Louisville. The UofL Department of Theatre Arts’ mission is "Art in Action: theatre that is enjoyable, inclusive, rigorous, and transformative" *(About Us)*. My time at UofL made me a politically engaged theatre artist who helps create accountable spaces for all involved to think critically about the current social and political issues. UofL has shown me that to be actively engaged in affecting political change one does not need to be marching downtown and on the front lines of a protest. It can be accomplished by using theatre to hold space for challenging issues and asking questions. The graduate program at UofL creates this very environment for its artists and audience members. They allow the art to work for itself because they have created an environment that allows critical questions. This sense of accountability changed how I approached the acting process while working on UofL’s production of August Wilson's *Gem of the Ocean*. 
ACCOUNTABILITY IN GEM

*Gem of the Ocean* created space for me to critically think about my role as a politically engaged actor. A politically engaged actor is an actor who uses their artistry to help create space for critical thinking and questions for topics or political ideals in their field and society. By using theatre as a container to ask politically charged questions, a politically engaged actor can effect social change. Citizen’s journey to being held in a more accountable space mirrors my journey to become a politically engaged artist. By asking questions that challenge my own perception of the world, my professors at UofL have created a space that allows for critical understanding of topics such as race and identity. Like the City of Bones, UofL is a safe haven that encourages me to face myself and the everchanging world around me. By challenging the work, I do and critically questioning its value in the world, I become a more politically charged artist in the future.

Aunt Ester creates a space for Citizen to hold himself accountable for his actions. The play focuses on Aunt Ester, a spiritual leader in the community, and her house where Citizen Barlow arrives from Alabama to seek spiritual healing and guidance to redeem himself for a mistake he committed. Citizen has been told by the people of the neighborhood to “go see Aunt Ester and get your soul washed” (44). Aunt Ester and Black Mary tell Citizen that she does not have any “magic powers” (44) and that he must come “face to face with himself” (51) for his redemption. Aunt Ester lives up to the idea of not using magic to help Citizen but instead creates a space for him to help himself. Aunt Ester can only help him if he is willing to help himself (44). Citizen facing himself is how he is held accountable for his actions. Aunt Ester creates a space that forces
Citizen to critically think and challenge his actions up until this point. The space she creates is the City of Bones. It is here that Citizen must face up to his wrongdoings so that he can move forward.

Citizen Barlow signifies what it means to be accountable. Citizen’s name emphasizes his function as an “African American Everyman” (Bogumil 168). In the medieval morality play *Everyman*, the title character is an allegory for all mankind that serves to teach Christian values. Citizen Barlow is a representative of African American kind that *Gem of the Ocean* uses to teach the values of accountability for humankind. For Citizen to become a citizen, he must hold himself accountable for his actions. In doing so, he learns what it is to be a good person towards mankind. Citizen Barlow functions to show African Americans that their identity is shaped by themselves. That by holding themselves and one another accountable for their progression, security, and wellbeing they will discover an identity that is not determined by the history of slavery in America.
August Wilson is celebrated for his contributions to African-American theater. His work is deeply rooted in the African-American experience, and it seeks to inspire joy and radical change. His plays inspired many to write on the political intent of his work. In *The Theatre of August Wilson*, Alan Nadel gives us an idea of how August Wilson's plays were meant to inspire social change. Nadel dives into the history the performances focus on, being that each one of the Pittsburgh Cycle focuses on a different decade in African-American history. Nadel suggests that "being exposed to the repetitive performance of history, we learn to read history from our experience of theatre" (22). Theatre is shaped by history and history can be shaped by theatre; they are dependent on each other. August Wilson’s plays gave opportunity for change in American theatre for the African American community.

*Gem* uses symbolism to convey its message of freedom. Nadel’s *The Theatre of August Wilson* gives an in-depth study of August Wilson’s ten-play cycle. In the chapter “Beginning Again, Again: Gem of the Ocean and Jitney,” Nadel explains the history of *Gem of the Ocean*, its characters, and what they all symbolize. Nadel makes the point that Aunt Ester’s home is the place where we go to change locations to succeed (56). Nadel states that her house is the jitney station to Africa (56). Citizen Barlow starts at Aunt Ester’s house, the jitney station, but to move forward he must go back to Africa. His path back then is the Middle Passage, and he travels on it backward to find his start in his past at the City of Bones. Nadel explains that “going to the City of Bones is a ritual act of cleansing in which the spiritual, the political, and the historical all combine” (57). This
metaphorical cleansing frees Citizen from his guilt and allows for him to be someone who takes accountability for himself and his people.

*Gem’s* use of ritual conveys the change to be more accountable. Wilson scholar Harry J. Elam Jr. has stated in Ritual Theory and Political Theatre: “*Quinta Temporada*” and “*Slave Ship*” that rituals can formulate values and induce action in their community and during crisis, can redress social strife (464). Using Elam's ritual basis definition, I see how the ritual of the City of Bones is used to cleanse the soul of Citizen Barlow and make him more accountable. Taking people to the City of Bones is something Aunt Ester does repeatably to help people be accountable for what they have done. Aunt Ester tells Citizen that “the truth has to stand in the light” (72). In the City of Bones ritual, if someone chooses to face up to what they have done they are awarded with a beautiful sight, the City itself. It is a choice for the person and never something that is forced on them. They must hold themselves accountable and “stand in the light”. That is the point of the ritual. An audience member could see this ritual and it could induce accountability in a community, according to Elam (464).

What is lacking from Elam’s analysis is how the use of this ritual could evoke accountability for the actor playing Citizen going through the City of Bones. In preparation for such a role an actor must hold themselves accountable to the work. As I held myself accountable through the process of *Gem*, I began to examine how I engage as a political actor through art activism. This led to me creating a guide for other actors who want to engage with art activism in their own work.

*Gem of the Ocean*, like many of August Wilson’s works, has values that should be questioned and reflected on during and after the performance. Mary Bogumil’s
Understanding August Wilson dissects the values presented in Gem of the Ocean. In the chapter “Gem of the Ocean: Community, the Individual and Values, and the Postcolonial Legacy,” Bogumil dives into the specific values of characters in Gem of the Ocean. My thesis is focused on my performance as the character Citizen Barlow, whose values include “an intersecting array of cultural, historical, political, and personal events and experiences that encapsulate the struggle of free blacks in the early twentieth century to find their way in America” (168). Citizen Barlow represents the new generation of African Americans coming into the beginning of the century. His journey in the play has him absorb cultures, history, and political views he may not see as his own. “Making the people owe is worse than slavery” (60). Citizen claims this in reflection to the money he owes the mill. Solly and Eli educate Citizen on the true horrors of slavery that they experienced (60). Citizen absorbs their knowledge and their selfless act to fight for the sake of others and by end of the play decides to spend his life fighting for others as they did. The world of Gem shows the effects of the psychological damage slavery has done to African Americans in the twentieth century and the value of learning that history and passing it on to the next generation. These values are meant to be questioned and reflected on by the audience and the performer in a space that holds them both accountable. For the audience to be held accountable to such values, the performer must hold themselves accountable to the research and bring these values forward in performance. Knowing the values is not enough; there must be a clear path for the performer to prepare to unearth those values in their performance. My thesis will offer such a path that not only unearths those values but will give a guide to engage with them a performance.
August Wilson’s work is not always viewed as something that was positive for the African American community. Robert Brustein, a long-time dramatic critic of the *New Republic*, criticized August Wilson's plays. Brustein states in “Subsidized Separatism: Responses to *The Ground on Which I Stand*”, that Wilson did not pursue social change in his plays but rather took the African-American experience and used it as a weapon of victimization (Brustein). I agree with Bogumil’s point that Brustein overlooks Wilson's political goals. He desires to "dispel the myth of racial equality and acculturation on the American stage” and thereby takes a defiant stance against the status quo (7). Reviews like Brustein’s on Wilson’s work are informative but, we are missing specific research on how the approach to performing an August Wilson play fares against the values the words themselves instill in performers.

Wilson’s work is that of a politically engaged artist. Wilson’s rebuttal to Brustein is in the *Ground on Which I Stand* in which he states, “there are two distinct and parallel traditions in black art: that is, art that is conceived and designed to entertain white society, and art that feeds the spirit and celebrates the life of black America by designing its strategies for survival and prosperity” (18). Wilson’s work is meant to celebrate not victimize. By creating work that questions how American theatre engages with black art he is doing the work of a politically engaged artist. Wilson states that this can be done by theatres being accountable for black art. That “without theaters we cannot develop our talents. If we cannot develop our talents, then everyone suffers” (33). If I want to be accountable for black art then I must live up to my full potential as an artist and develop my work that encumbrances on the life I have lived as both an African American artist and a politically engaged artist.
I noticed that while there is work done on the political intent of Wilson’s plays, there is not as much research by actors on how to perform the political intent of his plays. A lot of literary criticism on Wilson’s work is available. There is less work on approaches to performing an August Wilson piece as a politically engaged actor. Even Sharrell Luckett and Tia Shaffer’s *Black Acting Methods* offers no clear approach to performing the complex piece of literature that is an August Wilson play. My thesis will help fill that gap as I will explore how the work in preparing for *Gem of the Ocean* affects the actor and how, through that journey, I became more politically engaged.

In Chapter One, “Digging Through the Bones,” I argue how value script analysis is for politically engaged actors. The analytical model I propose is valuable to politically engaged actors. To prove this claim, I will analyze *Gem of the Ocean* (2004) through Elinor Fuchs’s method to explore the play’s world, which allows a politically engaged actor to unearth a play’s sociopolitical structure. These methods were how I started my journey as a politically engaged artist. Over time the methods grew and developed a new way I engaged with my art politically. These methods will help me as an actor to come face to face with myself and the issues of modern society.

The next chapter, “Citizen Barlow: The Arc of Transformation” will show my approach to preparing to play Citizen Barlow in the UofL’s Theatre Arts 2024 production of *Gem of the Ocean*. I argue that my preparation to transform into Citizen Barlow led me to transform into a more politically engaged theatre artist. The approaches outlined in this chapter are valuable to politically engaged artists. I will prove this claim by doing a deep analysis of the character and story more holistically than in Chapter One. I will do this by analyzing the language in a script using fact sheets, the integral setting of the play,
imagination work, entrances and exits, and putting it all together in an analytical playbook which includes the use of historical research, character analysis, and Uta Hagen’s Nine Questions. These steps helped me develop Citizen Barlow into a more fleshed-out character for this production.

The final chapter, “A Reflection in the Ocean” will show how the preparatory work from Chapter Two was enacted in the rehearsal and performance process to transform me into Citizen Barlow. I argue that by reflecting on this work I will prove that the kind of transformation I experienced in the theatre is a political act akin to a march. I will prove this claim by exploring how in rehearsal I enacted the preparatory work from Chapter Two and discussing the specific steps I took in the process to make this transformation possible. These steps include pursuit of a question posed by the dramaturg and the discovery that my preparatory work was not definitive. This discovery led to the use of new approaches that I applied in the rehearsal process, such as the Universe Assignment, Co-signs and Comebacks, the Alexander Technique, SoulWork, warm up techniques for performance, and Patsy Rodenburg’s Three Circles of Energy. All of these were strategies I learned while in my graduate training that enhanced my transformation into Citizen Barlow.

In the Conclusion I will provide reflections about how playing Citizen Barlow has made me a more engaged political artist. I will explore how the themes of the now twenty-year-old Gem of the Ocean are still important in modern society. I will also explore how, as a politically engaged theatre artist, I can best serve the community. By the thesis’ end, I will have unpacked my journey to becoming a more engaged political artist through performance in Wilson’s Gem of the Ocean.
CHAPTER ONE
DIGGING THROUGH THE BONES

To an actor, the script is essential to performance. Script analysis is a “process by which actors interrogate a script for its intended meaning. It consists of equal parts research, close reading of the text, and guesswork” (Rekers). Script analysis turns the script from words on a page to a guidebook from which actors can make choices. The dynamics of character relationships, imagination work, and information about the play’s setting all come from the script. When actors make choices for characters, the audience can assume that these are derived at least partly from an analysis of the script. Analyzing a script is not just for actors, it is also a form of literary analysis. Unlike literary criticism, an actor will examine a script for a more in-depth understanding that will be enacted on stage. Script analysis is even more necessary for a politically engaged theatre artist so as to map out the political landscape of a play.

In my analysis of Gem, I will prove how learning the political landscape of the play’s world informs the choices of a politically engaged actor. I will use the method of Elinor Fuchs, a New York theater critic noted for her writing on contemporary experimental theater, to expand on the Aristotelian approach and show how allows a politically engaged actor to unearth a play's sociopolitical structures. I chose this method over other analytical methods like Aristotle or Freytag because it is not bound by the
Aristotelian conventions and allows for the discovery of a play’s sociopolitical structures. This approach is more beneficial to a politically engaged theatre artist.
THE FUCHS’ BONE

The next bone to dig through is the world of the play. By using the non-Aristotelian script analysis method developed by Elinor Fuchs, a theatre professor, dramaturg, and playwright noted for her writing on contemporary experimental theater, I will unearth the play's sociopolitical structures more thoroughly. The use of Fuchs’ method as outlined in “Visit to a Small Planet: Some Questions to Ask a Play” (2004) allows this due to the questions posed, which allow for more interpretation of the world of the play. Unlike an Aristotelian approach that situates characters as agents of action that drive the plot Fuchs’ approach allows for characters to change to reflect and contribute to the world of the play. As I look at the rules of a play’s world, I see the sociopolitical structures being brought more to the fore. Her approach allows a politically engaged artist to see the play as its own world rather than in the terms of a linear plot sequence or strictly through the lens of character analysis.

Fuchs' method of script analysis is an alternative to an Aristotelian approach that she insists is "not a 'system' intended to replace other approaches to play analysis" (403). She uses her approach "together with Aristotle's unparalleled insight into plot structure" (403). Fuchs’ is stating that she uses her method to expand upon the Aristotelian approach to world building in a play. However, rather than analyze a play in accordance with Aristotle’s hierarchy on the six Elements of Drama, Fuchs proposes that one first look at a play's world. She cautions, "If too tight a focus on language makes it hard to read plays, too tight a focus on character creates the opposite problem: it makes the reading too easy. To look at dramatic structure narrowly in terms of characters risks
unproblematically collapsing [the play's] strange world into our world" (404). This way of looking at the play kept me from unloading my twenty-first-century biases on a play whose world is its own.

Fuchs argues that one should first look carefully at the entire world of the play (404). Fuchs proposes one take the play and "mold it into a medium-sized ball, set it before you in the middle distance, and then squint your eyes at it" (404). As Fuchs suggests, the world has become more manageable now, and as I stared at it, I started to ask myself about the world's space, as per Fuchs’ (404). The world's space is interior, as the play takes place inside Aunt Ester's home. All the action happens in the house as the house is our stage and the action takes place on stage. The play does have what Fuchs calls unseen spaces, or referenced spaces unrepresented in the action of the play (404). Much of the exposition in Gem occurs in these unrepresented spaces outside the home. While unseen, they still have value to the play’s world. For example, the mill is an unseen space referred to in the dialogue. The mill is an exterior space as it takes place outside the viewed world which is Aunt Ester’s house. Caesar says that "mill is what holds everything together, and without it, the city would be in chaos" (36). It has its sense of time; as Caesar says, it has been "three days since the people have been to work" at the mill (33). The mill has its own sense of tone, and mood, and that space's characteristics are connected to the space of the viewed world, Aunt Ester's house. The mood of the mill is tense because Caesar says, “The mill is what hold everything together” (36) as it is the source of income for a lot of people and people are not going to work. The tone of the mill is revolution. Citizen says, “The mill wouldn’t pay me so I stole a bucket of nails” (48). It is also supported by Solly’s line, “They had a riot over at the mill” (27). The mill
is a place where there is constant protest against social injustice towards the community of the world. Even though we do not see the mill, what happens there affects the seen world, Aunt Ester’s house.

Next, Fuchs asks about the behavior of time in a play’s world (404), which in Gem is linear and marked by the newspaper. In the newspaper, Black Mary reads Garret Brown's obituary, saying he "died on September 30th, 1904" (27). Caesar informs us how long it has been since then when he says it has been "three days since the people have been to work" (33). Time is moving forward one day at a time, and the paper provides a specific date and time to follow in the world.

Next, Fuchs asks about the climate of the planet, which in Gem is paralyzing cold. Aunt Ester talks about the "window being open, and that is why she is cold" (22). She also asks Eli to "fix the stove in her room" and says that she "seems to be cold all the time" (17). Selig talks about the cold of the river when Garret Brown drowned. He says the "cold will get to you and shut your body down" (13). The established time also helps with identifying the world’s climate. We know it is September from Black Mary reading Garret Brown’s obituary (27). Fuchs asks about the seasonal “feel” of the world (404). Based on the evidence from Aunt Ester always being cold, Selig talking about the paralyzing effects of the cold river, and the paper announcing the time of year, the seasonal feeling of the world is Fall.

Fuchs shifts from the climate to the mood, which in Gem is joyful. This decision was discovered during Solly and Eli's story to Citizen about their past working on the Underground Railroad. After the story, Eli wants to pour them a drink. Solly teases Citizen about “giving his whiskey out of a teaspoon" (63). This playfulness between two
generations of African American men gives a sense of joy in the world. There are moments when the mood shifts from joyful to oppressed, as when Solly says “The people said they wasn’t going to work and the police tried to make them” (27). Also, when Citizen said “When I left Alabama they had all the roads closed to the colored people. I had to sneak out. Say they didn’t want anybody to leave. Say we had to stay there and work” (24). Both identify an oppressive military like government in the unseen worlds of the play that directly influence the characters’ way of moving through the world. The mood and tones of the world are created through the resiliency of the inhabitants of the world.

Fuchs argues that the final thing to look at when observing a play’s world is it sounds, including its music, and the music in Gem is significant for shaping the world. Fuchs states, “Every dramatic world will have, or suggest, characteristic sounds” (404). The song that Eli, Solly, and Black Mary sing when Citizen goes to the City of Bones indicates the characteristic of incantation (66). This song is what helps Citizen transport to the City of Bones. The song starts off, "Oh, what a day to go to the city of the bones" (66). This is what is said to help Citizen feel the boat moving and move towards the City. This lyric is what started the incantation for Citizen as afterwards he begins to see the house turn into a boat (67). The lyrics changed the world into an unseen space that only Citizen can see on stage. Next, they sing, "I got a home in the graveyard, remember me" (69). This creates the image of other people on the boat with Citizen. This is done by the multiple voices singing the lyric making it seem like there are multiple people around Citizen. Citizen is in another space from everyone else in the house making the multiple
voices affect his perception of people in the space. The music in this world is part of a ritual that puts a spell Citizen to create a new world for him.

Fuchs asks, how the class rules function in the play (405). This world's class structure features upper classes oppressing the working class. Solly speaks on this oppression when he says, “The people said they wasn’t going to work and the police tried to make them” (27). The class rules are also challenged when the people rioted at the mill (27). Citizen discusses revolting against the upper-class when he says, “The mill wouldn’t pay me so I stole a bucket of nails” (48). However, there is always a price to pay when revolting against the class rules of the play. In Citizen’s case when he stole the bucket of nails “They say Garret Brown stole it he ran and jumped in the river…I looked up and he had drowned” (48). Garret Brown paid the price for one member of the working class revolting against oppression by the upper-class.

In Gem, what Fuchs calls the social patterns of the figures in the world revolve around Aunt Ester and her soul-washing (405). Citizen says that "the people sent him to see Aunt Ester. One man says he came to see Aunt Ester and all his problems went away. Say she can help anybody" (44). Figures seem to have a social pattern of seeking guidance from Aunt Ester, and that is why people are always at her house. Making it that the play represents “groups in action” instead of “isolated individuals” (405). Upon Caesar’s first-time meeting Citizen, he says here goes "another one come to get his soul washed" (33). There is a social pattern: if you need spiritual guidance, you seek Aunt Ester, and when you are new in her house, it is assumed you are there to get your soul washed.
In *Gem*, the repeated social pattern leads to the single central figure of the world being Aunt Ester (405). Citizen says the repeated social pattern in the world is that “The people say go see Aunt Ester and get your soul washed” (44). Her reputation has made her the spiritual guidance of the world of the play. Caesar is seen in this world through his connection with Black Mary, and she is there because she was invited to stay by Aunt Ester. Black Mary’s invitation is supported by the textual evidence when Aunt Ester said “I had a dream about Black Mary before I known her. I had that dream and the next day Black Mary knocked on the door and asked me if I had any laundry that needed washing. I told her to go upstairs and make that bed ‘cause anybody willing to do laundry was welcome to stay here” (19-20). She is the figure that ties the community of the world together.

In *Gem*, the upper class who owns the mill has power over the community that works at the mill. Among the questions Fuchs suggest be pursued in the “social world of the play” section is, “who or what has power, or indeed agency on this plant? How is it achieved? Over whom is it exercised? To what ends is it exercised?” (405). The power or agency lies within the mill. Caesar supports the power of the mill when he says “Industry is what drive country. Without industry wouldn’t nobody be working. That tin put people to work doing other things” (36). This power is held over the people working at the mill until the death of Garret Brown where the power and agency switches in world. This evident when Caesar says “Just like them niggers wanna riot over a bucket of nails. Talking about they ain’t going to work. Talking about closing the mill down” (36). The people take back their agency after the death of Garret Brown regardless of the consequences of their livelihood.
In *Gem*, what Fuchs calls a play’s “language habits” are both colorful and logical (405). This world's language habits are observed through monologues and dialogue. Monologues are used to express the logic in the world. Citizen's monologue to Aunt Ester starts by answering her question, "Where is he from?" (24). He starts off by answering "Alabama," and then he discovers a new thought about how he left Alabama by "sneaking out" (24). He then uses his language to give colorful thoughts about his treatment at the mill and the lies they promised him about his wages being "a dollar fifty" instead of "two dollars" (24). All of these led to the discovery of him admitting "he killed a man" and he is there to see Aunt Ester, so he does not go to hell” (25). Dialogue is used to express the colorful feeling of joy for the figures. Aunt Ester teases Solly about the women he has and says that "he got one on every street. He must have none on Wylie Avenue," and Solly responds that he "got two" (19). Aunt Ester asks Solly to marry her and that he is "always talking about getting married" (19). Solly expressing the number of women he has and Aunt Ester's response to that is to get married to him displays the joy their relationship brings to each other. Both have known each other for some time now based on the familiarity of the dialogue. When Aunt Ester asks about marriage, we know it is not the first time they have had this discussion since Solly is “always talking about getting married” (19). The dialogue in this world is used to establish the joy between the figures.

In my analysis of *Gem*, identifying what Fuchs calls the play's social world helped me discover as a politically engaged actor how to navigate that world (405). Plays are more than just entertainment; they can be an influence on the shape of society. Plays can reflect the social aspects of society, like race, class, gender, identity, and can influence
them in a way that can be socially just. A politically engaged actor, may be aware of these topics in their own lives as well as in their artistry, which can influence the type of art they choose to pursue. Identifying the aspects of a play’s social world by using Fuchs’ approach encourages a politically minded actor to be aware of the influences of sociopolitical structures on and off stage. This is done by activating Fuchs’ method off stage by asking questions about one’s own political ideas and their influences over one’s artistry. By looking for the patterns in the world one can see how the inhabitants navigate through its sociopolitical structures.

Looking at the world dynamically because it moves in time is how I can see what now changes within the world (405). Destiny in this world is evident through three images that involve Citizen Barlow, who changes the "rules" of this world's operations (405). Fuchs asks that one first look at the first image of the play, then at the last, and then locate a "striking image near the center of the play" to account for its depiction of destiny (405). The first image of the world is Citizen Barlow knocking on Aunt Ester's door, saying he has "come to see Aunt Ester" (9). The last image is Citizen taking Solly's hat, coat, and stick and leaving out the door while Eli says, "So live" (89). The striking middle image is Citizen’s journey back to the Middle Passage on the ship itself (68-70). This is evident when Citizen tells Solly I’ll go with you. He gonna have to catch both of us” (80). Citizen is willing to risk his life for another person as he has discovered his destiny in being a citizen. Fuchs asks why "it is essential to pass through the central image to get from the first to the last?" (405). It is essential because there must be a force or action that requires the play’s world to follow its destiny to change. This is true
because nothing stays the same in the world and something must lead the world to change.

In accordance with Fuchs’ approach the landscape changes in Gem as well (405). The landscape changes from inside to outside and house to kingdom when the action shifts to the City of Bones. The play’s world shifts during the incantation that puts Citizen under a spell. Citizen says, “The boat’s moving! I feel it moving! The land…it’s moving away” (68) indicating that the landscape has changed from the house to a boat outside on the water. Then the landscape changes again when Aunt Ester says, “Come on, Mr. Citizen, let’s go down to the bottom of the boat” (68), indicating that instead of being on the deck of the boat the landscape changed to being in the hull of the boat. The landscape changes for a third time when Citizen sees the City of Bones. He says, “There it is! It’s made of bones! All the buildings and everything” (71), indicating that the landscape has changed from being in the hull of the boat to a city made of bones. The landscape then changes back from the City of Bones into Aunt Ester’s house. This is supported by the evidence when Citizen tells Black Mary, “I seen the city. I was on the boat. There was people on the boat” (73). Citizen recaps the landscape changes the play’s world has undergone during the City of Bones and establishes the landscape has returned to stasis.

Time has also changed as time moves through the stages of human life (405). As Citizen Barlow admits that he was the one who stole the bucket of nails from the gatekeeper of the City of Bones, who looks like Garret Brown, he simultaneously dies in the metaphorical sense (72). This is evident in the play when Citizen says, “It was me. I done it. My name is Citizen Barlow. I stole the bucket of nails. The Gate’s opening!” (72-
Then overwhelmed by the beauty of the city and releasing his guilt, or getting his soul washed, Citizen begins to cry. At this moment, he sheds the former and is "reborn as a man of the people" (73). As Citizen engages with characters throughout the story, his former self slowly dies, and he is slowly reborn. Only after admitting his sins is he reborn into another cycle of human life that changes by ending one life and starting another in this world.

Citizen’s journey to rebirth is also the action that changes in this world (406). Fuchs asks what the action moves towards, and in this world, the plot moves from suffering to rebirth. Initially, Citizen's guilt makes him feel he has a "hole inside of him and if he is not careful, everything will leak out of that hole" (48). Citizen tells Black Mary that he has "to get his soul washed real bad," which is why he breaks into Aunt Ester's house (43). Citizen's desperation to get his soul washed is only fueled by his suffering over Garret Brown's death. The action of suffering is changed after the City of Bones to rebirth. After that trip, he becomes a politically engaged member of his community, as evident when Citizen takes Solly's hat, coat, and stick, to take up his mission of freeing enslaved individuals (43).

Fuchs asks whether there is an “absolute reality” in the play’s world that does not change (406). In Gem, it is God. Aunt Ester tells Citizen that "God is the only one who can wash people's souls. God has big forgiveness" when he asks her to get his soul washed (22). Black Mary also says that “God's the only one who can wash souls” (44). When Citizen goes to the City of Bones and admits to his crimes, he is forgiven and has his soul washed not by Aunt Ester but by God. This is supported when Citizen says, “I feel all filled up inside. That’s something I done to myself” (76). Citizen has found
forgiveness within himself for what he has done, which allowed for him to find forgiveness through God. God does not change in the world, no matter what is going on in the world. His forgiveness is always there like He is, even if He is not always discussed or seen in the world. His presence is there and stays consistent.

This world demands the audience to leave the theatre and take political action (406). Fuchs asks, "What changes in you, the imaginer of the worlds?" and "What has this world demanded of me?" (406). During the City of Bones, Aunt Ester tells Citizen, "Life is above all. God raised it to a great height. Live, Mr. Citizen. Live to the fullest. You got a duty to life. So live, Mr. Citizen! Live!" (71). The world tells the audience to fulfill their duty to life and live it without regret and judgment. Aunt Ester tells Citizen that Garret Brown would "rather die in truth than to live a lie. That way, he can say his life is worth more than a bucket of nails" (49). Citizen must "find a way to live in truth. If you live right, you die right" (49). This supports the play’s definition of truth as being right and honest as a member of the community. The play wants the audience to live their life to the fullest but to live an honest life. The political action it is provoking is to not simply ignore the world's injustices but to live your life and speak the truth about them. 

*Gem* gives the audience the responsibility to live their life and make sure all those around them also have life.

*Gem’s* world echoes the worlds of other plays in Wilson’s cycle. Fuchs uses the term “theatrical mirrors” to describe how a play’s world may reflect that of other plays and signal interior performances (406). August Wilson wrote a ten-play century cycle depicting the African American experience within a hundred years of American history. While *Gem* may start the cycle, it is one of the last to be written. Yet it still invokes the
African American spirituality in the other plays in the cycle by including Aunt Ester as a character and setting the action in the Hill District. *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* (1982) is the only play in the Cycle to not take place in the Hill District. All the other plays feature the African American spirit and wisdom that is upheld in this area of Pittsburgh by the spiritual leader of the world, Aunt Ester. She washes the souls of Memphis Lee, a restaurant owner, Holloway, a retired house painter, and Sterling, a man recently released from prison in *Two Trains Running* (1990). When she dies in *King Hedley II* (1999), that connection that was invoked to the past in all the other plays dies.

To examine the characters that inhabit the world of the play, Fuchs says one must first find the pattern they exist in (406). The figures in *Gem* fit the pattern of freedom-seeking. Citizen seeks freedom from his guilt over Garret Brown and inhabits this world in search of that freedom when he tries to shove Eli to get into the house to see Aunt Ester (9). When he breaks into the house after Eli leaves for the funeral (22), he even states to Aunt Ester that he wants to go to the City of Bones to "get this thing off of him," this thing being his guilt (58). This specific set of conditions is how the figure Citizen Barlow exists in this world. Fuchs says, "there is nothing in the world of a play by accident" (406). The play’s world shows a pattern of seeking the truth behind freedom. Solly said when he got to freedom, “I don’t feel right. It didn’t feel right being in freedom and my mama and all the other people still in bondage” (61). This pattern will reflect on all of the characters in the play’s world.

Fuchs method challenged the way I approach a play. As I first began engaging with Fuchs, I had difficulty because I had never looked at a play this way. Fuchs asks questions that one pursues to uncover the world of the play; after that, performance
decisions can be made. This relates to what I stated at the chapter’s outset: analyzing the script will inform your choices as an actor. While I was asking myself questions to see the changes in the play’s world, I started to wonder what changed in myself as a politically minded actor. I learned that identifying a play’s pattern before leaping to what Fuchs calls “normative psychology” of a character is useful in finding a character (403). As Fuchs suggests, a character reflect and changes with the world so once a pattern of the world has been established it is easier to find how a character exhibits patterns to fit within and navigate that world.

*Gem of the Ocean* is a play that strengthens a politically engaged artist's artistry. *Gem* explores various political topics, such as racial identity, racism, self-preservation, and destruction of one’s community. As a politically engaged artist, I know these topics will be mirrored back to the audience during the production of this play. The methods of analysis I have chosen allowed me to identify and engage with the sociopolitical structures of the play in a more in-depth analysis. I felt more confident going into the production of this play with this analysis behind me.
As an actor, starting a new process for a show can be daunting. I put myself in very vulnerable places when acting. I feel exposed, whether getting on the stage during the performance or just showing my work during rehearsal. The process becomes even more intense when I am in a room with people who have never been in a process with me. *Gem of the Ocean* is a play that challenged me as an actor mentally, physically, and emotionally. In terms of processes and plays here at the University of Louisville, I have not had one so incredibly challenging. The stakes were high as this is the Theatre Arts Department Chair Shona Tucker's first show as a director at the University, and my last show performing as a student on the collegiate level. However, I have learned to overcome such anxiety by being prepared for it. Most actors prepare for a role in some way, shape, or form. I have heard actors, especially in my undergraduate Theatre program at Norfolk State University, say that their preparation process starts by highlighting their lines. While I am not tearing down anyone's process to work, there is a better way an actor can prepare for a role. I am discussing a full dive into the script with research and some choices made before the first day of rehearsal. Making all choices before rehearsals can inhibit an actor from making discoveries in rehearsal.
The idea is to have the preparatory work, like character analysis, research into the play’s setting, an analysis of the play, and an analysis of the play’s language done so that in the rehearsal room an actor may be open to discoveries made by themselves, the director, or their scene partners. The preparatory work I used is developed by combining the old techniques and strategies I gained through my time as an undergraduate student and the new ones I gained while in graduate school.

*Gem of the Ocean* is where I combined both my undergraduate and graduate techniques and strategies to develop a process that helps me feel the most prepared for a show as a politically engaged artist. I am excited for rehearsal, knowing that my choices are limitless due to the extensive work I have already done with the show. In preparation for transforming into the role of Citizen Barlow, I embarked on a journey of transformation into a more politically engaged theatre artist. In this chapter, I will explain and analyze my process in preparing for the role of Citizen Barlow through research into a play’s specific vocabulary, use of fact sheets, analysis of the integral setting of the play, use of imagination work, notation of entrances and exits, and putting it all together in an analytical playbook that includes historical research, character analysis, and answers to Uta Hagen’s Nine Questions. My approach to the script will differ from that in Chapter One, as I will now be more focused on the individual character Citizen Barlow versus the play’s dramatic structure and what Fuchs calls the rules governing its world. Looking at the script through the lens of my character after looking at it holistically in Chapter One helped develop Citizen Barlow into a more fleshed-out character with a background rooted in the script. For a politically engaged theatre artist focusing on character after
attending to the sociopolitical structures in a play’s world via Fuchs’ method is useful to understanding how the world affects the individual one is performing. This can in turn inform how a politically engaged artist can operate in the world they live in. By examining the sociopolitical structures of the city, town, or the world in which they live in, a politically engaged artist can assess how their craft might serve a cause. My transformation into Citizen Barlow will help create a guide for other politically engaged actors who want to engage with art activism.
ORIGIN OF MY PROCESS

The first part of my process comes from my undergraduate training. As I stated in my Introduction, before attending the University of Louisville, I studied at Norfolk State University. My acting professor and mentor were Anthony Stockard. I did three plays in my first year, Black Nativity (1961) by Langston Hughes, Ruined (2007) by Lynn Nottage, and The Wiz (1974) by William F. Brown. I remember that when I was in Ruined (2007), in 2017, directed by Anthony Stockard, I was asked to score my script. John Lutterbie, Chair of Theatre Arts at Stony Brook University, defines scoring as identifying “a sequence of actions that is more or less precisely repeatable” (181). Lutterbie is saying that when scoring you are writing down, what, when, how, and why, you are doing something in a scene so that it can be repeated with idea of making discoveries in the moment. At the time, I had yet to learn this and how it would help me. I will admit I wrote something in my script to stay in the show. However, I did not realize what I had cheated myself out of until I was in another August Wilson play, Fences (1985).

The 2018 production of the play Fences (1985), directed by Anthony Stockard, is where I gathered my first strategies to develop a character which would be combined with new strategies for my process in Gem. For me, this combination of my past and my present practices created space for me in the rehearsal room by allowing me to think about the work I had done in the past and how it is being heightened by the work I am doing now. This is essential to a politically engaged theatre artist to critically think about the work and its effects on them.
and the room. The *Fences* process taught me so much but is only the start. There were seniors, juniors, and guest artists, and I was there as a sophomore who had recently changed his major to theatre. The show was double cast, meaning two people were in each principal role. However, just because you got cast as a principal did not mean you would stay one. Roles were always up for grabs, and you would lose your role if you did not do your work. It was like *Survival*, the theatre edition, motivating me to work hard so I did not get bumped down. I was double cast with a young man named Jadon Jenkins, and he was a beast of an actor. He came from Alabama State and had been acting his whole life. The pressure I felt competing against him was exhilarating. I never felt I could take a break or stop working because I knew he was, which was good for me as I began my theatre career. When the cast list was sent out, it was attached to an assignment I had to turn in before the first rehearsal. That assignment included fact sheets for characters, which are sheets that tell us everything the character says and does in the play as well as what others think about the character based on what they say and do, comprehensive research on the play, vocabulary research, historical references from the play, imagination work, which is when I would fill the gap in the background of a character based on research from the play to fuel my imagination to make educated guesses on theses gaps, entrances and exit work, which is when I mark what my character was doing before they enter a scene and when they exit a scene and scoring the script. While this was a heavy workload, it would propel me to create a full character. I took this preparatory process to graduate school, and it was the foundation of my process for this production Wilson’s *Gem of the Ocean*. 
THE PROCESS THROUGH LANGUAGE

Understanding the language and researching specific terms used in a play can be crucial to understanding its overall meaning and characters. After my thorough analysis of Gem in Chapter One, I re-read the play with a focus on language and specific terms. Fuchs warns that focusing only on language ignores other parts of a play’s world; this in turn makes it difficult to visualize the play and hard to read (404). While I agree with this for a first read, when I am more familiar with the play, it is helpful for me to focus on this essential element. Analyzing the play’s language helped me better understand how the effects of slavery and racism effect the sociopolitical background of the world. As a politically engaged theatre artist using language can be a way to affect the sociopolitical structures of the world. Researching all terms and references in a script is crucial because if I am unclear on what is being said, I can miss a story element that affects a character or the plot. As per the practice I learned as an undergraduate student I first read the script, circle any words I do not understand, then look them up in a dictionary. This is a method from my prior practice and one I still find useful and employed in my new method. Period plays like Gem, that are set in the past, sometimes have antiquated words. Because "clodhoppers" is a word I have never heard before reading Gem of the Ocean (11), I circled in the script and looked it up in the Cambridge Press Dictionary, where I learned that clodhoppers are “large, heavy shoes." These are also the type of shoes Citizen Barlow is reportedly wearing. Another definition is used to refer to clodhoppers as "plowmen" or farm workers (B.E.). With that one word alone, I understand what Citizen might have been doing before leaving Alabama. Historically
specific terms like this helped me create a backstory for a character that may not be explicitly stated in the text. This term suggests that Citizen's job before leaving Alabama could be that of a plowman. As I analyze the script's specific terms, I help make connections to the story and characters that would have been missed otherwise.

The language of the play helps define the character. A character is defined by Aristotle as an agent of action (9). In other words, a character is defined by what they do and they function to push the plot forward (9). To me, the character is largely determined by the words written on the page. The playwright, the cultural and historic moment in which the play was written, the target audience, and the artist involved in the initial development of the play do help influence how those words are written on the page. Fuchs advocates looking at character last, after looking closely at the play's world (406). Having thoroughly analyzed the world of *Gem of the Ocean* using Fuchs’ method, I approached the character of Citizen first through the language of the play, and then through other aspects of the world he inhabits. This approach is useful to a politically engaged theatre artist because it leads one to understand a character in relation to the sociopolitical conditions of the world they inhabit. Using Fuchs' approach was a new strategy that I had learned while in graduate school. Combining this new strategy with an older strategy like fact sheets, better served me by challenging my habit of seeing the character only as words on the page. I now see the character as someone who is affected by the sociopolitical world they are in and how the choices they make are their way to navigate that world. As a politically engaged theatre artist, I am tasked with finding multiple solutions to issues or topics. After looking at a problem one way, I must investigate it further from another angle to find the best solution to move forward. This is
the same for my new understanding of character as there is not one way a character can be discovered in a process but multiple.
FACT SHEETS

To find out who the character is, I created a fact sheet, a strategy carried over from my undergraduate training. A fact sheet is textual evidence from the script that indicates how my character behaves, how my character feels about other characters, or what other characters think about my character. This includes any direct actions my character makes throughout the show, anything my character says about themselves, anything other characters say about my character, and what my character says about other characters. At first, it seems like busy work, but it helps textually ground my interpretation of the character as a character is not truly realized without both textual support and interpretation. In the first part of the fact sheet, everything my character does is connected to the “do as I say, not what I do” phrase. For example, Citizen is tasked by Aunt Ester to get two pennies and meet Jilson Grant, a man who lives in Blawnox, twenty minutes from the Hill District, to receive something from him and bring it back to Aunt Ester (51). Citizen does get the two pennies but still needs to meet Jilson Grant. However, Citizen returns to Aunt Ester without completing the task; why? Looking at all the other things Citizen has done, like walking from Alabama and trying to work at the mill, we know Citizen does not take shortcuts but does his best. Citizen had stated that he “walked around till he got tired” while searching for Jilson Grant and the two pennies, and after he found one, he knew he had tried his best to find them and came back to Aunt Ester (55). That is why he comes back without meeting Jilson Grant; he tried his best, and to him, that is enough.
When discovering who a character is for an actor, sometimes the character will say who they are or who they think they are. The next part of the fact sheet is anything the character says about themselves. Citizen breaks into Aunt Ester's house and steals bread of hers to eat, and the first thing he says when she catches him is that "he is not a robber" and that "he is not going to harm anybody" (22). It could be argued that Citizen is committing robbery, which would make him a robber. However, Citizen does not see himself as a robber. Some will say when Citizen steals the bucket of nails, he is causing harm and it was his intent to cause harm (48). The difference between these moments is the subtext in them. Citizen stole the bucket of nails from the mill because he was unfairly compensated for his time working there versus him stealing bread from Aunt Ester because he has not been able to eat. One was done out of anger and was intentional on causing harm versus the other which was done out of necessity and the intention was survival. If Citizen is viewing himself as different than what he is, as the performer playing Citizen, using the subtext will allow for me to play the idea of Citizen being a robber but play the subtext of innocence he has because he does not view himself as such.

Analyzing what characters say about my character helps me to shape their dynamics with each other and the behavior that my character displays to others. This is the final thing for this fact sheet. This part is valuable for figuring out relationships and other characters' thoughts about my character. Black Mary describes Citizen as "not saying too much" when he first moves in (27). That tells me a lot about how much effort Citizen has made to connect with the people of Aunt Ester's house. Aunt Ester is the only person to get Citizen to open up about his past and what he has done before the City of Bones. An example would be when he breaks into her house and tells her how he ended
up in Pittsburgh (24). These moments led me to ponder when and why he speaks, and what about? These questions led me to go back and look at Citizen's lines which helped me figure out the weight of the conversations Citizen has. An example to support this is when Citizen tells Aunt Ester “I stole a bucket of nails. The mill wouldn’t pay me so I stole a bucket of nails” (48). This is the first time Citizen has admitted what he has done to kill another man. When returning to this section of the script I discovered the weight of this moment for Citizen. It is hard and scary to admit the wrongs he has done and how it has killed someone else and cause chaos for so many others. This also informed me on the dynamic Aunt Ester and Citizen have with each other. She is someone Citizen believes in, and he trust that by telling her his sins he will be absolved of them.

I also looked at when characters say things about Citizen that are untrue. Caesar says that Citizen is a thief, and that Citizen is liable to steal the coffee pot (35). He then says that everyone should keep their eye on him (35). Eli also tells Black Mary that she should keep her eye on Citizen (27). While both characters state that they distrust Citizen when they first meet him, they have very different feelings for him towards the end. Eli tells Citizen he "belongs to the band" (80), seemingly inviting him into his inner circle along with Solly. In contrast, Caesar vows to catch Citizen for being with Solly and seemingly stealing Selig's wagon (88). Caesar's statements about Citizen turn out to be untrue, along with Eli's initial statement about him. The difference is that Eli got to see Citizen change for the better, which changed his view of him, while Caesar only met Citizen once and never got to know him honestly.

Another part added to the fact sheet is what my character says about any other character. Written from the perspective of my character, it informs what my character
thinks about others at different times in the play. For example, Citizen says that “One man say he came to see Aunt Ester and all his problems went away. Say she can help anybody” (44). To Citizen Barlow, everything he has heard about Aunt Ester makes her seem like a magical creature. Even when Black Mary says that Aunt Ester has no magical powers, he defends his belief in her by saying, "The people say go see Aunt Ester" (44). Citizen’s insistence leads me to believe he sees Aunt Ester as more than she appears. It also indicates Citizen’s desperation as he is taking a lot of stock in what people say versus trying to figure out Aunt Ester himself. It also tells me that Aunt Ester moves and acts in a way that makes her seem magical to Citizen. Analyzing how characters describe other characters informs decisions about who that character is or who they appear to be.
THE INTEGRAL SETTING

Analyzing what Jerry J. Watson calls “the integral setting” (638) is important to the development of characters and understanding the historical context in which a play takes place. For a politically engaged theatre artist this is useful because it informs a deeper understanding of the time the play is set in and allows for an understanding of the setting. This is better than just a summarization which opens an artist up to be empathetic when viewing the past and not judge it. Watson defines an integral setting as “a careful and full description of the setting” that “is provided in concrete terms” (638). Watson asserts, “characters move through the setting, not simply over it” (638), because it is integral to the story: it has a "great deal of influence upon the values, speech, and actions of characters, the movement of plot, and the presentation of theme and mood" (638). Watson’s term is valuable as it requires research that must be found outside the script to find the play’s setting. This differs from Fuchs’ approach which uses the script’s language to analyze the play’s world. To find the integral setting of Gem, I looked at the play’s “concrete description” of the setting, Gem of the Ocean (2004) “is set in 1904, the Hill District of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania” (6). Artisia Green, the inaugural editor-in-chief of the Black Theatre Review, states that in 1904, freedom did not mean much due to the structural injustices placed on the newly freed African Americans. These injustices included sharecropping, merchant liens, peonage systems, and Jim Crow, which prevented many of them from migrating North (142-43). This integral setting helped me understand Citizen’s motivation for going to Pittsburgh (24). His motivation was to seek a better opportunity in Pittsburgh than he had in Alabama. This also helps identify his
feelings of betrayal and confusion when he discovers that the situation up North is similar to that in the South.
After focusing on specific terms of the play to fuel my research and character analysis, I then take that information and create a backstory for the character that helps create a more fully realized, three-dimensional character. This is what I call imagination work, which is when I use my character fact sheet and research on the play to make educated guesses that fill in any gaps in the provided background of a character. The play sparks the imagination to fill any spaces about a character that the script did not give. What I create is for me to see the characters in a way that connects them to a sense of reality. This part of my process is done last as it requires all the analysis be done so that what I create can still be rooted in the play’s world. This work is sparked by text-based questions, such as "What did Citizen do at the mill specifically?" and "What was life for him like in Alabama?" These questions were derived from identifying facts in the script, like Citizen's employment at the mill (24). That information fueled my imagination to create the representational world where my character lives on stage and aspects of the character’s world that are not represented in the play.

The imagination work I created for Gem was more realized as it came from the combination of my undergraduate and graduate training. My imagination work for Citizen was designed on how he navigates the sociopolitical landscape of the world around him. This is the story from my imagination work: Citizen Joseph Barlow was born on Friday, October 13th, 1871. His father, James Barlow, and his mother, Mae Barlow, had only one child, and James died while Citizen was a teenager. Citizen got mixed in with the wrong crowd and was tricked into helping a robbery unbeknownst to
him. When the police came to question his mama, she cried at their questions, and Citizen watched as his mama cried, thinking of something wrong that could happen to her child. Citizen vowed to stay out of trouble to avoid his mother's tears over his mistakes. A man had told rumors in town that several jobs were waiting to be handed out up North—this promise of financial security excited many people, including Citizen. The white community, whose livelihood depended on the black community working for little to no money, set up roadblocks and guards to keep the community from leaving. Citizen, overwhelmed with the idea of being oppressed and unable to take care of himself as a man, decided to leave. He told his mama, and she reluctantly went along with it.
ENTRANCES AND EXITS

Tracking a character’s entrance is helpful to a politically engaged theatre artist because it impacts the sociopolitical landscape of the world. When I started my theatre career, whenever I got off stage, I would drop a character and then try to summon it back up before I went back on again. This lackluster way of performance led to some of the performances feeling manufactured rather than coming from an organic place. Knowing where my character is coming from and where they are going helped keep me focused on why my character is moving around the space. For example, Citizen enters Act One Scene Three from outside. Eli had stated that he was "helping him with that wall and that he was busting up the rocks for it" (28). When I entered as Citizen, I was able to show the exhaustion of breaking rocks outside before coming inside. This specificity in my work will help me stay in character even when I am not on stage.

Tracking a character’s exit is just as important as an entrance as it shows how the sociopolitical world is impacting the character. Knowing where a character is going gives an opportunity to show how the character was affected by the sociopolitical world and if it has changed them while leaving. An example of this can be Citizen’s exit during his scene with Black Mary. Citizen in this scene tries to have Black Mary spend the night with him, and in response Black Mary ask him what he will have after that they spend the night (45). Citizen says “I got me. That’s all there is” in which Black Mary responds “That ain’t never gonna be enough” (46). Citizen exits on her line, and it gives opportunity to play with the different ways Citizen can navigate the sociopolitical world he is in. In this world it is one of community and as Citizen tries to navigate it by going
through it alone, he is challenged and leaves to think about how we will continue to
navigate the world afterwards. This was another example of an undergraduate strategy
being heightened by my graduate school training.
THE PLAYBOOK

Creating an analytical playbook helps me come prepared to make choices informed by my text interpretation. I had stated earlier that scoring is identifying the what, when, how, and why, for everything a character does in a scene so that it can be repeated and discoveries can be made in the moment. While this definition is true, it does not fully encapsulate what it means to me. When I score, I create more of a playbook for myself. In sports, all teams have a playbook that states what one team will do in response to another team's playbook. This is all done based on research done by the other team, but more than that is needed. The other team could change the play in the middle of the game and throw the other team off. I create my playbook, which has everything I need based on my script analysis. When I am acting, I use that playbook as a way of predicting how my scene partner is going to react. However, if my scene partner does something else, I must be able to be present and adapt to my scene partner. Scoring is not entirely repeatable because you cannot repeat something you felt instantaneously as a reaction to someone else. The playbook, then, is a guide to making choices. Those choices will change during rehearsal, and again during the production. I want to be open to those discoveries. I am gathering things to have ready at the start of my rehearsal process.

I find my character’s purpose for being on stage by using the Nine Questions developed by Uta Hagen, a German American actress and theatre practitioner. Her approach is helpful to a politically engaged actor because it helps identify how and why a character traverses the sociopolitical world. In my undergraduate training,
Professor Stockard taught me that if "I do not know why I am on stage, then I have no business being on stage." I find my character’s purpose for being on stage by using the Nine Questions developed by Uta Hagen, a German American actress and theatre practitioner. Uta Hagen was first introduced in my undergraduate training, but it was not until I came to UofL that it was expanded upon, and the questions became steppingstones to how I could navigate a scene. How I answer these questions grounds me on stage with a sturdy foundation that allows for endless techniques and notes to be layered on top. Uta Hagen’s questions are “Who am I? meaning, who is your character, and list specific details. What time is it? The year, the season, and so on. Where am I? The specific location where the play takes place. What surrounds me? What is happening in the world around me? What are my given circumstances: identify past, present, and future events. What are my relationships? These relationships go beyond relationships with people but relationships with objects, locations, and events. What do I want? What do I want immediately? What is in my way? What are the obstacles blocking me from what I want? What do I do to get what I want? What actions or tactics do I take to get what I want?” (82) Answering these questions is much easier once the work above has been done.

Identifying a character’s objectives per scene helps a politically engaged theatre artist by activating why a character is trying to navigate the sociopolitical landscape. The question "What do I want immediately?" relates to the character’s objective for the scene, which is something a character seeks, typically from another character. A character’s objective for a scene is always something the character wants. Depending on the scene, this can be different, but I have discovered that the strongest objective is when one character must get another to do something for them. An example of this would be during
the Prologue of *Gem* when Citizen arrives at the house (9). One objective might be that Citizen wants to see Aunt Ester; another is that Citizen wants the door to be opened. The second objective allows for different choices to be made regarding how Citizen approaches the house for the door to be open. Whatever the actor playing Citizen does, it must be something that makes whoever is inside the house open the door for him. During rehearsals, you can try different objectives to discover which succeeds or fails.

Identifying the super-objective is relevant to a politically engaged actor because it will connect and affect the choice of objectives from scene to scene which are the reasons for moving through the sociopolitical world. Stanislavski calls the super-objective “the stream in which the individual, minor objectives, all the imaginative thoughts, feelings, and actions of actor” all flow through to achieve the goal of the plot (293). “What do I want” is the super-objective or what the character wants throughout the entirety of the play, and all scenic objectives can be traced back to it. Citizen going to see Aunt Ester to get his soul washed is a scenic objective that connects back to his super-objective to be absolved of the guilt of getting Garret Brown killed. Citizen’s dilemma escalates when he meets Aunt Ester and is not immediately absolved of the guilt because Citizen does not want to fail his super-objective. As the actor playing Citizen, identifying his super-objective allows me to see the desperation and urgency Citizen has at the beginning of the play.

Identifying a character’s obstacle is relevant to a politically engaged actor because it tells what in the sociopolitical landscape of the play is difficult for the character to navigate around. Sonia Moore, a student of the actor and teacher Konstantin Stanislavski, stated that Stanislavski would define an obstacle as “something that opposes
the action” of a scene (57). "What is getting in my way" relates to an obstacle, which is what is stopping a character from achieving their objective. I am going to stay with the Prologue for a while as my example of what is stopping Eli from opening the door for Citizen (9). One, it is late; two, Aunt Ester does not see anyone until Tuesday, and the day Citizen arrives is not Tuesday. Eli also wants to keep the peace in the house and go to bed, so Citizen knocking late at night does not motivate Eli to let him in. I have found that most obstacles are discovered by identifying the other character's objective. What Eli and Citizen want are very different things, but there is magic in that. The actors are now on stage 'fighting' for their respective objectives. This is where the playbook is essential because now both actors are using their playbooks to try and find a way to get through their obstacle, which is the other character in this instance, and achieve their objective.

Identifying a character’s tactics are relevant to a politically engaged actor as it gives a roadmap on the how a character navigates the sociopolitical landscape. Stanislavski define tactics as actions that “explains what a character does at a given moment and why he does it” (Moore 65). "How do I get what I want?" or tactics are the plays in the playbook that help achieve the objective. Citizen deciding to move the door aside when Eli would not open it is a tactic for Citizen (9-10). Citizen tried reason with Eli as a tactic in response to Eli telling Citizen “You got to come back Tuesday. She don’t see nobody till Tuesday” (9). Citizen asked Eli “What you mean come back? The people say go see Aunt Ester. This 1839 Wylie ain’t it?” (9). Citizen tried to ask questions and even let Eli know that he was sent there by the people. When that failed, he had to switch tactics so that he would not fail his super-objective. What is interesting about tactics is that they can change not just based the play but by the actions of the actor.
If Eli had said, "You got to come back Tuesday. She don't see nobody till Tuesday," and proceeded to shut the door to keep the peace, then a tactic Citizen might use would be to hold the door open or shove a foot in the door so it could not close (9). These are not specific directions given in the script, so if an actor makes a choice like that, the other actor must be open to discovery and pursue a tactic to achieve their objective.

Identifying beats is relevant to a politically engaged actor because it allows the feelings of a character navigating the sociopolitical world be known and recorded. I marked my playbook with beats to build my guide for navigating Citizen’s feelings and transitions in scenes. Beats are breaks in a scene and there are three types of beats: a change of thought, an idea, or an entrance or exit (Schreiber 188). I break a beat into three parts: the trigger, the processing, and the response. An example of a beat for Citizen would be in the Prologue when Aunt Ester enters during Citizen's and Eli's tussle (10). Her entrance is the trigger. Citizen processes how he feels about this woman he desperately wants to meet, seeing him fight with someone in her house, and he responds with silence and calmness. The parts to a beat all happen simultaneously, with no considerable breaks between them. Beats, like everything in the playbook, will change during rehearsal. However, they are the emotional guide for the character and the way I interpret the scene and play.

All the preparatory work I discussed in this chapter is how I feel fully prepared for a rehearsal process. When the first day of rehearsal arrives, I will use this information in table work, which is when the director, stage manager, actors, and often other production team members (dramaturg, voice coach, etc.) comb through the script as a group around a table. These strategies from both my undergraduate training and graduate
training being brought together created a new foundation for me as a politically engaged actor. As a politically engaged actor, I am constantly evolving and changing how I approach work based on this new foundation I have created. This process makes me feel secure in the work and allows for discoveries based on my work.
CHAPTER THREE
A REFLECTION IN THE OCEAN

When I started my acting journey over eight years ago, there was always a separation of character and actor. I loved performing because it gave me the unique ability to portray someone other than myself. I especially enjoyed characters that are much more outlandish and non-human because it would allow me to separate myself from the character further. I approached Citizen Barlow in *Gem of the Ocean* (2004) in this same mindset. I wanted to create Citizen, and step into the character like a nice suit, to wear and then take him off. However, when creating Citizen, I was missing the most crucial part of the character: me. Every character I play will always have a small amount of me in the character, making the character unique. If Denzel Washington, an American actor, producer, and director, were to perform Citizen Barlow in this *Gem of the Ocean* production, it would be different from my performance, even though we would both have the same director and production staff. I will never be Denzel Washington, and vice versa. There is strength in being your authentic self and bringing that sense of self to a role. That is what I discovered playing Citizen Barlow. By looking inside of myself, I found the thing that would turn Citizen into a three-dimensional person: me.

My transformation into a politically engaged theatre artist comes from this production of *Gem*, my three years at the University of Louisville, and my training at
undergraduate Theatre program, at the HBCU Norfolk State University. Gem was the culmination of this roughly 7-year transformative process. There were other shows I have done at UofL that also helped reshape my identity as an artist. The UofL productions of Split Second (1984) by Dennis McIntyre (Fall 2021), Afromemory (2018) by Teshonne Powell (Spring 2022), Blood at the Root (2014) by Dominque Morisseau (Fall 2022), and Fairview (2018) by Jackie Sibblies Drury (Spring 2023) were also critical to my growth as a politically engaged artist. While this chapter focuses on my rehearsal and performance process in Gem, these other productions greatly influenced my process. They trained me to engage with the political aspect of my artistic choices when performing. Those choices in those performances showed how I as an actor can support social justice through performance.

Discussing my process in UofL’s 2024 production of Gem of the Ocean will reveal my transformation into a more politically engaged theatre artist. This will prove that an artist can be politically engaged in ways other than marching in rallies. For theatre artists who are likewise interested in politically engaged work, this process will be useful in exploring ways they can actively blend their political beliefs and their artistry. I will demonstrate this by revealing how the preparatory work from Chapter Two was enacted in the rehearsal process and in performance. I will also discuss discoveries I made and specific steps I took in the rehearsal and performance process to make this transformation. These discoveries include my response to a question posed by the dramaturg, and the realization that my preparatory work was not definitive. I will unfold the new approaches I applied in the rehearsal processes, such as the Universe Assignment, Co-signs and Comebacks, the Alexander Technique, SoulWork, warm-up techniques for
performance, and Patsy Rodeburg’s Three Circles of Energy. All of these were strategies I learned while in my graduate training that enhanced my transformation into Citizen Barlow as I traversed the sociopolitical world of Gem.
FIRST DAYS IN THE WATER

The first day of Gem rehearsals set the expectations for the rest of the process. You could feel the anticipation upon arrival at rehearsal on November 11th, 2023. The production’s director, Department Chair Shona Tucker, and the actors, met with the production’s dramaturg, Dr. Khalid Long. Long is an Associate Professor at Howard University and an August Wilson scholar. He asked a question that I had not anticipated: "What your first experience with August Wilson?" My introduction to August Wilson was when I was cast as Gabriel in Norfolk State University’s 2018 production of Fences (1985). My process in Fences is where I first developed a process for performing. However, I only scratched the service in this process and never engaged with the sociopolitical side of the play that would enhance my performance. It was not until I was in this production of Gem of the Ocean at UofL that I realized you cannot ignore the political ideas of a play as they will only enhance the performance for both the audience and me.

The role of Gabriel was the first time I was pushed as an actor to create something from combining my past and present. This same push would come again in my third year as an MFA Candidate at UofL when I combined my past undergraduate training and graduate training. My process for playing Gabriel was challenging because I was asked to use my prior knowledge, which at the time was just my imagination and things I learned from watching tv, and the new strategies as an undergraduate student at Norfolk State University. Gabriel is 50 years old and has a specific brain injury that causes him to perceive the world in a way most others cannot. I was only 20 years old at the time of the
production and still new in my acting career. My goal was to honor the truth of his injury but not paint it in a way that could be perceived as belittling people who have brain injuries. Finding the truth was the best lesson I received from performing in *Fences*. Finding the truth, however, was not easy and required a huge amount of research and preparatory work. It was in *Fences* that I found myself being pushed beyond what I thought was required for an actor. For myself as an actor to commit to the circumstances of the play and make them true, I had put in the work to create the world the character lives in.

The preparatory work on *Gem* outlined in Chapter Two helped give me some of the answers but more still needed to be discovered in the rehearsal room. My preparatory work allowed me to come into rehearsal ready to make choices for my character. I discovered that while I did have choices, they did not always help tell the story the director wanted to tell. This sent me into a spiral on the first day because I wanted to make sure I could answer any question about the play or Citizen. Professor Tucker ensured that we would not have all the answers that first day or by the end of the week, but we would have an idea of where we wanted to go. She stressed that “this production was a lab, a place where we would keep discovering”. Professor Tucker asked that we be bold in our discoveries and never be afraid to be wrong. That phrase changed the way I looked at theatre and this production. Yes, I had done a lot of prep work for this show, but that did not mean my discovery period was over. On the contrary, it was just beginning. Realizing the rehearsal space is for discovery taught me about the importance of collaboration in theatre to effect social change. While I cannot have all the answers on
the first day the way to discover the answers was to work in the moment with the other artist in the room and create the answers together.
THE UNIVERSE ASSIGNMENT

Professor Tucker created an assignment that added to the imagination work and world building I had done in preparation for rehearsal. Professor Tucker called it the "Universe Assignment.” The assignment was to create a 7 to 8-minute-long performance that focused on the universe of our character. This assignment was related to my examination of Gem’s universe using Elinor Fuchs’ approach to script analysis. Like Fuchs, I did not want to focus solely on the language of the play (404). For this assignment, I decided to focus on the mood of the universe as it pertains to Citizen Barlow. I stated earlier that the mood of the play was joyful as it focused on the resiliency of the human spirit. The “Universe-Assignment” performance summarized Citizen’s monologue to Aunt Ester into a piece filled with movement and sound (24). The piece began with me as Citizen traveling through the country to get to Pittsburgh. I entailed the harsh reality of the environment around Citizen to the point of desperation and failure and yet Citizen prevailed. Then I moved on to show Citizen working in the mill. I did a series of repeated hammering motions that used my full body to do them. I also added breath in my movements to be able to hear the struggle of doing this work. I then showed Citizen not being paid for his work and him deciding to steal the nails and watching Garret Brown drown in the lake. I had mixed in a soundscape of an ear-piercing screech to show the mental scar Garret Brown’s death had placed on Citizen. Then when it seems hopeless for Citizen, he prevailed forward to seek help from Aunt Ester.

The feedback I received from the director and the rest of my fellow cast mates on the assignment was beneficial in helping create the character of Citizen. The feedback I
got on the performance was that it was almost a prologue to the prologue. I created the universe to reflect the resiliency of Citizen. Despite the harsh environment, backbreaking labor, and even the destruction of one’s own fellow man, Citizen preserves through it to find the light at the end of the tunnel. There was a repetition to show Citizen's mundane life and how he persevered through it to find joy. Citizen is constantly being brought down by the world and instead of quitting he is someone who continues to try again and again. As I began to discover more of who Citizen is, I had found out that the first part of Citizen is resilient despite of adversity.

The “Universe-Assignment” was a great way to expand my artistic voice, heighten my sensitivity, and create more awareness as a politically engaged artist. Fuchs’ approach helped me create the world of the play before I set foot in rehearsal. Now I was able to take that world and experience it first-hand. I created the story based on how Citizen describes his journey to Pittsburgh (24). From the entrapment of people in Alabama, the lies and poor treatment of the people of Pittsburgh, to Garret Brown's death (24), I created an experience that helped me understand why Citizen stole the bucket of nails. I found Citizen's desperation when looking for Aunt Ester at the beginning of the play from this assignment. Putting together this moment in this way helped me expand the way I use my art. Taking information from the play and creating a new performance allowed my artistic voice to go beyond what was given in the play. However, it was still based on the analytical work I had done before. That work increased my awareness of the sociopolitical world of the play. Creating a new performance influenced by that awareness is relevant to how theatre can be used for social change. By creating a space
for empathy for the character that allows the audience to take the impersonal circumstances of the play feel personal.

The “Universe-Assignment” coupled with Fuchs’ method is useful to a politically engaged theatre artist by encouraging the actor to identify and then inhabit the political structures informing the character’s world. By doing this assignment after analyzing the play’s world via Fuchs’ approach I can see the political landscape that Citizen lives in. When Citizen arrives to see Aunt Ester, he tells her of the dangers it took to get to Alabama. He says “I only been up here four weeks. When I left Alabama, they had all the roads closed to the colored people. I had to sneak out. Say they didn’t want anybody to leave. Say we had to stay there and work” (24). Citizen was a fugitive of a police state and fled to the North to escape. However, when he arrived, he said that the mill was “Paying two dollars a day, but when we got there, they say a dollar fifty. Then they say we got to pay two dollars for room and board. Then they sent us over to a place the man say we got to put two dollars on top of that” (24). Citizen was met with a system that still benefitted white supremacist structures. This political landscape is what Citizen attempts to push through for the entirety of the play. This informed the heart of the character which helped inform the heart of the story. Identifying, inhabiting, and responding to a play’s political landscape is essential for a politically engaged artist as it informs the techniques the actor uses as the character to exist in that world.
It is essential that politically engaged artists use their words to affect others rather than themselves so as to make an impact on others. Performing *Gem* requires trusting the language and given circumstances. During the first week of rehearsals, we were joined by Brandon Dirden, an Associate Professor in the Graduate Acting Department at NYU Tisch and an August Wilson scholar. Dirden shared how he approaches August Wilson's work. He has performed in *Jitney* (1982) and *The Piano Lesson* (1987) and directed *Seven Guitars* (1994) and *King Hedley II* (1999). He said that emotion is a by-product of Wilson’s scripts and does not need to be put on; instead, the actor can trust the language of the play. The idea of not putting on the emotion impacted how I previously engaged with acting. In Chapter Two, I talked about discovering beats to add emotions in my performance. I wrestled with not putting on previously identified emotions throughout the rehearsal process. This is where trust of the words and given circumstances became beneficial. I identified the emotional beats and then did not put them on in my performance by letting go of trying to show emotion through the words and instead use the words to affect the world and people around me.

Trusting the language and given circumstances can be done by a technique Dirden created as a long time performer of Wilson’s works called Co-sign and Comeback. Co-sign and come back are ways to respond to characters or call up previous ideas from earlier in the play. Co-signs are usually when characters agree with others or themselves. They are to help characters state what they think about
certain ideas presented in a play. An example of Co-signs would be when Citizen tells Black Mary “The people say, Go see Aunt Ester and get your soul washed” (44). This is a Co-sign to his previous statement to Black Mary that “The people sent me to see Aunt Ester. One man say he came to see Aunt Ester and all his problems went away. Say she can help anybody” (44). He is agreeing with his own idea that the people told him that Aunt Ester will wash his soul and solve his problem no matter what it is. Come backs are usually when a character is rebutting another character’s thought and or a linkage to an idea introduced by another character. An example of this is when Citizen says that "Solly was gonna get him another boat and some more men" (86) as a come back to when Aunt Ester said it to Solly at the beginning of the play (20). Lines in the play are either a Comeback or Co-sign to something or someone in the play and must be given energy all the way through. This strategy helped me when approaching Citizen’s monologues. I knew the central argument of the monologues but had to find the supporting statements. This gave me the agency to trust the language in the play, which led to an emotional connection to the story.

Being this is a politically engaged performance, this work informed the specificity in the words I say in response to others. Co-signs and Comebacks are tools to engage with the political landscape of the play and inform how a politically engaged artist would respond to that landscape. Identifying Co-signs and come backs informs how theatre can be used for social change by being tools to navigate spaces held for critical thinking. By demonstrating the idea of linking thoughts introduced by others and either agreeing or rebutting them to introduce a new thought theatre can build a cohesive community that educates on social issues.
INHIBITION OF HABIT

Letting go of things I did in the past allowed me to transform into an actor who is more politically engaged. During my first year of graduate school at UofL, I was introduced to the habitual patterns or tendencies I have as an actor. In *The Actor's Secret*, Betsy Polatin, a professional teacher of the Alexander Technique, describes habitual patterns as "physical and psychological habits that interfere with the manifestation of innate raw talent and skill" (XIII). UofL's voice professor, Rachel Carter, designed the three years of voice classes to reteach your neuromuscular pathways and inhibit your habits that would block them. Professor Carter uses the Alexander Technique to teach self-improvement and neuromuscular reeducation (XII). During rehearsals for *Gem*, I returned to the Alexander work I have been doing to help with certain habits I have developed. Having habits is not a negative thing. Professor Carter ensured that discussing personal habits is not a personal attack on the actor. These are suggestions to better support the body and voice during a performance.

When first introduced to the Alexander Technique, Professor Carter informed us about the racist verbiage used by Frederick Matthias Alexander regarding people of color. Alexander was an Australian actor and author who developed the Alexander Technique. In his book *Man’s Supreme Inheritance* (1910), he states “The controlling and guiding forces in savage four-footed animals and in the savage black races are practically the same” (72). This hateful language made me not want to engage with Alexander Technique as I saw the correction of my habits as a correction of me as a black actor. As a politically engaged actor, I felt very conflicted about this. On the one hand, the technique is helpful in identifying and inhibiting habits. On the other hand, the
technique was not designed with my black body in mind, so it would feel forced. While I appreciate the revised version of the technique by contemporary practitioners such as Carter and Polatin, it is still derived from a technique that viewed my black body as less than. However, as I understood the character of Citizen Barlow more and the effort it would take to perform, I had to go back to the Alexander Technique. I had to put aside my feelings and find the most out of the technique I could get. I learned to separate my feelings for the person Alexander and the usefulness of the technique for a politically engaged artist.

As a politically engaged artist reconnecting to my breathing allowed for me to not put on or show anything like emotions but instead trust the work I had already done. This is necessary for a politically engaged artist because it helps in voicing one’s political beliefs. By freeing one’s voice through the Alexander Technique one will have the ability to speak in a manner that brings attention and thought to their political beliefs. The biggest habit I needed to inhibit was my lack of breathing. For me, during times of extreme emotion and long passages, I have noticed that I forget to breathe. I have enough air to get through it, but I am not using my natural voice. My voice has beautiful tones and pitches it can reach with enough air. Professor Tucker would say it sounded like I was putting on a voice. During my last year in graduate school, I started taking private Alexander Technique lessons with Professor Carter. In these lessons, she tried to retrain the neural pathways in the body. During one of my lessons, I brought up the strain I felt doing my monologue with Aunt Ester (24). The monologue is a build of emotion that leads to Citizen blurting out that he killed a man (25). I was pushing to get to the end of the monologue, and that would force the emotion to come out. Professor Carter asked me
in my lesson if I needed to rush to the end to blurt it out. She asked me to say the lines, breathe, and forget about what it had been. In my Alexander Technique private lesson, I was thinking about the sensation of breathing in and toning my abdomen. Before, I would constantly flex my abdomen when exhaling words, but I never thought of the inhalation. I also did not need to flex my abdomen to tone it, but by breathing and getting out of my way it would tone naturally. As I added this new sensation of breathing to my work I found my voice is free to make all kinds of discoveries in pitch, volume, tone, and speed. This is also where political possibilities lie. By freeing my voice I am able to discover new ways to voice my political beliefs so that they can affect social change. In this, my words sounded more connected without me having to put on anything extra. The work was already done and I did not have to force it is how theatre can be used for social change. Creating space for critical thinking and discovering one’s voice is what a politically engaged artist does and part of what creates that space is trust. That trust is not only for the actor to the audience and vice versa but for the actor to trust themselves and the work they have done. For me, inhibiting this habit showed me that the performance of my art in theatre can affect social change and like my performance I do not need to add anything else to it but be myself.
SOULWORK

To keep my performance of *Gem* fresh I incorporated Cristal Chanelle Truscott’s SoulWork. SoulWork, as described in Truscott’s essay in *Black Acting Methods*, is a "comprehensive methodology of acting, directing, playwriting, music-making, script analysis and ensemble-building designed to create heightened levels of emotional sincerity and evoke circumstances beyond words that elicit a visceral response and the exchanges of soul between artist and the audience/community" (39). In the rehearsal and performance process we focused a lot on ensemble-building and ritual practices. Anthony Graham-White, the former chair of the Communication and Theatre Department at University of Illinois at Chicago, defines rituals as a routine (319). *Gem* has a lot of intimate scenes for actors, like Citizen and Black Mary’s scene when Citizen attempts to win over Black Mary romantically (43-45). That moment involved me and the actor playing Black Mary, Krystal Waller, to be vulnerable with each other on stage. To do this we engaged with the ensemble-building part of SoulWork and created a ritual before starting the scene. Our intimacy director, Dr. Ariadne Calvano, called this ritual a check-in and check-out. We would check-in before this scene to make sure that each of us were comfortable to engage with each other and the scene and then a check-out after the scene was done. This ritual allowed for me as an actor to be vulnerable and safe during the performance and rehearsal because we created a space that was safe enough to allow for us to be truthful with each other on stage.

In this production of *Gem* by breathing in the words of my scene partners I was able to connect with them in a way the created a heightened level of emotional sincerity
(39). In the scene with Black Mary when she said “Come on. What can I be without you?” (45) Citizen would step out of her brace and respond with “I’m a man. I can’t change that. You a woman. A man’s gonna have his way with a woman. I got the same as everybody else” (45). In this moment while I was Citizen, I would breathe in the words Black Mary would say and use that breath to respond back. The same would be done when Krystal Waller as Black Mary would respond to my statement back. This collective breath allowed for us to acknowledge the feelings being sent to the other person and acknowledge the space we are in now. The space was different every time and not just the physical space but the mental space and emotional space we both were in on that specific day the scene was happening. By breathing in the words, we were both reminded of that space from our check-ins. It also allowed for our emotions to be affected by this breath that allowed for a deeper sense of vulnerability to happen. The breath was how we exchanged soul between each other. Once the audience was added to the performance our breath was now an exchange to invite the audience into our space as well which only heightened the level of vulnerability.

As a politically engaged actor, SoulWork gives me the space to live in discovery which is more useful than trying to master what I discover because I am able to be present in every new moment I am in. Citizen's journey through the City of Bones can be emotionally taxing (66-73). In previous work, I would use the emotional memory technique from Uta Hagen’s *Respect for Acting* to gather emotions for specific roles. Emotional memory or recall is the "recalling of a psychological or emotional response to an event moving in on me which produces sobbing, laughter, screaming, etc." (46). This technique takes an actor’s memory that invokes a specific emotion. Instead of using the
memory I remember an object like a photo or candle to recall the emotion (49). This is so the memory does not fade, and the actor lose the desired emotion. SoulWork challenges emotional recall due to the psychological dangers it can have on an actor (Truscott 7). Those dangers include forcing an actor to relive a painful memory repeatedly to evoke emotions that can cause emotional distress and make it hard to heal and move on from the memory. SoulWork aims to rely on the memory stored in the body to conjure up emotion. This fits into one of the principles of SoulWork, Emotional Availability (46). Emotional Availability is defined as the “connection between the emotional and physical functions from intellectual analysis to explore the essence of a piece” (46). The body stores and remembers emotions (47). SoulWork aims to create a safe space in the ensemble for the body to remember the experience (47). This builds trust in the ensemble as one person can be open to that vulnerability. It will spread to others and allow for emotions to be safely grounded in a state of exploration that allows an infinite number of ways for an experience to be given (47). In the rehearsal process and production run we would do this at the beginning. We would first come together then put a word or sound in the space to describe how we were feeling in the moment. Then we would take all the things that would prevent us from being fully focused on the room and put it in an imaginary red balloon and let it float up in the sky until the end of rehearsal. Then we would all breathe together and then make a simultaneous clap together. This experience let everyone know that we understand and respect the space you came from but that you are in a new space now, a space that is holding everyone accountable and that your work is valued and wanted here. This made it much easier to allow myself to be vulnerable emotionally in this show.
SoulWork can be used to be a more engaging political artist. SoulWork is used to craft safe spaces for collaboration (47). This space moves far beyond the rehearsal space. SoulWork can engage the community outside of just theatre through community dialogue and conversations. These dialogues can maximize community inclusion, diversity, and engagement (Truscott 7-8). During the rehearsal process, Professor Tucker arranged for a scene from Gem to be shown to Bates Memorial Church. It was the scene when Citizen breaks in to see Aunt Ester. The scene was used as a device to show young black art in Louisville during Black History Month. The scene sparked questions of forgiveness and redemption from sin in the church. As a politically engaged theatre artist, my artistry was used to help lead these conversations in both the theatre community and the community of the audience. SoulWork is needed for politically engaged artists to discover a way to lead toward dialogue that engages with topics of injustice. Those conversations are never meant to achieve a specific result. The process of the conversations will lead to a result, but these conversations are ongoing. Like SoulWork, the result will always be different because nature and outside circumstances will always affect the process.
WARM-UPS FOR PERFORMANCES

Doing specific physical, vocal, and mental warm-ups can be useful to an actor who is politically engaged by preparing the space and themselves to make new discoveries during the performance. Targeting these specific areas of my full body instrument is what allowed me to maintain my performance of *Gem*. Doing warmups before any show is not new to me and has been a part of my preshow ritual since undergrad. I discovered the unique physical, vocal, and mental challenges *Gem* presents so I had to get specific in what I did to prepare for them. I start with a physical warmup to stretch my arms, legs, and abdomen. During the City of Bones Citizen is chained to the boat and my legs are stretched out with my abdomen or core supporting me upright. These warm-ups not only help my body prepare for strain it would be enduring during this scene but also helped to ground my body to itself. During the performance I get a surge of energy that shoots through my body. My physical warm-ups help that energy be navigated in a way that helps me best tell the story. I then do vocal warm-ups that aim to help use the full range of my voice. While using the Alexander Technique did help the unlock my full range in my voice but without proper warm-ups my voice would feel as if it were strained. My warm-ups start with massaging and stretching my articulators. My articulators are my tongue, lips, and teeth. Then I do tongue twister to warm-up my articulators. In the past I noticed I speak at a speed that can sometimes blend words together so when doing tongue twister, it gives me the ability to stretch out my mouth to not blend words. Then I practice raising my pitch to the lowest part of my range to the highest. This is so when my voice changes pitches during the show it is not
straining to reach a pitch that is too high or low. The last thing I do is I take 10 minutes to practice breathing and meditation. The City of Bones in Gem has Citizen being metaphorically whipped, chained, branded, and seeing sights that are overwhelming to his mind. This can be a lot to deal with so before the show I take time to meditate to find a way to connect with the story but not get lost in that reality that it damages Tajleed the actor. These warm-ups are essential in showing how theatre can be used for social change by helping an actor become aware of themselves and the space and fill it with new discoveries.

The warm-ups I have outlined are helpful to a politically engaged artist because they ask for self-reflection. As a politically engaged artist I am checking myself and my beliefs in the work that I do. The work offers so much to different people, myself included and yet before I can show it, I must check in with myself. The warm-ups I do help to navigate my body for the work. During the performance I am constantly checking in with myself making sure the actor is safe and yet still connected to what is going on. It seems effortless but that is because the effort that goes into constantly checking on things that have been prepared for the show. The body, voice, and mind all worked in tandem to create the art of Citizen in Gem. A politically engaged artist will need their body, voice, and mind to use their art to fight for their own political ideals. These warmups allow for those artists to check in with themselves and prepare their instrument for long-term use.
THREE CIRCLES OF ENERGY

When using theatre for social change the energy the audience brings and receives will influence the performance. On Friday, February 23rd, the opening performance of Gem, I could hear the audience talking in excitement about what they are about to see. The lights went down and I heard my cue to start the knock at the doors. I felt this surge of energy hit me and I could hear my heartbeat in my head. When I hit the stage, I felt another surge of energy coming from the audience. Now there are two very powerful surges of energy in the building, and I had to figure out what to do with them. The energy from the audience did not leave; it was ever present throughout the entirety of the show. As they sent energy, the performance that was so wonderfully crafted before was beginning to evolve into something new. I knew that the performance would bring about new discoveries but a discovery I had not anticipated was the audience. It seemed that the audience was an additional member of the cast that was not on stage, and I felt myself sharing energy with them. The performance was not completely new, it was just different. It was growing and it was something that none of us could prepare for. Our director, Professor Tucker, told us what thing would be considered funny or would get a reaction, but she could not predict everything. The performance was strong because the cast was receiving very positive feedback from the audience. Now how we responded to the audience was the interesting part.

Moving through the circles of energy will allow for a politically engaged actor to create space for themselves, the cast members, and the audience to have agency in the room to critically think about the political ideas being presented during a performance.
British vocal coach and author Patsy Rodenburg wrote *The Second Circle* (2008). Rodenburg identifies Three Circles of Energy, which “describe the three basic ways human energy moves” (15). Rodenburg says that everyone has a habitual circle and that it is blocking presence (15). You can move through these circles rapidly and in finding your way through them you will create a space open for all.

The First Circle keeps an artist from experiencing the work of others. The First Circle is the circle of self and withdrawal (16). It is in this circle that energy is focused inward and looks to absorb all energy without every giving any back. In this circle it is difficult to be “observant or perceptive about people or objects outside of yourself” (16). An example would be if the audience gives energy to the scene I am in with a scene partner and my scene partner responds to me with that energy but I ignore it and do what I was doing in rehearsals. I am not listening at that point and am more focused on myself. While this circle is not a bad thing to be in, for a play like *Gem* that relies strongly on the organic connection of the ensemble, being in this circle did not best serve the best story.

Third Circle keeps a politically engaged artist from making specific choices to help tell stories. This is an actor’s habitual circle. It is the circle of bluff and force (17). In this circle all energy is outward and non-specific (17). This circle is a shield from vulnerability with your scene partner and the audience (18). This is where I came into the rehearsal process with all my preparatory work already done. I had a lot of energy to show the work I had done but it blinded me on honing into specific choices with my others. I have been fighting against being in this circle my entire graduate school career. This circle is for those who take up space and do not leave any for others (18). My preparatory work can get me excited to talk first in any discussion about *Gem* and while
that is nice, it ruins the discovery period for other members in the cast. Focusing the energy towards the product and not the journey to get there could inhibit a politically engaged actor from making discoveries in collaboration with the cast. Not everyone did the work I did but that still does not mean I take the experience of learning and training away from them and in so doing potentially prevent myself from learning from them.

Second Circle is a focused energy that allows for 50/50/50 awareness on stage. If I am aware of myself, my scene partner, and the audience and share energy between the three of us evenly, that I am in a state of 50/50/50 awareness. Second Circle is the energy of connecting (19). The energy is focused and moves outward and inward in a flowing give and take zone (20). Rodenburg says that this circle “touches and influences another person rather than impresses or imposes your will on them” (20). This is the circle you strive to be in during the performance. The audience sends you energy on stage and you share that energy with yourself and scene partner and then give the energy back. The opening night performance was exactly that. It was a give and take of energy which elevated the performance to new heights.

When there is no energy from the audience you must rely on your scene partners to give you energy. While the opening night performance really gave us a new element to play with, the next night seemed to take it away. The audience that night seemed to be in a state of First Circle, reflecting inward about the performance rather than sharing the energy with us on stage. I had expected to have energy given to me on stage, but it was clear it was not coming. I wondered what I would do when I remembered that I have a partner on stage with me and they were sending energy my way to help me with my discoveries. Even if I cannot be in Second Circle with the audience, I can still achieve it
with the ensemble of people on stage, all of whom have worked hard with me to create a splendid show.

For a politically engaged artist knowing what circle you are in is helpful in engaging how the work is affecting others and yourself. You do not have to march downtown in rallies or protest to express your political ideals. Your art is enough and doing your art is a political stand on its own. You still need to see how that art is affecting others. I believe Second Circle is the best circle for a politically engaged artist. The point of politically engaged work is that it is meant to affect social change. It cannot be work that is focused on the self or be so out there that it is unspecific. The work must be given energy by those it is being shown to and by letting their energy evolve the work to something else. The work of a politically engaged artist is always charged with something and when you add the energy of the audience or others involved with the work it becomes something that may affect social change in others. That is because Second Circle is about creating a space for the artist and those watching the art to coexist together and create something new.

Both my analysis and preparatory work was beneficial but did not come without drawbacks. Anyone who knows me, knows I work hard. Professor Rachel Carter stated in my private Alexander lessons that I have too much training and work too hard. I say that because once I have done the work it becomes difficult to let the work go and be free in the moment. This is what I learned while in the rehearsal and performance process of Gem. I had done so much work on the frontend that it sometimes impaired my judgment and stopped me from making new discoveries in the moment. However, all of that work is meant to inform but not dictate my experience. Every day was a new day and I had to
trust that the work to help me navigate the political landscape was done and that I, Tajleed, could be present and aware on stage. This awareness is how a politically engaged actor can be aware of the topics that will help them affect social change.
CONCLUSION

The idea of using art to affect social change has always intrigued me. In my Introduction I stated before that I never intended to be a person who enacted social change with their art. However, my undergraduate mentor Professor Stockard’s questions, “Who are you as an artist?” and “What is the mark you want to leave behind?” as an artist, still resonate with my spirit. I have seen him use his art to change the world around him. It was not on a global scale, but in the bubble of the Theatre Department at Norfolk State University, the world became a place that was safer to navigate. His work allowed me to find my identity as a black artist. When I arrived at the University of Louisville, I carried that identity with me and evolved it into a politically engaged artist. Professor Stockard created a legacy with me and, along with UofL, molded me into a politically engaged artist.

Creating a guide on how a politically engaged artist can create space that allows for critical thinking on political issues in society is my legacy. My process of preparing and performing the character Citizen Barlow in *Gem of the Ocean* allowed me to gather all the tools to create a guide for artists to engage with any show politically. This study examines my application in the *Gem* process of the acting tools I learned at Norfolk State University and everything I have learned at UofL to become a more politically engaged artist.
As a politically engaged artist, I aim to create space for others to think critically. The opportunity Aunt Ester creates for Citizen Barlow’s transformation in *Gem* models how space may be given to allow for transformation. She offers to take him to the City of Bones, she says “I can take you to that city, but you got to want to go. Do you want to go, Mr. Citizen? Do you want to get your soul washed?” (58). She gives Citizen the choice, to go to the City of Bone because the only way he can get there is by wanting and believing he can go. Aunt Ester represents how a politically engaged theatre artist could affect change in others. By not judging his decisions, supporting his journey of discovery, only pushing him as far as he wants to go and asking questions that engender self-reflection, Aunt Ester created a space for Citizen to think critically about his actions, their effects on others, and how he will move forward. That is what I aim to do with my work. While I could not control what the *Gem* audience thought, my performance as Citizen may have given space for critical reflection. As a politically engaged artist, I aim to ask questions they did not have before the show.

This study of my transformation into the character of Citizen Barlow offers actors examples of textual analysis approaches and performance methods that help make a performance more politically engaged. To build a guide to help artists become more politically engaged, I blended strategies from my undergraduate and graduate training to create a new process to politically engage with theatre work. This was valuable to support my transformation into Citizen Barlow. While a politically engaged artist should come into a rehearsal prepared with choices already made, it is essential to hold space for
discoveries found in the rehearsal room. This open space for discoveries allows an actor to find new ways to use their art to activate their political ideas. The tools provided herein were applied to the overtly political *Gem* but could also be applied to less overtly political plays.
FINDINGS

My time at UofL has made me more politically engaged. Since being at UofL, I have found myself subconsciously asking questions about my art and how it can be used to benefit the community. For example, when writing this study, Senate Bill 93 was introduced in Kentucky. This Bill aims “to prohibit public school districts and schools from expending any resources or funds on diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging or political or social activism; prohibit public school districts from engaging in diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging” (Kentucky General Assembly). This could jeopardize the African American Theatre Program (AATP) attached to UofL’s Theatre Arts program, which is the only one of its kind in a public university in the United States. As a politically engaged artist performing August Wilson’s Gem for the AATP, I show the benefits of having an African American Theatre Program. That program allows students to engage with and study BIPOC or Black, Indigenous, and people of color playwrights like August Wilson. To be politically engaged as an artist does not need to be protesting or marching down the street. UofL demonstrated its way of being politically engaged and protesting Senate Bill 93 by producing Gem. The audiences able to come and see the play were offered the opportunity to protest the Bill through attendance at Gem. That is political activism, and it did not require UofL to stand or march on the Senate's step.
Actors working on becoming more politically engaged with their art will need acting techniques and script analysis that enhance their rehearsal and performance process. As discussed in Chapter Two, Elinor Fuchs' script analysis approach allows an actor to view the political landscape of a play. Taking that political landscape and adding it to the acting techniques I had from my undergraduate training and the new ones I gained from my graduate training created a world to live in during the run of the play that was heavily influenced by the political nature of the play. This created an awareness for myself as an artist on the political issues this play addresses and how I, as an actor, make space for those issues to be thought about critically by both myself and the audience. In turn, this allowed for a deeper connection to the character and the performance.
FUTURE APPLICATION

My blend of both my past and present, like Citizen, has created an artist seeking to develop more work that holds space for political systems to be thought about. *Gem* has closed, and my time in that process will be one that I will remember forever. While I am done with *Gem*, my time as a politically engaged artist is just beginning. This thesis is the culmination of my time in the MFA program at UofL. After graduation, I plan to work with Kentucky Shakespeare Festival in their 2024 summer season. I will employ the techniques and processes I have developed through *Gem* in their season and hold space for critical thinking.

Kentucky Shakespeare’s Juneteenth celebration is my way of working as a politically engaged artist. Juneteenth in Louisville used to be an event where new work created by BIPOC artists was produced for the community. It has been discontinued since 2011 but now has been brought back. As a politically engaged theatre artist, I intend to create a piece to be performed on their stage on Juneteenth. I will create a brand-new piece that focuses on the African diaspora with an all-black cast that aims to make space for the majority white audience of Kentucky Shakespeare to think critically about the black bodies and stories they are witnessing on stage. This relates to Wilson’s project as articulated in *The Ground on Which I Stand* as I answer the call as an African American artist to seize the power over my own cultural identity. An actor can achieve that with the techniques I have shared here and doing so can, in turn, make them more politically engaged. This cycle will continue, and more space can be created for people to think critically about how they can address political ideas.
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CURRICULUM VITAE

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Education

Norfolk State University, BA, Theatre Arts, 2020

University of Louisville, MFA in Performance, 2024

University of Louisville, Graduate Certificate in African American Theatre, 2024

Creative Work

Academic Performance

Citizen Barlow - Gem of the Ocean, dir. Shona Tucker, UofL Theatre Arts, Louisville KY, 2024

Dayton – Fairview, dir. Catron Booker, UofL Theatre Arts, Louisville KY, 2023

Justin – Blood at the Root, dir. Nefertiti Burton, UofL Theatre Arts, Louisville KY, 2022

John – Afremory, dir. Nefertiti Burton, UofL Theatre Arts, Louisville KY, 2022

Smalls – *A Soldier’s Play*, dir. Anthony Stockard, NSU Theatre Company, Norfolk, VA, 2020


Ensemble – *The Color Purple*, dir. Anthony Stockard, NSU Theatre Company, Norfolk, VA, 2018

Gabriel – *Fences*, dir. Anthony Stockard, NSU Theatre Company, Norfolk, VA, 2018


**Professional Performance**

Winston – *The Island*, dir. Crystian Wiltshire, HopePunk Theatre Collective, Louisville KY, 2023*


Young Siward – *Macbeth*, dir. Amy Attaway, Kentucky Shakespeare, Louisville, KY, 2023

Mustardseed/Fairy – *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, dir. Matt Wallace, Kentucky Shakespeare, Louisville, KY, 2023
Antipholus of Ephesus – *The Comedy of Errors*, dir. Steve Pacek, Virginia Stage Company, Norfolk, VA, 2020

Caliban – *The Tempest*, dir. Patrick Mullins, Virginia Stage Company, Norfolk, VA, 2018


**Theatrical Design**

Set Designer, *The Island*, dir. Crystian Wiltshire, HopePunk Theatre Collective, Louisville, KY, 2023*

Lighting Designer, *The Island*, dir. Crystian Wiltshire, HopePunk Theatre Collective, Louisville, KY, 2023*

Sound Designer, *The Island*, dir. Crystian Wiltshire, HopePunk Theatre Collective, Louisville, KY, 2023*


Sound Designer, *The Colored Museum*, dir. Laiona Weaver, NSU Theatre Company, Norfolk, VA, 2021

Directing

Director, *Unchained*, Kentucky Shakespeare, Louisville, KY, 2023

Assistant Director, *The Earth Remembers*, dir. Anthony Stockard, Virginia Stage Company, Norfolk, VA, 2021

Assistant Director, *The Colored Museum*, dir. Laiona Weaver, NSU Theatre Company, Norfolk, VA, 2021

Director, *The Game*, Norfolk State University, Norfolk, VA, 2019

Stage Management


Production Stage Manager, *The Colored Museum*, dir. Laiona Weaver, NSU Theatre Company, Norfolk, VA, 2021


Stage Manager, *Once on this Island*, NSU Theatre Company, Norfolk, VA, 2019

Stage Manager, *TopdogUnderdog*, NSU Theatre Company, Norfolk VA, 2018

Playwriting

*Unchained*, dir. Tajleed Hardy, Kentucky Shakespeare, Louisville, KY, 2023

*Don’t Do Drugs Kids*, dir. Sarah Bunn, UofL Theatre Arts, Louisville, KY, 2022

Producing
The Island, dir. Crystian Wiltshire, HopePunk Theatre Collective, Louisville, KY, 2023*

Unchained*, dir. Tajleed Hardy, Roots 101 African American Museum, Louisville, KY, 2023

Unchained*, dir. Tajleed Hardy, Kentucky Shakespeare, Louisville, KY, 2023

Children’s Theatre Performance

Anansi The Spider, dir. LaShondra Hood, UofL Repertory Company, Louisville, KY, 2022-2023

Seven Stops to Freedom, dir. LaShondra Hood, UofL Repertory Company, Louisville, KY, 2022-2023

Storytellers, dir. Allison Sims, Stage One Family Theatre, Louisville, KY, 2022-2023

Teaching Experience

University of Louisville, Department of Theatre Arts, Louisville, KY, 2021-Present

- Intro. to Acting for Communications- Graduate Instructor of Record-2023

This class provides an introduction to theatre and performance as communication. Students develop a general performance awareness and practice effective approaches to public speaking.

- Enjoyment of Theatre – Graduate Teaching Assistant- Fall 2021

This class provides an exploration of theatre, from its origins to the present, as a means of communicating ideas. In addition to watching performances or reading plays, students will have the opportunity to gain hands - on experience of theatrical techniques through creative exercises.
Kentucky Shakespeare, Camp Shakespeare

Instructor/Counselor – Summer 2022

“Creates opportunities for children and young adults ages 5-18 to explore the theatre arts through imaginative play, visual arts, movement, storytelling, language, and more!”

(Kentucky Shakespeare)

Awards & Recognition

Black Theatre Studies Award, University of Louisville, 2022

Best Supporting Actor, NSU Theatre Company, Brother Boxer: The Amen Corner, 2020

Sustained Academic Excellence, NSU Theatre Company, 2019

Outstanding Leadership, NSU Theatre Company, 2019

Best Supporting Actor, NSU Theatre Company, Gabriel: Fences, 2018

Excellence in Stage Management, NSU Theatre Company: Once on this Island 2018

Conference Presentations

“The Pinnacle of Theatre: A Broadway Performance,” UofL Graduate Student Regional Research Conference, 2023

Memberships

Equity Membership Candidate Program 2017- Present
Service

Service to UofL

Graduate Student Council Committee, 2021-present
Graduate Network in Arts and Sciences Committee, 2021-2022

UofL Department of Theatre Arts

Production Buyer, 2021-2022
African American Theatre Program Committee 2022-2023
Undergraduate Curriculum & Recruitment Committee Member, 2023 – Present
Assistant to the Director of Undergraduate Studies, 2023 – Present

Search Committee Member for a Tenure-Track Acting Faculty, 2021-2022