IMAGES & REALITIES:

A PORTRAIT

OF

THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN MALE

ON THE AMERICAN STAGE

AN M.F.A. ACTING SHOWCASE

BY

LUTHER D. WELLS

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Master of Fine Arts degree in Theatre

The Ohio State University

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1993
DEDICATION

To my mother and grandmother; Marion, Puncho, Princess and Precious. To Matthew, my father and brother, and all the other men of African descent for whom this work is primarily focused. But the greatest honor and dedication is given to God who has given me the gift and inspired and blessed this ministry every step of the way.
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TO: Dr. Reid Gilbert, Ellen Newman, Dr. Beth Sullivan, and Graduate Studies Committee.
FROM: Luther D. Wells
RE: M.F.A-Acting Recital, Proposal

The following is a proposal around which I am presently developing a 30-minute one-person acting recital in requirement for the degree Master of Fine Arts in Acting from The Ohio State University, Department of Theatre.

THEME: Statistics show that the lives of African-American males are in jeopardy, and we run the risk of becoming extinct. Factual and presumptive evidence confirms that race, gender, age, and ethnicity influence behavioral outcomes in our society. But the concern is how negative factors, such as racism, affect these outcomes.

Images: Embattled, Embittered, Endangered researches historical, social, and developmental information about Black males in American society. It focuses on the images created by mainstream society in general, and the African-American society in particular. I attempt to ferret out hegemonic ideologies that have promulgated negative images of the Black man, and put into question his intelligence, masculinity, and capacity to function as a leader in our society.

Both the heterosexual and homosexual orientations are explored, as well as, the dilemmas that they experience while attempting to find their
rightful place in society. I address the struggle for self-definition by young Black males who often have their identities defined for them. A fostering of racial pride, its expression when individuals surpass stereotypical limits, and the definition of success are also considered.

**PERFORMANCE/PURPOSE:** The 30-minute recital will consist of a number of monologues combined with music, song, and dance. The attempt is to create a theatre piece designed to present truth-positive images of the Black man, and impress upon its viewers the horrors that abound when unwarranted false and negative images persist in the lives of Black men in particular, and the American people in general.

**PRODUCTION NEEDS:** At this time the production will only require the use of a bare stage and lighting that consists of at least three area spots. The use of minimal furnishings, likely represented by the rehearsal blocks, is also needed. I will be responsible for securing the necessary costumes and props as needed.

**RESEARCH:** The following are a number of the resources that I am presently using.

**BOOKS, MAGAZINES, AND ESSAYS**

The Crisis Magazine
Black Psychology
Young, Black, and Male in America
Black Man in White America
Young Black Males in Jeopardy: Risk Factors and Intervention Strategies
Masculinity and Race: The Dual Dilemma of Black Men

VIDEO TAPES

Ethnic Notions
Tongues Untied

PLAYS

Come And Get These Memories
101 Black Inventions
Before It Hits Home
Miss Evers' Boys
Fraternity
My Girlish Days
'Skegee
Pill Hill
The Colored Museum
Spell #7
Slow Dance on the Killing Ground
Home
Don't Bother Me, I Can't Cope
Colored Peoples Time
Images: Embattled, Embittered, Endangered

Factual and presumptive evidence confirms that race, gender, age, and ethnicity influence behavioral outcomes in our society. A growing concern is how negative factors such as racism, affect these outcomes. Of particular concern is the increase in statistics which show that the lives of African-American males are in jeopardy, and that they literally run the risk of becoming extinct. This paper researches historical, social, and developmental information about African-American males in American society. It focuses on the images created by mainstream society in general, and the African-American society in particular. The attempt is to ferret out hegemonic ideologies that have promulgated negative images of the African-American male and put into question his intelligence, masculinity, and capacity to function as a leader. Attention is given to the issue of American racism in regards to peoples of African descent, the effects on its victims, and the images that have been created by its inhumane practice. A fostering of African-American racial pride, its expression when individuals surpass stereotypical limits, and the definition of success are also considered. Both heterosexual and homosexual orientations are explored, as well as the dilemmas experienced while attempting to find safe and nurturing places in society. The struggle for self-definition by young Black males who often have their identities defined for them by racist hegemony is also addressed. The final analysis is an attempt to answer the question, "How should Blacks be portrayed in the Arts?", with particular attention given to the images of the African-American created on the stages and screens of American theaters.

Webster's dictionary defines "racism" as the assumption that the characteristics and abilities of an individual are determined by race and
that one race is biologically superior to another, or that a political program or social system based on these assumptions is "racist."¹ This is a rather general definition, but racism is often very specific and has been shaped differently by the social context in which it occurs. Religious and political turmoil, geography, and the economics of countries shape what gets defined as race. What distinguishes it, however, is the dynamic of what underlies specific racist ideologies. Racism is a low-level defense and adjustment mechanism utilized by groups to deal with psychological and social insecurities similar to the manner in which individuals utilize psychic defenses and adjustment mechanisms to deal with anxiety.² It manifests itself in different ways, is carried over from generation to generation, and in various contexts is looked upon as an appealing social value much like patriotism, religion, and good manners. Lloyd T. Delany, in his essay *The Other Bodies in the River*, says that the Negro in the American society was the victim of the most commonly employed devices used by individuals to avoid dealing with deep-seated conflicts; *projection and justification*. Projection allows a man to take those characteristics which he knows or fears are unacceptable by others and attribute them to a down-graded group of people. He then justifies his actions and refuses to accept reasons for pride in that particular group. In *The Fire Next Time*, James Baldwin comments on how well White racists use this device:

If one examines the myths which proliferate in this country concerning the Negro, one discovers beneath these myths a kind of sleeping terror of some condition which we refuse to imagine. In a way, if the Negro were not here, we might be

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forced to deal within ourselves and our own personalities with all those vices, all those conundrums, and all those mysteries with which we infest the Negro race ... The Negro is thus penalized for the guilty imagination of white people who invest him with their hates and longings, and the Negro is principal target for their sexual paranoia...³

Religious and social conditions of Europe gave birth to White racism in America. Within Eurocentric ideology it was not uncommon for one group of people to exploit another in order to gain economic and industrial power. Every race of man was subject to slavery, and justification for inhumane acts was not a requirement. However, the Protestant Reformation brought the belief that man was accountable only to God and fostered ideas about personal dignity and rights unrecognized at any time before. The fanaticism and extremism that was synonymous with the Reformation created the need to show that the slave was less than a man or at best, a different kind of man. The highly religious early American supposed no natural inferiority in Africans, no inherent failure to develop and mature. But when necessary it was relatively easy to reduce the Black African--different in culture, appearance, and religious practice--to the picture of a savage beast suitable for enslavement. The notion that slavery was just and beneficial was well established by this philosophy, and the slaver and slave-holder took on the role of disciple sent to lead a lost nation of "savage beasts" to the promised land.

Such rationale tainted the fabric of American society and set in motion an idea of White superiority and Black inferiority. The color of one's skin in the racist American milieu had an enormous impact on our

society, and became the single characteristic associated most with the "evil" sexual and aggressive impulses projected onto Blacks. The following excerpt by L. J. West demonstrates this:

For man daytime is a good time, the safe time, the healthy time, when he can see what is going on and make his way in the world. The daydream is aspiration; but the nightmare is consummate terror ... Night is the time of secret, mystery, magic, danger, evil; and the man of the night is black.\(^4\)

According to C. A. Pinderhughes, the prevailing thought was that if a group was different in appearance, culture, and behavior---especially when low value was given to those differences---the group would be associated with low things---the bottom, buttocks, genitals, and sexuality. As evidenced here, the promulgators of slavery successfully made their case, making this type of association possible. Because the average White American knew nothing about the great kingdoms of Africa, a prevailing myth was created that depicted the African as a savage beast running wild in the jungle until he was rescued by the tamed, moralistic White man. These ideas, coupled with the fact that so many Blacks were left without purpose, or the ability to defend themselves against physical, social, and psychological abuse helped to create a repressive and oppressive context for Africans in the United States.

While the institution of slavery has disappeared, its effects have reinforced this superior/inferior notion, and created an image of Blacks that is fixed in the minds of most Americans. Moreover, slavery and its continuing effects have led to the systematic destruction of the most stabilizing aspects of African culture. An enormous amount of adjustment

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was required, and led to an unstable existence for the African in this new land. Separation of family and kinsmen was the common experience created by slavery. While African culture cherished and reinforced values regarding familial relationships leading to an attitude of respect for self and responsibility toward others, those cultural attitudes were crushed with the forced migration. Instead, what resulted and continues to remain evident are consequences that range from severe disabling psychic, emotional, and social trauma to moderate impairment such as low self-esteem.

Social malfunctioning, under-achievement in academics, and teenage delinquency are a few of the side-effects reported to be experienced by African-American boys. In many cases, these effects are attributed to being reared in fatherless homes. Speculative information states that these single-parent children have greater difficulty in defining their sex roles, are less independent, and more subject to lapses of immature behavior at any given moment. Underneath this assumption, however, many women feel there is a misogynist view that women are ineffective parents. The absence of the father brings the assumption that close identification with the mother results in the male child becoming overtly homosexual, and compensation for this sexual confusion is thought to be sought out in bombastic masculinity, or any number of other defense mechanisms. Black male youth are often forced to learn what it means to be a man outside of the home under the guidance of their peers, who themselves have varied notions and opinions of the model presented by mainstream society. Examples of such are: (1) Black boys are often reinforced by their peer group for athletic accomplishments, yet ridiculed for academic achievement; it is not "cool" for a boy to be too good in school.
At an early age Black boys often learn to control and dominate women, and to avoid being tender, communicative, or emotional in relationships with women. These learned attitudes are more the effects of a racist system than any innate qualities or defects.

Along the same line, Black men are often portrayed as animalistic, sexually charged beings. Originally established by the insecure White male to instill fear of the Black man into the lives of White women, these and other stereotypical images have since been adopted for self-description by Black men, and by Black women who frequently refer to their male counterparts as "dogs." Black men who identify with the myth of sexual superiority attempt to uphold this image by engaging in multiple sexual relations, and fathering a number of offspring in order to solidify their "manhood." Additionally, Black men are portrayed as lazy, trifling, and abusive "jive-talkers." Black mothers teach their daughters that men are abusive, "no good," and unreliable while fully accepting the fact that their daughters should marry these men. In her book, Black Macho and the Myth of the Super Woman (1979), Michele Wallace writes:

... there is a profound distrust, if not hatred, between black men and black women that has been nursed along largely by white racism, but also by an almost deliberate ignorance on the part of blacks about the sexual politics of their experience in this country.

Domineering, sexually hung up or demanding, and the belief that they are in competition with them for jobs, money, and power are a few of the

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images that Black men hold about Black women. Under- and unemployment has been a historical mainstay in the lives of Black men. The devastating effects that this phenomenon has had on the Black American male has done little to foster a positive self-image about their masculinity (ability to support the family). His inability to "bring home the bacon" has resulted in many fathers leaving the home in order to make it possible for their wives to become eligible for governmental support, (ie., welfare). Often these men leave the home just long enough to allow government workers to come in for periodic visits and return upon their departure, at other times they leave and never return. These permanent departures add to the growing number of statistics and a continuing cycle of single-parent homes.

Black homosexual relationships also face their share of obstacles. Support and acceptance, or the lack of, is the biggest problem facing homosexual relationships in the Black community. The Black community tends to be extremely homophobic, and ostracizes anyone who identifies with the gay community. Homosexuals are viewed as "freaks," and often referred to as "it" or "he-she," not "he" or "she." Open hostility toward gays is most often demonstrated by Black men, more so than Black women, as this practice is commonly viewed as identifying with White culture. However, for Black gay men, racism in the gay male community is another dimension compounding their plight in the multi-cultural American milieu. J. DeMarco, in his article "Gay Racism" about gay life in Philadelphia, describes how Black men are often singled out for "carding" (made to show more than one piece of identification), allowed entrance only when accompanied by a White patron, and various other tactics designed to discourage their attendance at many of the predominantly White bars. He
further notes that after being admitted, Black patrons are often met with racial slurs, dirty looks, and even uninvited physical advances without a word of introduction. Black men in the gay community are often viewed as inferior to their White counterparts. The inferior stigma that is placed on Black gays is often internalized, and results in their taking on extreme feminine characteristics, (the "Miss Thing" syndrome), as a defense mechanism. Accentuated masculinity, aggressive posturing, extreme defensiveness, and dominant roles in intimate interpersonal relationships are additional ways in which these men counteract the negative images and results in them being characterized as "Super-studs." Psychologically, the consequences of these racial practices results in the Black gay male losing his identity. He is no longer viewed as an individual, but is rather looked at as symbolic representation. These mythical identities, which are clearly connected to racial stereotype, again cause low self-esteem, or negative self-image in the Black gay male.

Racism and homophobia make life for the Black gay male, as a "double minority," extremely difficult and psychologically complex. For Blacks, the Black community serves as a curator in developing coping techniques and maintaining positive self-identity. For gays, the gay community serves an equally important function by providing a network of social and psychological support. For Black gays, however, the often overt hostility between two communities may be more harmful than supportive of a positive sense of self.\(^7\) The confusion and alienation experienced by Black gay men, combined with other cultural male gender

expectations, often forces them to make a painful decision to either be "Black" or "Gay."

Though much attention has been given to the role or image of the American Black male in society, what still exists is the need to address the issue as it pertains to his portrayal in the arts, particularly on the stages and screens of American theaters. W. E. B DuBois first initiated this discussion back in 1926 in the Crisis magazine, when he composed "A Questionnaire" (seven questions) designed to extract from the artists of this country a centralized view on "The Negro in Art: How Shall He Be Portrayed?" The images that "graced" the American stage in the 1920s pacified White America's concept of Negro life up to that point, consisting primarily of the minstrel, singer, dancer, and comedian, or a much more negative image of the lazy, shiftless "nigger," "sambo," or wide-eyed, yassa' boss "Uncle Tom." What was not being depicted was the life of a people complete with poignant love relations, hates, fears, and aspirations. In his thesis "Recovering Dramatic Losses," Mikell Pinkney traced the origin of these negative images as far back as 1769 when Lewis Hallam, a White man, played the role of a Black slave in Isaac Bickerstaff's The Padlock in a New York stage production. It seems that Hallam, donned in blackface makeup, went on stage in a drunken stupor; but rather than seeing him as a drunken unprofessional, the all-White audience laughed and appreciated Hallam's performance. Thomas Rice, considered the father of the American minstrel, later earned his fame when he imitated a crippled old Black man and performed a musical rendition of "Jump Jim Crow." Rice's popularity gave rise to minstrelsy and a great number of it's blackfaced White performers. These developments helped to create a Eurocentric criterion
by which all performances of Black characters were thereafter judged.

Pinkney notes:

Early minstrel performers did not represent or express the actual life conditions or feelings of Blacks in their theatrical performances. Most of the men who impersonated Blacks and appeared as minstrels had never actually met a Black person. Accordingly, although minstrelsy was supposed to be founded on the lives of Black people it was primarily a tradition created out of intentional misrepresentation by the White establishment. The intention was to signify that the Black race was incapable of functioning independently in society, but if they had any chance of doing so they would first have to be trained and cared for by Whites. Such a theory produced continuous portrayals of denigrating images on American stages.

Perhaps the greatest injustice inflicted upon the Black male by the institution of minstrelsy was the negative self-image it helped create. A quarter of a century after the birth of professional minstrelsy, it's first Black performers entered into the profession. Although most of these performers where already themselves dark in complexion, still they maintained the custom of blackening their faces and outlining their lips with red or white to make their mouths twice their normal size. The parody of this practice was that Black performers, although they brought authenticity to their performances, were now imitating poor White imitations of Black life. By falling into an already established framework, pioneering African-American performers making the first mass entrance

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into the entertainment industry were themselves aiding the establishment and institutionalization of the Black image as national buffoon.\(^9\)

The residual effects of this national tradition helped to fuel and sustain negative images of Black life long after the demise of minstrelsy. Perhaps it was to this that DuBois was alluding in his attempt to ferret out answers to his questions. With the compilation of responses to the questionnaire, Dr. DuBois was able to ascertain some notion as to where the real challenge lies, as evidenced in the following excerpt:

"Thus it is the bounden duty of black America to begin this great work of the creation of Beauty, of the preservation of Beauty, of the realization of Beauty, and we must use in this work all the methods that men have used before. And what have been the tools of the artist in times gone by? First of all, he has used the Truth-- not for the sake of truth, not as a scientist seeking truth, but as one upon whom Truth eternally thrusts itself as the highest handmaid of imagination, as the one great vehicle of universal understanding. Again artists have used Goodness--goodness in all its aspects of justice, honor and right--not for sake of an ethical sanction but as the one true method of gaining sympathy and human interest.\(^10\)

Upon close examination of the articles, it appears that the overwhelming majority of the respondents felt that the challenge was to the artist. That challenge entailed evoking the truth in depiction, be it positive or negative.

The earliest attempt to combat the negative images of Black life created by White America, and the poor standards of performance that had come to be associated with the African-American is recorded nearly a century prior to Dr. DuBois' questionnaire. In the 1820s James Hewlett founded a company of Black actors called the African Company and they performed at a Greenwich Village tea garden, The African Grove, run by a

\(^9\)Pinkney, 45
retired seaman known as Mr. Brown. This African Grove Company is the first known African-American theatre company, and were known to produce works of Shakespeare as evidenced in their very first production in September 1821, *Richard III* with James Hewlett in the title role. They are also reported to have performed the first play written by an African-American, *King Shotaway*, written by Mr. Brown. The African Grove is said to have closed in 1823 or 1824, because of assaults by outraged Whites. However, the company was able to produce a young Black artist by the name of Ira Aldridge who later went on to Europe and became one of the most celebrated Shakespearean actors of his time.

Not again until 1915 with the creation of The Lafayette Players did any other Black theatre group attempt to concentrate on producing legitimate drama. This first major professional Black dramatic company was successful at stepping out of the mold that had been created for them; not only by White writers, producers and directors, but by both the Black and White audience as well. This mold confined the Black artist to portraying caricatures of themselves that were intentional-misrepresentations of real Black life despite the achievements of notable Black actors as James Hewlett and Ira Aldridge. The company of Black actors made their heralded grand opening at the New Lincoln Theatre on November 15, 1915, under the name The Anita Bush Stock Company, in honor of it's founding member. Their opening performance was that of *The Girl at the Fort*, a farcical comedy, and was well received by both the public and the press who applauded this effort at legitimate drama by a Black company.

Miss Bush later moved her company to the Lafayette Theatre where they had their debut on December 27, 1915 with a new play *Across the
Footlights and eventually assumed the name by which they would be
renownly remembered. They were pioneers of a new generation of Black
performers and were given that recognition by a new kind of Black
audience. The greatest contribution to the American theatre that was
given by this company of actors, was the opportunities it provided the
Black actor to be trained in a variety of acceptable dramatic roles.
Clarence Muse, who joined the group in 1916 and became one of it's
greatest stars, says of the Lafayette's early members:

Our aims was to give vent to our talent and to prove to every
body who was willing to look, to watch, to listen, that we were
as good at drama as anybody else had been or could be. The
door was opened a tiny bit to us and, as always, the Black man
when faced with an open door, no matter how small the wedge
might be, eased in.\textsuperscript{11}

Lester Walton, the comanager of the Lafayette Theatre and Black
drama critic of the New York Age declared that the company would be
remembered for introducing to New York an IDEA which was bound to
take root, spread and rebound the good of the Negro on the stage. He
continued by saying that their work was:

a great and meritorious effort being made to raise the standard
of the colored theatrical profession; and an endeavor to prove
that the Negro can do other than sing and dance, an endeavor
that warrants the hearty support and cooperation of all
members of our race.\textsuperscript{12}

Subsequently an additional group of Lafayette Players was formed to
perform in Chicago in April of 1916, and a third in May of the same year

\textsuperscript{11}Sister M. Francesca Thompson, O.S.F., "The Lafayette Players, 1915-1932," The
216.
\textsuperscript{12}Thompson, 217.
for the Washington, D.C./Baltimore areas. By 1917 there was one group of Players at the home theatre in Harlem and two traveling groups on the road. By 1932 financial woes and a number of other factors forced the Lafayette Players to disband. However, the Players had a very profound impact on the American theatre and Black Theatre history. They were responsible for helping raise the conscious of the American people and the standards of Black entertainment. Their seventeen years of uninterrupted and successful performances laid a foundation on which Black entertainers in today's theatre were able to build.

The Lafayette Players were able to bring to the drama a gift of a Black tradition as well as a particular temperament and talent. Alain Locke, in his essay The Negro and the American Theatre, notes:

> Time out of mind he (the Negro actor) has been rated as a "natural born actor" without any appreciation of what that statement, if true, really means. Often it was intended as a disparaging estimate of the Negro's limitations, a recognition of his restriction to the interpretative as distinguished from the creative aspect of drama, a confinement, in terms of a second order of talent, to the status of the mimic and the clown. But a comprehending mind knows that the very life of drama is an instinct and emotion, that drama begins and ends in mimicry, and that its creative force is in the last analysis the interpretative passion.¹³

In essence the Players were modeling themselves after their White counterparts, but within that was able to liberate themselves by breaking out of the well-established traditions previously associated with Black performers. Existing barriers were broken and the acceptance of Blacks in legitimate theatre was begun.

Other notable efforts to break down the barriers and stereotypes of the African-American on the American stage came with President Roosevelt's Federal Theatre Project and the establishment of separate Negro units of the project during the years 1935-1939, the Black Revolutionary Theatre Movement of the sixties, and Barbara Ann Teer's founding of the National Black Theatre and the Temple of Liberation in 1968. Entertainment is not the necessary goal of the National Black Theatre, instead its major goal is to re-educate and restore spirituality and cultural tradition that has been taken away from Blacks in America. This process is popularly known as consciousness-raising. The National Black Theatre's major contribution is the creation of a Black theory of acting and liberating. Jessica B. Harris states:

As the black experience in America is quite different from the white one, black actors are frequently asked to play roles that have nothing to do with the basic reality of their lives. This may seem to be a contradiction but Stanislavski's "as if" does not always work for black actors in these times. With the theories established by the National Black Theatre, the black actor can return to himself, to his culture, to his heritage and to his people.¹⁴

The ideas implemented by Ms. Teer encouraged other Black theatres to return to their African roots for inspiration and the look for a spiritual base.

Henry Louis Gates, again proposed the questions originally asked by Dr. DuBois with the same intent some sixty years later, in 1987. Careful examination of responses to the questionnaire in 1987, shows that the

The ideology of the respondents had changed very little in the sixty years since DuBois first posited it for debate. It appears that the only change had taken place in the semantic nature in which the subject is now referred, that being, instead of "Negro" artist, the customary reference now is "African-American" or "Black" artist. In the BALF edition of "A Questionnaire," Gates and his colleagues challenge us as artists and laypersons to bring to the forefront the true nature of the African-American culture. It is likely that if any change in the idea of how Blacks are portrayed should occur that it will be Black artists and the Black community in general who will act as leaders of that change.

By most accounts that message is taking root. With a growing number of African-American actors and directors in the entertainment industry, one of today's hottest topics of discussion is how we as Black artists can be at the forefront of change. This change will only come through the education of the total community. The prevailing notion is that once we, as a race, regain our Afrocentric culture, then and only then will we be able to educate others about who we are and what we are as a people. Young movie directors like Spike Lee, John Singleton, Mario Van Peebles, Matti Reich, and the Hudlin Brothers understand the importance of regaining the Afrocentric culture and are addressing these issues in their work. The current video blitz and the technological advancement of our nation, is making it possible for all facets of our society to see the work of these young artist. People who ordinarily are not reached are seeing such work and are being affected by the experiences of African-Americans. With the emergence of such writers as Ntozake Shange and George C. Wolfe who write primarily for the theatre, and are writing about Black life and the realities of living in White America, strides are being
made to correct the wrongs and injustices that have permeated our society dating back to slavery. Clearly, these writers' sense of where the real problem lies allows them vehicle to tread into uncharted water. They make it possible for Black actors to be in touch with their Afrocentricity and the spiritual powers the live within. Gregory Hines, star of Broadway's current hit musical *Jelly's Last Jam*, says that after reading the Jelly script he had little hope of actually doing the show, but upon seeing the great risks that writer/director Wolfe was taking with the African-American stage he could not resist. He believed that he would finally have an opportunity to say something important about the interior life of Black Americans. He exclaims:

> I loved being in shows like Eubie and Sophisticated Ladies but I knew they weren't really saying anything. Jelly is. One of the best-kept secrets in the world is the racism that exists within the African-American community. And I knew that to have a piece on Broadway about....the attitudes we have about hair quality and skin color and class would not only affect White and African-American audiences, but it would speak on larger issues of the human condition.\(^{15}\)

Exploring the essence and consequences of Black America's internal racial anxiety is what makes the success of Jelly so special. With this and many other productions, new ground is being broken to destroy the stereotypical Black musical, and the mythical idea that African-Americans are always singing and dancing, and happy.

Denzel Washington, one of America's fastest growing and sort after Black actors, feels that integration has been more of a detriment than a saving grace because it has caused African-Americans to move further and further away from their own culture. He states:

In our desire to climb the ladder, we've gotten away [from our culture], which is one of the things I liked about Cry Freedom. What Steven Biko was saying is you have to go back and study your own history your own culture. That's where your strength comes from. Not from trying to assimilate someone else's culture because they have their history--as a matter of fact they've cut out yours.\textsuperscript{16}

Although Washington gave an Academy Award winning performance in the film "Glory," he initially had reservation about doing the role. A by product of his view on the effects of integration is the desire to not do "slave films." However, he was able to look beyond with greater vision and understand that as long as there is honesty in his portrayal and a fully realized character, he would not be compromising his integrity.

Washington helps to set a standard by which all Black actors must be willing to gauge their work. The Black actor, therefore, must give voice to his soul. He must play that which is real, speak from his own experiences, and allow his performance to be empowered by the manifestation of the spirit and inherent revelation.

Development of a theory to determine how people of color should be portrayed on the American stage, is a direct result of the need to destroy images created by racist White America that began with the institution of slavery. The residual effects of this oppressive practice firmly embeds stereotypes in the minds of White Americans and warrants the efforts of Black artists who have struggled to overcome these attitudes. It is hoped that through the work of artists such as Ntozake Shange, Spell #7, and George C. Wolfe, The Colored Museum and Jelly's Last Jam, the continued destruction of these mythical images will bring about the desired change.

I posit that the role of Blacks on the American stage should be delivered with integrity and an honesty that will foster a greater understanding of a culture that is both spiritually and culturally rich, as Black artists and the Black community at large continue the struggle of recapturing the Afrocentric roots of which its people were systematically robbed hundreds-of-years ago. Gilbert Moss provides ample summation:

The days are over in which many people in theater become hung up on the notion of positive as opposed to negative Black images on stage and screen. Black characters weren't real people: they were symbols. Even when playwrights tried to make their heroes more than symbols representing all Black men or all Black women, critics, and the public in general, resisted.\textsuperscript{17}

Denial and resistance from both the Eurocentric and Afrocentric perspective must end and allow the real men and women to come forth and speak.

REHARSAL & PERFORMANCE JOURNAL
Monday, November 9
Today is my first rehearsal. I’ve been reading and going over the prologue in my mind for so long it’s very much memorized, it was just a matter of getting up and moving today. I was able to set the opening pose as well. As far as the blocking goes, it feels pretty good for me to just go with what comes naturally and do what the words tell me to do from one moment to the next. I don’t think I’ll set it, except for what is needed to set lighting cues. I’ll need to have an U.S. special at Center for the opening silhouette and dance. That should be enough until I move downstage on “My father was a retired magician...” From that point on I think the rest of it can be done in general illumination with the sudden magical black out at the end. Matzeliger is going to take a lot more work. There’s absolutely no connection with him at this point. How old is he? Where did he come from? Well, I guess I should be using the pronouns “I” and “me”, huh? (smile) How long have I been sick? What is the weather like? Do I remember this woman? I guess this means I’ve got more research to do. You know this piece sounds and feels so infantile, or should I say sophomoric, but I like it because of what I think it says about homeless people. I don’t think people realize that there are very intelligent and sometimes brilliant people in this senseless condition. I heard a homeless gentleman say on one of the journalistic news reports the other day, “It makes no sense to be homeless.” I have to agree, in this supposedly single remaining superpower, whatever that means, it makes absolutely no sense at all. If our government would take the money that is spends on weapons and other stupid things that are constantly destroying us and put it to better use, we wouldn’t have people living out on the streets and eating out of garbage cans. We seem to have grown so immune to the human
condition. Is there any love left in the world at all? When you really think about it all (most) of us are just a short step away from being there ourselves. I hope that Clinton will be able to help change it since he's been elected. No more Bush! YES!!!

Tuesday, November 10

I scheduled a reading of my script for my committee today, however, Beth was the only one able to attend. Afterwards she gave what I thought were good comments and suggestions, including:

- Transitions from one point to the next to be made clearer
- Physical stamina (concern of overall length)
- Distinction of segments
- Length of the final two pieces

She suggested that I consider cutting the last paragraph of the sermon. She doesn't think it's needed. She also said for me to know exactly what makes each of these character's anger different from the others. I think that's what she means by distinction of segments. Even though she suggested cuts, I think I can make it work. After all she said they were only suggestions, I feel so strongly about each of these pieces. But I wouldn't totally rule out the possibility. It seems that her biggest problem overall is with transitions and how smoothly they can work. Which led her to suggest that I work it out so that I'll not have to leave the stage for costume changes, but instead they can be done in view of the audience. I think this is a wonderful idea and I will try to incorporate it as much as possible, although I think it'll be totally impossible for Miss Roj. It was good to have her come in and give feedback. Points for Beth!!

Thursday, November 12
Today I started working on Scott, the initial blocking came instinctively and seems to work. However, I'm pretty sure it will change once I connect with the character. I wonder if there are any former football players on OSU's campus who have had this experience? I'll need to get a football, too. (prop note) Edward is definitely too long, I'll have to figure out the best place to cut it so it'll move smoothly into Woody. I began to memorize Woody and it stuck in my mind rather quickly. I think he's a lot like me. Now I understand what Beth meant about Woody's visible anger. It would totally contradict what he has to say about being cast in stereotypical roles. He has to relax early on into the piece. Thanks Beth!! I'll wait and begin Zooman next rehearsal.

**Sunday, November 15**

I came into rehearsal intending only to work Zooman today, but the spirit guided me right into Carrington and Wilcox. I can already see that this third and final section will be my favorite. The transition has to be extremely smooth, something's not yet right. I decided to cut Randall today, though it breaks my heart to do so. But I realize it's too long and he's just a more intellectual and eloquent version of Zooman. That's at least ten or fifteen minutes taken off the show.

**Tuesday, November 17**

Dennis really came up with a great concept for the use of the rehearsal blocks, instead of the furniture that we originally picked out from the cyclotron. I especially like the idea of using the grocery cart. I was able to find a few more pictures that could be used for the slides and began memorizing Miss Roj. I knew it better than I thought.

**Wednesday, November 18**
I worked on Miss Roj today. She's developing nicely. I decided to cut the waiter, which is something Beth suggested after the reading, but of course I was trying to make it work. (smile) It doesn’t! So, it’s gone. Ellen came in to watch today, so I started over from the top and did a semi run-through with lots of stops and starts. She thinks it’s going to be a good show, but suggests that I:

Work on maintaining a continuous throughline in the action
Try a dialect with Matzeliger/
Work on building speeches to a climax/
Watch the habit of closing my eyes on the song and pull the audience in/
Open my vocal passage more/

all of which I greatly appreciate. Thanks Ellen. Mike also sat in on part of the rehearsal today, his overall comment was that I need to loosen up and let the words of what I’m saying work more for me as a guide to doing what comes naturally. I do feel extremely tense with all the things that I still have to do. I thank them for their observations.

Thursday, November 19

I cancelled my rehearsal today in order to go see Malcolm X. I think the movie is wonderful!! I feel that Spike should get something this year. This is by far his best work. I’m glad I went to see it now rather than later, because it helped to give me a better perspective on my own work. A lot of the ideas that Malcolm had, post-Mecca, are many of the same ideas that I’m attempting to bring to the forefront in this project. Identification with our African roots and pride in our heritage are extremely important in our culture, particularly so for the African-American male. We have to make a
change and save our race, especially our young children. They are our hope for the future.

Sunday, November 22

Yes!! A lot of things began to work, or at least feel better today. I had a wonderful warm-up before I began, so I think that helped a lot. I was able to divorce myself from all the ripping and running that I’ve had to do concerning other matters of the production. Reid came in to watch today. He thought that Rev. Wilcox was moving in the right direction. We had a wonderful discussion about spirituality and the use of theatre as a ministry. I really enjoyed that. I didn’t realize we shared so many of the same ideas about what we do in the theatre. It was very enlightening, as well as encouraging. Thanks Reid!!

Monday, November 23

Dennis and I took pictures for the slides today and I took the film to Slides Service International to be developed. I can pick them up tomorrow.

Tuesday, November 24

I picked up the slides and they look pretty good. Now I need to make a final decision on all of the music that will be used. Today was the first time that I’ve done a complete nonstop run-through of the show, and it was awful! Beth, Ellen, and Phil were present. I wanted to stop and work on things, but Ellen wanted to see a run-through before my holiday departure. So, I kept going and failed miserably at everything. Beth and Phil agreed that it was dreadfully rough. Ellen tried to be a little kinder, but I wish she would just be honest. I know it stank, so why try and hide it. Maybe going away for the Thanksgiving weekend will help. It can only get better from here on in. If it gets any worst I might as well jump off a bridge somewhere. God!! I need help!! PLEASE!!!!!
Monday, November 30

I had a wonderful Thanksgiving break in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Although I was unable to fully rehearse the show, I did keep up with reading the script, making changes, and memorizing. Most of my changes are technical or transition oriented. I’ll meet with Dennis tomorrow to discuss new ideas. I think Miss Roj needs to have a strobe light at the beginning, which means that the slide projector will probably need to be hung from overhead. Mona, Frank, and Jim did their shows tonight. They were great! I was especially impressed with Mona’s work I’ve never seen her this open and connected before. Points for Mona!! Well, I’m up one week from today and I have yet to totally connect with all of these characters. So, I’ll continue working and praying.

Tuesday, December 1

Carolyn and I got all the music recorded on reel to reel today. I met with Dennis to share my new ideas, however, he had a better idea for the Miss Roj lighting sequence. I really like Dennis. He’s such a wonderful person to work with. He enjoys working with actors on the creative process, and we hit it off so well. I really appreciate his input. He said something about using his trademark white cloth stuff for the slide projection. I know he’ll work it out somehow.

Wednesday, December 2

Oh boy! This was the first day in a week the show has been on it’s feet. Not so good!! But I know the Lord is watching over me. He’s going to send down the angels of mercy at some point in this process. Well, at least Mark and I got all the music and sound effects put on tape in the proper order. He’s been extremely helpful and I’m eternally grateful. Thanks Mark!
Thursday, December 3

It appears that my committee members won’t see the show again until Monday. I’ve been working with Phil on the South American accent for Matzeliger. He said that he’ll be in to watch again on Saturday and give me some final comments and suggestions. He’s really cool. I like Phil. I think he’s a great asset to this department.

Friday, December 4

Yes!! I knew the angels were going to step in sooner or later. I was put out of the theatre at 1:00 a.m. by the Drake Union staff people. I really wished we owned our own building. It’s crunch time and I need as much time as possible. Well, anyway, the spirit laid it on my heart to make more cuts and changes, and by God the show is going to work much better. I now have the throughline that I’ve been needing all this time. I decided to do the voice-over stuff live and that was the missing piece to the puzzle. Lou has to be in control of this show from beginning to end. I cut some of Zooman, totally axed Carrington and will have Jay play “Come Ye Disconsolate” during the transition into Wilcox. Wilcox’s sermon was shortened, and the finale song cut. The show now ends with Miss Roj. Yes! I think it’s going to work. Now I’ll have to call Dennis and Chrisha in the morning and ask them to come a little earlier, if possible, so that we can make the necessary changes in the cues that were just set today. I’m really excited about this now. I can’t wait to see how it goes on tomorrow. I already feel better about it. I guess I allowed my stubbornness to get in the way of good judgement. Various persons had already suggested cuts, but I would not heed the warnings. Now I wished I had at least another week to make these changes work and polish the show the way I know it
can and should be. I’ll just have to do the best that I can with what time I have left. Thank you Jesus for your divine intervention!!

Saturday, December 5

Today was somewhat of a disappointment. When we got to the theatre the light board wouldn’t work and we couldn’t use the one from Thurber because the Talent Search Dance Competition was going on in there. Jim Knapp tried to hunt down the problem, but couldn’t. Mary wasn’t home, so they left a message. Mark came out to see if he could determine what the problem might be, but he too was unable. So, we had a partial music tech rehearsal. Dennis appeared to be disappointed with some of the changes that were made, I guess he must’ve had some lighting ideas he wanted to try. Once I explained the circumstances behind the changes he was able to understand. He was very upset that the board wasn’t operating today, of all days, I think he and Chrisha were more worried about it than I was. I’m keeping faith that everything is going to work out fine. Last night’s revelation proved that to me, so I’m not worried. I told them that it just wasn’t meant to be today and that whatever was happening was beyond us; but that a greater power was taking control. I don’t think they understood what I meant, but Avis and Jay did. Black people are such spiritual beings we understand each other well when talking about higher sources, it has a lot to do with our heritage and culture. I was able to see Dawn’s piece for the first time. It’s wonderful! And the two pieces fit so well together. She’s going back to our roots, and I’m dealing with the present conditions. How ‘bout that? God is so good!!

Sunday, December 6

Somehow they were able to get the lights working today. I understand that the other board from Thurber would not work either. There’s
obviously a flaw in the system somewhere. Anyway, they operated it manually somehow, and we had a tech/final dress all in one. The show works well with the new changes, if only I had a few more days. But, I don’t, so get over it! I'm pretty confident in it being received well on tomorrow, however, I know I'll have to tighten it up a lot more before presenting it in the future. I really like what Dennis is doing with the white cloth. I think it symbolizes White America’s invasion and influence in the lives of Black Americans. I don’t know if that's what Dennis was trying to accomplish at all, but that's how I see it. It's wonderful!

Performance 1
I arrived at the theatre relatively early, approximately 5:00 or 5:15 p.m. I wanted to make sure that I had everything properly set before Dawn's show began. Doing this would allow me more time to warm-up, relax, and get focused. Joy came back to wish me well and gave me a little gift that she'd obviously spent plenty of time laboring over. She's such a wonderful person. I was a little jittery, but I was feeling good and very excited about finally doing the show that had only been a mere idea less than a year ago. After Dawn was done she received a standing ovation, and I could feel the energy pulsating throughout the theatre. She had already laid the foundation from which I could build. The themes of these two shows go extremely well together. Obviously, there was a missed cue at the very top of the show, because when I walked out there, which is supposed to be in total darkness, the upstage special was already up. Yet, I still went out and struck my opening pose. That was stupid!! I should've just gone on with the soft shoe routine. But, overall I think the show went pretty well. The energy was really flowing and I could feel the audience was with me. I was especially pleased with how well Zooman and Miss Roj went. Miss
Roj is just what is needed for the big finish. There was miscommunication between Jay and me on “Come Ye Disconsolate”, but it worked fine. I meant to talk to him about the starting point for the vocals before the show, but I forgot. The audience seemed to love it. Afterwards, several people came down to say how much they enjoyed it. I know that Beth and Reid were there from my committee. Ellen was unable to make it tonight, so she’ll be there tomorrow. I believe I saw Phil Thompson out there tonight, but I’m not sure. Phil Kilbourne was ecstatic, as were Mona, Frank, Andrea, and Mike Renner. Mikell thought that it went well, but he too knows it can be better. He never lets me get away with anything, which is one of the things I love about him as a friend and director. Dawn said she hated the character of Zooman. She thought he was very believable. Well, that's good. I'm absolutely wound up. I hope it goes as well or better on tomorrow. Once again, I have to thank God and all the ancestors that stepped in during my hour of need. Thank you Jesus!!

Performance 2

Hallelujah, it’s over!! Technically the show was much better today. I don’t feel that I was as connected throughout the performance as I was last night. I jumped ahead on my very first line and started talking before I did the dance steps. Also, the strangest think happened after the sermon. As I was exiting the stage to go change for Miss Roj I walked into the U.S. wall. That was funny. Everything was black and I was at the wall before I knew it. Oh well, things like that happen sometimes in this business. The audience's reactions were very different today; not only for my show, but for Dawn’s as well. The energy was totally different from last night. Which is very interesting, because there was a much larger number of African-Americans in the audience last night. So, I guess maybe our shows
appeal more to black audiences. I'm not blaming the audience, but I felt that many of them today just did not get it. I know my performance was not as good as last night's, but that's different from what I'm talking about. Well, I'm glad this part of it is over.
CHARACTER ANALYSIS
Paul Louis Williams

Lou was born October 18, 1948 in Trenton, New Jersey and is the oldest of Charles and Sarah Williams’ three children. His parents, both working professionals—he a physician and she an educator—encouraged and stressed the importance of academic achievement and cultural awareness at an early age. The Williams household was one of material comfort and intellectual stimulation. It was not uncommon for the Williams family to host weekend variety shows in their home consisting of song and dance numbers by the Williams children (Lou and his two sisters), poetry readings by Mrs. Williams, and magic tricks by Mr. Williams. Lou became very well read and fluent in several different languages, including Spanish, French, and German. He began writing poetry and short stories while he was very young, and had every intention of becoming a professional poet or novelist in his adulthood. At the age of eight Lou and his family moved to St. Louis, and were often host to prominent writers, musicians, and other Black entertainers who were on tour traveling in the southern region of the United States, but were unable to lodge at segregated hotels.

As a result of Brown vs Board of Education, America’s public schools were being forced to desegregate and Lou, along with millions of other Negro children across the country, were bused into all white neighborhoods to integrate these schools. It was while attending a predominantly German-American school that Paul Louis’ life would begin to take a dramatic turn. In addition to varied racial incidents, Lou was told by one of his gracious teachers that colored people did not write. Suddenly, Lou’s muse for writing was gone. The five years that the family resided in St. Louis were very traumatic for Lou, and began a long list of
unforgettable life experiences that included a love affair that ended in a bitter divorce after only a year of marriage, and several failed attempts at suicide. After his last attempt, Lou realized that he was being summoned by the spirits of the ancestors to serve as messenger of the word. He went on to complete his studies and graduate with honors with a B.A. degree in American Studies, and an M.A. degree in Literature.

By his gift of wisdom and assistance of the ancestors, Lou has constructed a show in which he serves as Mr. Interlocutor, the spiritual guide or conscientiousness of African-Americans everywhere. Through magic, a practice that his father gave up after being asked by a little black boy to be made white on the spot, Lou allows us, as audience, to see into the world of seven Black men. This forty-five minute montage speaks to us with the need to share the life experiences of real people. Victims of systematic destruction caused by the hegemonic ideology of the Eurocentric masculinist, Lou’s character as Interlocutor is very fun-loving. He is able to ease the audience’s fears, calm their nerves, and magically transport them into worlds of the unknown. He can make you laugh or cry, turn your joys into sorrows, or give you hope for tomorrow; as he says in his opening speech “all things are possible…” With all the powers that be, Lou’s desire is for people of color to be proud of their African heritage and ancestry, and reconnect to those cultural values that brought their race through hundreds of years of trials and tribulations. And for White audiences to learn of the rich heritage that people of African decent have come from, to respect that heritage, and destroy the images of Black men that have stained the fabric of American society for much too long.

Jan Ernst Matzeliger
Jan Ernst Matzeliger was born on September 15, 1852 in Paramaribo, Dutch Guiana. By the age of ten he was working in the government machine works. At age eighteen he migrated to the United States and settled in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. While in Philadelphia he worked in a shoe factory and immediately learned the trade of shoe-making. He settled in New England, and began what would eventually make him one of America’s greatest inventors.

Jan realized that even during this time of industrial revolution, no one had come up with a machine that could sew, stretch leather, and wrap and fasten it around the sole of the shoe all at once. So, he set out to invent such a machine. Jan visited junk-yards looking for spare parts to fit on his contraption and rarely slept at night. Finally, Matzeliger completed his design for the shoe lasting machine which he patented in March of 1883. Sydney W. Winslow bought Jan’s patent and established the United Shoe Machine Company, which eventually became a multi-billion dollar business.

Jan was a self-taught speaker of English and an extremely determined individual. He loved a good joke and never gave up the opportunity to crack one. He loved children, but never married or had any of his own. He was a very handsome man, about 5’10” tall, 165 lbs, a moderately strong voice that never lost it’s South American flavor. He died in the summer of 1889 long before he was able to reap the benefits of his labor. He comes back to visit us now in the form of a physical spirit.

Scott Floyd

Scott was born January 11, 1962 to Willie and Geneva Floyd of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. His father, a steel mill worker and his mother a domestic, he is the third of the Floyd’s five children. It appeared at an
early age that Scott was destined to be involved with sports. His athleticism was often demonstrated in performances of double backward flips off the neighborhood walls, to the delight of admiring friends and family. Or, his continuous challenge to other neighborhood children who wanted so desperately to put an end to his reign as the neighborhood's 100 yard dash champion. He was the kid that everyone wanted on their team, or longed to be chosen by him for his team in pick up games of football.

In addition to being voted Most Popular and Best-All-Around during his senior year of high school; he was the county, regional, and state champion of the 100 meters in track and field four years running, as well as, All-County and All-State in football. He was selected to McDonald's All-American high school teams, and highly recruited by all the major college football programs in the country. School became secondary to Derrick-Scott, he did just enough to get by. After all, if you're going to be passed anyway, "why study?,” was his attitude. He was heralded as the neighborhood hero, someone that all the young kids could pattern themselves after, because he was destined to go pro. $$$$$$$

On April 1, 1980, in what became a media blitz, Scott Floyd, after many months of agonizing thought, announced his choice of the University that would be given the opportunity to let him ride on a full four year athletic scholarship. The next day’s headlines read,” Number One American High School Star Signs On With Big Time University”. He was off and running. The little Black kid from the heart of Pittsburgh's ghetto was on his way up to Pill Hill, and a piece of the American Dream.

A sidelining injury ended Scott’s honeymoon with sports two weeks into his freshman season. Suddenly he was lost with a nagging injury that would no longer allow him the speed he once knew, no direction, and
minimal knowledge struggling to pass his classes. It was devastating. He became bitter and angry at the world who had told him he was immortal. He is now forced to work in the steel mill and live the life from which he so desperately wanted to rescue his family. The desire still burns in him. He has a girlfriend and two illegitimate children. He is unable to commit to any lasting relationships. He drinks often, and gets loaded whenever depressed. He's very childlike, especially during times he reminisces about his football playing days. He’s 5’10”, 210lbs, with a muscular built. He still show signs of his athletic training. His voice is rather husky and he often drops the ending of words. He has a reputation of sometimes being very hot tempered.

**Woody Andrews**

Woody was born July 12, 1950 to Doug and Paula Andrews of Miami, Florida. His childhood was one of instability as his mother and father journeyed on a roller coaster ride of a relationship. On several occasions they separated and reunited only to be legally divorced in 1963. Woody loved both his parents and hated to be fought over and put in the middle of their domestic problems. During all this upheaval Woody got his first taste of stardom in his fourth grade production of "The Three Little Bears," in which he played the role of Poppa Bear. When he heard that applause he knew he was destined to be on the stage.

Other than during an occasional talent show or special holiday church services, when he would recite poetry, or sing a song, Woody would not again get on the stage before an audience until his freshman year in high school. He joined the drama club and would now be able to begin to fulfill his dream. Woody went on to graduate from high school and go to college to major in theatre, with special emphasis on performance. It was there
that he and a couple of his classmates decided that after graduation they were all going to move to New York and make it big in show business. They completed their studies in 1972 and left for New York the very next day.

Crashing on the living room floors of friends and family, Woody and his comrades diligently sought after work. They were able to land a job here and there and finally earned enough money to rent a little place to live and to open their own little theater. Things began to happen for them, at least for a little while, until the gang began to split up on the East and West coasts. Woody was fortunate enough to land an agent that got him a little work in New York and Europe. But times haven't been as great as he'd hoped. He's about 6 ft., 185 lbs., with an eloquent voice trained to speak numerous dialects. He's a very loving guy, and likes to have a good time. He smokes Benson & Hedges Menthol, and his favorite drink is Crown Royal.

**Lester "Zooman" Johnson**

Zooman, born Lester Johnson, entered into the world on May 15, 1975, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. His parents, JoAnn Johnson and Lester Smith, met at a bar, dated briefly, and conceived little Lester during a night of hot passion. Soon after Lester found out JoAnn was pregnant he left town headed for Chicago looking for work. It hadn't been long before they'd met, that he came to Philadelphia from Alabama to live with relatives and find work that he could not find in Montgomery. So, now little Lester would be born without his father there to help raise him. His mother, who worked hard cleaning White folks' homes in an exclusive Philadelphia suburb was not always able to be there for him. This unfortunate circumstance caused little Lester to be raised mostly by aunts,
cousins, neighbors, or whoever was able to keep him that day. Noticing that he wasn't getting the same attention from his parents that other children were receiving, little Lester began to demonstrate signs of anger and contempt towards persons of authority. He would pick fights with the other children, and commit various other mischievous acts.

At the age of eight little Lester committed his first act of violence. After being accused by a playmate of stealing his lunch money, Lester picked up a brick and struck him in the forehead inflicting a deep wound that required thirty-seven stitches. There was a sudden sense of power in violence. He was expelled from school and not allowed to return for ten days. During the time of his expulsion he was brought home by police, because he had been caught stealing out of the neighborhood market. Little Lester's schooling began to suffer and it never appeared that he'd be able ever to catch up again. He was placed in remedial classes, but hardly learned a thing from a teacher who could care less and kept very little discipline in the classroom. What developed was a continuing cycle of absenteeism, discipline problems, and little Lester being passed on to the next grade in order that teachers would no longer have to deal with him. He was eventually ordered by the courts to attend The Philadelphia School for Boys, an alternative education program for youthful offenders. It was here that Lester met his friend Stockholm, and adopted the nickname of "Zooman". One day during a classroom brawl, of which he was not a part, Zooman, fond of his new math teacher, decided to take control of the situation and quailed the melee. During the quieting down period, suddenly, the teacher blurts out "Thank you Lester, I guess I'll have to call you my Zooman from now own," which bought a round of laughter from the other students. It was then that Lester realized that "all teachers are
the same, they all think of us as animals." Well, from that day on the name stuck and Lester himself began to go by the name of "Zooman".

Zooman is 5' 10", 165 lbs, with sandy black hair and brown eyes. He's of medium complexion, and speaks with a thick Philadelphia accent. He has very little formal education, but is extremely street-smart. He's usually dressed in T-shirt and jeans, or other casual pants of some kind. He also wears hightop sneakers and a number of gold and silver chains hanging from around his neck; remnants of his purse and jewelry snatching operations. He is so full of contempt and rage he can hardly stop jittering. He walks with a strut, carries a gun and 10-inch switchblade with him and loves to boast of the terror and fear he inflicts upon others.

Rev. Benjamin Franklin Wilcox

Benjamin Franklin Wilcox was born to Franklin and Lucille Wilcox, sharecroppers, in Tuscaloosa, Alabama on July 10, 1938. He is the youngest of the remaining three of the seven Wilcox children. Economic hardship was no stranger to the Wilcox household. His parents made very little working on the Johnson farm, and what little they did make was usually owed out to the town store or old man Johnson himself by the end of the week. The Wilcoxes were very religious people; attended church every Sunday. Mr. Wilcox was a deacon and his wife a deaconess. They believed wholeheartedly in their bible teachings, and saw to it that their children were properly trained in the word. The Wilcox children were respectable kids, well known and loved by everyone. It was speculated early on that Benjamin would one day grow up to be a preacher. He always loved to speak before the congregation, and frequently volunteered to perform speeches or welcome addresses for special church services. Therefore, it was no surprise when, after a terrible bout with pneumonia
at age 12, upon returning to church that first Sunday young Benjamin got up and testified that in a vision God had called him to preach.

After graduating from high school Benjamin continued his studies at Tuskegee Institute, and earned a degree in religious studies. Upon completion of his studies, after the sudden death of his pastor, he was called in to lead the church that he had grown up in and devoted so much of his life work to. Under his leadership the church membership more than doubled, and they were able to build a new sanctuary. Rev. Wilcox is a powerful speaker and was once thought of as a better public speaker than Dr. King. He now has difficulty remembering the theme of his sermon or why he decided to select it. He lost his faith in God on a Sunday afternoon in 1963, when violence struck his church. He found a different faith that evening in a bottle and it has sustained him ever since. He's a rather large man, about 6'2", 220 lbs., black hair, and brown eyes. He has a deep voice that still has a bit of a southern twang, but very articulate.

Rojer J. Wilson

Rojer "Miss Roj" Wilson was born on July 18, 1962 in Brooklyn, New York to Dexter and Molly J. Wilson. He would be their first and only child. At a very young age Rojer was very fond of playing in his mother's closet, or playing house with all the girls in the neighborhood. He didn't know what was wrong, but noticed that he was not like the other boys who were interested in playing cops and robbers; or sports like football, baseball, or basketball. He could never understand why people were calling him a "sissy", "faggot", or "punk." What do these words mean? Why am I not like all the other guys? He didn't know why at age nine his next door neighbor, a boy of thirteen, asked him to perform oral sex and then proceeded with anal penetration on Rojer. He didn't think this was the
way it was suppose to be, but he knew that it felt right, he enjoyed it, and wanted it to happen again. Even more, he couldn't understand why that same neighbor never wanted to speak to him again; but instead joined in with the other boys calling him those names that he didn't know the meaning of but knew they must have been something vile, only because of the way they were spoken. Why did the girls, whom he had no real feelings for, love him so; but those guys, whom he so deeply admired and desperately wanted to be with, hate him so?

By age twelve or thirteen Roj began to understand. Men were supposed to be tough, play sports, and only have feelings for members of the opposite sex. What he learned, courtesy of his pastor's sermons, was that he was committing an abomination (whatever that means) against God, and God didn't love him like he did everyone else. But most of all, that he was damned and sure to burn in hell. How could this be? I'm not the person that Rev. Poole described. I'm not evil, immoral, and mentally sick like those people he told the congregation about. I'm confused! I want to be loved. I want someone other than my mother to hug me and tell me that everything is going to be alright. I want to be able to walk down the street and not have people call me those ugly names, but accept me like they do everyone else. What have I done to deserve this? So, Roj went in search of answers. He began to sneak out late at night. He'd walk the boulevard where he knew a stranger would pick him up, and take him to his home, or rent a room at a cheap motel so that Roj could experience the feelings he felt that day with his neighbor.

Finally, he met other people who shared the same feelings and had the same needs. These were friends. They called each other girlfriend, sister, and Miss Thing. He adopted the handle Miss, and became Miss Roj
at eighteen. He got his hair permed, bought, borrowed, or stole women's clothes to attend the bars, balls, and other gay extravaganzas. He was out!! Isn't this what they wanted and expected anyway? As the saying goes, "if you're going to be something be the best there is." Miss Roj was determined to be the best "drag queen" Brooklyn had ever known, or all of New York for that matter. And for all those who didn't like it, well, "get over it." Miss Roj is approximately 6' 0" in heels, 155lbs, and wears a wig. His complexion is pecan-tan with brown eyes, and a raspy voice that is punctuated by his Brooklyn accent. He carries himself with total elegance and absolute arrogance. He loves Aretha Franklin, his favorite drink is Bicardi and Coke, and he gets loud and obnoxious when he's drunk.
IMAGES AND REALITIES:

A PORTRAIT

OF

THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN MALE

ON THE AMERICAN STAGE

AN M.F.A ACTING SHOWCASE

BY

LUTHER D. WELLS
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The house lights fade to black and an U.S.C special comes up on Lou, the magician. He is dressed in the traditional costume of Mr. Interlocutor: tuxedo, bow tie, top hat festooned with all kinds of whatnots that are obviously meant for good luck, he does a few catchy "soft shoe" steps & begins singing a traditional version of a black play song:

**LOU:** (singing)

10 lil picaninnies all in bed
one fell out and the other nine said:
i see yr hiney
all black & shiny
i see yr hiney
all black & shiny/shiny

(as a greeting)

yes/yes/ yes isn't life wonderful

(confidentially)

my father is a retired magician which accounts for my irregular behavior
everything comes outta magic hats or bottles wit no bottoms & parakeets
are as easy to get as a couple a rabbits or 3 fifty-cent pieces/ 1958
my daddy retired from magic & took up another trade cuz this friend of
mine from the 3rd grade/ asked to be made white on the spot
what cd any self-respectin colored american magician do wit such an
outlandish request/ cept put all them razzamatazz hocus pocus zippity-
doo-dah thingamajigs away cuz colored chirren believin in magic waz
becomin politically dangerous for the race & waznt nobody gonna be made
white on the spot just from a clap of my daddy's hands & the reason i'm so
peculiar's cuz i been studyin up on my daddy's technique & everything i
do is magic these days & it's very colored/ very now you see it/ now you
dont mess wit me
i come from a family of retired sorcerers/ active houngans & pennyante
fortune tellers wit 41 million spirits/ critturs & celestial bodies on our side
i'll listen to yr problems
help wit yr career/ yr lover/ yr wanderin spouse
make yr grandma's stay in heaven more gratifyin
ease yr mother thru menopause & show yr son
how to clean his room
YES YES YES 3 wishes is all you get
scarlet ribbons for yr hair
a farm in mississippi
someone to love you madly
all things are possible
but aint no colored magician in his right mind gonna make you white
i mean
this is blk magic
you lookin at & i'm fixin you up good/ fix you up good & colored & you
gonna be colored all yr life & you gonna love it/ bein colored all yr life/
colored & love it
love it/ bein colored. (claps) Black out.

MUSIC: People Everyday w/ Slides

Suddenly we see an old homeless, dirty derelict come onto stage pushing a
cart. He stops to rummage through the garbage, coughs, and goes to the
cart for his whiskey bottle. He takes a swallow and looks about and
realizes that he's not alone, addressing the audience:

MATZELIGER: Normally . . . I don't drink. But, y'see, I got tuberculosis.
I got influenza. I'm undernourished, overworked, and nervous. So I might
as well be drunk, too. Hey, let me tell you a little secret. This is just
between you and me. Ssshhh . . . . I'm a genius. And I'll tell you
something else. There is a piece of me in every country in the whole
world, from California to Los Angeles. You don't believe a word I'm saying,
do you? Well . . . . I'll prove it to you smarty pants. (Cough,Cough) Excuse
me (to someone in audience) You got some big feet. Only you can stamp
out forest fires. (Ha, ha.) Now I'm gonna prove to you that I'm a genius.
Take off your shoe. C'mon take off your shoe. Forget you then. Who
needs you. (Takes off own shoe and smells it) Like a bed of roses! Now . . .
the shoe has three basic parts: the sole, the heel, and the uppers. (Coughs)
The most important part of making a shoe is connecting the sole with the uppers. This process is called "Lasting". See, I told you I was a genius. (Attempts to put shoe back on, but fails. A lady walks by) Excuse me, maam, would you put my shoe on for me, please?

LADY: Get a job, ya stinkin' bum! Jan? Jan Ernst Matzeliger! I can't believe it. How have you been? It's been a long time.

MATZELIGER: Yes . . . a long time but you still remember me. You must have a photographic memory. Too bad it never developed. (laughs)

LADY: I remember working beside you at the shoe factory. What's a church-going, God-fearing man like you doing drunk? Strange . . . . ole Matzeliger. I watched you work yourself to the bone trying to build a machine that could make shoes. Imagine! A machine that could sew, stretchleather, and at the same time wrap it and fasten it around the sole of the shoe with tacks. Yes, I remember you well. Everybody called you a fool; an idiot! And from the looks of things, we were right.

Matzeliger: Y'know something; you got every thing a man could want . . . a moustache, muscles, and a strong chest. (She walks away) Hey your feet so big that you could fill half of (his/her) shoe (referring to audience member again) Hey. . . hey. . . you so ugly. . . She's got some nerve talking to me like that. I'm old enough to be her. . . big brother. Kids today got it easy. . . complaining about homework or a 8-hour job. That's nothing. I came to this country in 1873. I was a mechanic but I couldn't speak a word of English. Nobody would give an ole South American, no-talking Negro a decent job. So I studied to learn English. In 1877, I got a job stitching shoes together and I worked from can't see in the morning to can't see at night. Yeah, you kids got it easy these days. Back then racism was legislated. It was against the law for me to go to a decent school. So I educated myself. Bought books on biology, physics, and mechanical science. (Coughs) I studied so hard! Yeah, you kids got it easy. With your Robok jeans and Jourdash sneakers. Opportunity is set right out there in front of you. All you got to do is grab it. But here I am, a real live genius. I'm poor. I'm sick. (cough) My doctor told me I only have six months to live, but I couldn't pay the bill so he gave six more. Yeah, I nearly killed myself. After five years of visiting junk yards, sleepless nights, empty pockets and empty stomachs, I built the lasting machine. . . finally. It revolutionized the shoe industry, and created a multi-billion dollar
business. It made shoes faster and cheaper. An expert hand laster person could make about forty pairs of shoes a day, but my machine could turn out 600. Without my machine, shoes would cost $300 a pair. Your shoes would cost $600. (referring to audience member again) My machine built the Consolidated Lasting Machine Company. They took over my patents to own and control 90% of the shoe industry in the whole world. So the next time you put on a pair of shoes, get down on your hands and knees and thank God Almighty . . . and me. 'Cause I'm a genius. A legend in my own time. (He walks into the bright light that shines U.S.C. Once he is in the mist of the light he turns and smiles, a black curtain drops. Light shines on the curtain that reads "1001 Black Inventions")

Axel F is heard playing and the audience now see's slide highlights from various football games, including the NFL's Pittsburgh Steelers. Scott wanders in from U.L, crosses to the cart and finds a football he makes a move as if he's going for the goal-line, he stops short.

SCOTT: Dammit! Man! Seems like yesterday--had more college football scholarships than I could count. Fastest running back in the Windy City! You'd see my pictures plastered all over the sports pages? Recruiters lined up at my doorstep. Had my life mapped out--all the way to the SUPER BOWL! The number one American high school star signs on with a big time University. Sports announcer rattling off my stats. HEISMAN TROPHY! Cover of SPORTS ILLUSTRATED. Number one draft choice--on my way to the Super Bowl with the Pittsburgh Steelers. Off seasons I'd be making television commercials chasing cars through airports--women chasing after me: Scottie! Scottie! Scottie, Baby! One day on the field--one day--I'd take that ball and run it into eternity! LISTEN TO THE CROWD! HEAR UM! Everything looked great til I twisted my ankle, and then I busted my kneecap two weeks into the season. SIDELINED--for the rest of my life! Everybody forgot my name. Hated going to class--WENT TO COLLEGE TO RUN THAT FOOTBALL! End of the year--my grades were lower than a snake's belly. Kicked out the back door without so much as a "thank you Scottie, boy." My old man told me to get my ass to the mill--or pack my bags. I prayed every day for that son-of-a-bitch to drop dead at the mill, just so I could prove him wrong! Bastards don't tell you only one in a
million black dudes ever become big enough football stars to chase cars through airports. They make it look so goddam easy on TV. If I come back into this world a nigger in my next life, I'm going to curse God and die!

You know what I hope. I hope the mill closes. That way I won't have to go back to that place with all them Mississippi niggers! Don't tell me what I can do! If I walk off I'll have to fight my old man, so don't tell me I can just up and quit, because you don't know shit from bread about what I have to do! (He stops in deep thought)

The spirit of Lou emerges from Scott and:

LOU: you have t come with me/ to this place where magic is/ to hear my song/ in this place where magic is involved in undoing our masks. in this place where magic always asks for me i discovered a lot of other people who talk without mouths/ in this place where magic stays you can let yrself in or out.

As he is speaking these last lines he adorns himself with a rehearsal cape. Lights come up and Woody crosses into the area rehearsing the following monologue of King Edward, from Shakespeare's King Richard III:

Have I a tongue to doom my brother's death,
And shall the same give pardon to a slave?
My brother slew no man; his fault was thought,
And yet his punishment was cruel death.
Who sued to me for him? who, in my rage,
Kneel'd at my feet, and bade me be advised?
Who spake of brotherhood? who spake of love?
Who told me how the poor soul did forsake
The mighty Warwick, and did fight for me?
Who told me, in the field by Tewksbury,
When Oxford had me down, he rescued me.
And said, 'Dear brother live, and be a king'?
Who told me.......
Suddenly he breaks midway through as we sense a feeling of frustration in him. He addresses the audience:

**WOODY:** I want to pay my rent on time. I don't want to be so poor I gotta steal toilet paper from McDonald's. I don't want to spend my days trying to be A Serious Actor when the people doing the casting are not even sure I'm human. I kept telling my self that I had to pay some dues so I kept going. And then one day, one day, I went to read for "Glass Menagerie", and I read the hell out of it, man. I would have made Tennessee Williams himself cry! And when I got done I heard the director laughing. He was sitting out front in the dark and I could hear him laughing, man. And so I said, "What's so damn funny?" And he stopped laughing long enough to tell me that the family in this play was too poor to have servants and that if I was trying to make a point of somekind, I better take it up with The New York Times.

I told him this wasn't any kind of Civil Rights demonstration, that I was an actor looking for a job just like all the other actors in New York City. And he told me to wash the shoe polish off and come back and he'd see what he could do. This director couldn't seem to stop laughing, man. And I knew I better get out of there if I wasn't prepared to kill somebody. So I told him it might take me awhile to make it back because I was gonna get his mother to come over and lick the shoe polish off and she always like to take her time on the good parts.

So, I stayed out there a little longer. I tried the black theaters, and the white ones who were doing plays that called for black actors. (He begins putting on denim jacket and baseball cap) But the only character anybody ever needed me for was a pimp, or a junkie, or a wino, or a killer. Always mad, always hollering at somebody or slappin his woman. So I perfected my angry black psycho act and I got work alright..........

He has transformed into Zooman before our very eyes. With boom-box in hand Zooman enters the area of light as Public Enemy's "Shut'em Down" blares from the box. he dances about for a short period cuts the music off then:
ZOOMAN: Once upon a time, while the goose was drinkin' wine ole monkey robbed the people on the trolley car line. I carry a gun and a knife. A gun in this pocket--and ole "Magic" in this one! Now you see it--Now you don't! I cut a mothafuka with this baby yesterday. Ole foreign mothafuka walkin' on the subway platform. Arms swingin' all ova everywhere--bumpin' into people--glasses, two, three inches thick standin' out from his eyes, can't half see! And I'm tryin' to listen to my music too? No-talkin' mothafucka needed to get cut. "Magic" nicked him. "Magic" is sharp as a razor. He ain't even know he was cut till he was halfway down the platform, and the blood started runnin' down the ole punk's hand. Mothafucka started screamin'--dropped his newspapa--jumpin' up and down, pleadin' to everybody waitin' on the subway--Ain't nobody do nothin'--ole jive West Indian mothafucka damn near got hit by a train! Fell all down on the ground and shit--peed on hisself! Shiit, he wasn't hurt that bad! "Magic" only knicked the scared mothafucka! Mothafucka don't know what scared is! They call me, Zoo-man! That's right. Z-O-O-M-A-N! From the bottom! I'm the "runner" down thea. When I knuck with a dude, I fight like a panther. Strike like a cobra! Stomp on mothafuckas like a whole herd of Bison! Zooman! That ole mothafucka yesterday coulda put somebodys eye out. Swingin' his arms around like he owned the whole fuckin' platform. Lotta ole people take advantage of you jes' cause they old. Movin' all slow and shit--mumblin' unda they breath--shufflin' down the street all bent over and twisted up--skin hangin' all off they faces--makes my stomach turn jes' to look at em! What am I doing here now? I just killed somebody. Little girl, I think. Me and Stockholm turned the corner of the street?--and there's Gustav and them jive mothafuckas from uptown, and this little bitch has to be sittin' on her front steps playin' jacks--or some ole kid shit! But I had tol' Gustav if I eva saw his ass around the Avenue, I'd blow him away. So I started shootin' and she jes' got hit by one of the strays, that's all. She ain't had no business bein' out there. That street is a war zone--ain't nobody see her, we was runnin'--shit! And in that neighborhood you supposed to stay indoors, anyway! She was in the wrong place at the wrong time--how am I supposed to feel guilty over somethin' like that? Shiit, I don't know the little bitch, anyway.
An USR light comes up on a sign that reads: "THE KILLERS OF OUR DAUGHTER JINNY ARE FREE ON THE STREETS BECAUSE OUR NEIGHBORS WILL NOT IDENTIFY THEM!" he crosses looks at the sign runs back and:

It's no fun being on the run. But I happen to know, if a black kills a black, and they don't catch you right away, they liable to forget about it. They got me a little scared. If they got Stockholm's ass in the slams, it's just a matter of time, 'cause the big blues put a lotta pressure on you once they pick you up. I got picked up twenty-one times las' year! Every time somebody black did somethin' and the cops didn't have a name? They busted me! Fuck y'all. Y'all don't lock up them dirty derelicts on the street - shit-smellin' mothafuckas' hair all caked with grease and slime- sleepin' in cardboard boxes, siftin' through trash, talkin' to theyself - Beggin'! I try to set one of them filthy mothafuckas on fire, every chance I get! And y'all got the nerve to hunt me? Y'all let anything walk the streets-and you mothafuckas never showed me no mercy! I'll be off your streets soon, don't worry-I just got one more thing to do.

(Zooman starts across the stage boldly toward the sign and what would be the Tate home. Before he reaches the steps he is hollering, his knife in his hand)

Hey mothafucka! This is Zooman out here! (He reaches up and begins to rip and tear at the sign) Don't nobody do this shit! You don't send people after me! You hear that, mothafucka!? This is Zooman you fuckin' with! Come on out!

(A shot is fired. It hits Zooman, and propels him back toward the audience. He is knocked down. He pulls the sign down with him. He is in surprised agony for a few moments as he begins to die.)

Fuck you I'm ZOOMAN! ! (He dies. Billie Holiday's "Strange Fruit" is heard as the lights fade to a single pool on the lifeless body of Zooman. Slowly the sound of a chant is heard building as we here the words of the chant the audience is revealed a slide that says: "THE PROBLEM WITH BLACK ON BLACK VIOLENCE IS NOBODY WANTS TO SEE IT"
CHANT: ANGER UNVENTED BECOMES PAIN,
UNspoken BECOMES RAGE,
RELEASED BECOMES VIOLENCE.

Gradually the spirit that is Lou rises up out of Zooman's lifeless body:

LOU: why dontchu go on & live my life for me
    i didnt want certain moments at all
    i'll give them to anybody

Lights fade. In the black out we hear "Come Ye Disconsolate" played on
the piano. Lights come up and we see Rev. Wilcox clad in a black robe
preparing a pulpit for church service as he sings. He sets the pulpit then:

WILCOX: This church has never before been so full and, yet, I as your
pastor, have never felt this empty. In these past few days, I have prayed
for the strength and the courage that would enable me to deliver a
message to you of love and hope built out of the ashes of despair and upon
the dead bodies of these four innocent little girls. . .I have screamed to
Jesus the question, "why", and I have listened for a response that could
help me here today, but my brothers and sisters, perhaps my hearing was
too weak, or my faith not strong enough, for no response came. . .And, so, I
stand before you this afternoon, still waiting, still asking, "why", still
praying for faith which has been severely tested by the sacrifice and blood
of our delicate young children who should be here to dream, to laugh, to
discover, to learn, to experience, to wonder, to do all of the things that
children have a right to do, protected from the insanity of a world driven
mad by the hatred and evil of men who deny Jesus as quickly as they
accept Satan.
(He looks carefully and slowly at his congregation)
I know, some of you are here with violence and revenge in your hearts.
(He points to some members)
You young brothers dressed in the militancy of our times, sitting in anger,
backs erect, jaws tightened, fists clenched, ready and willing to correct that
which can never be corrected. What do I say to you to change your minds, to touch you with a greater vision, to turn you away from thoughts of destruction and lead you toward the road to compassion and forgiveness? What do I say, sweet Jesus, to these grieving parents, who want only to hold their children again, to guide them to safety, to protect them from the wickedness that destroyed them in the place where we worship your father, murdered them in the very house of God! What can I say to this congregation, who suffers with them, who now fear for their own children, who may be the next to be violated on this hallowed ground? (He seems desperate and lost)

Dear Lord, master of my life, what can you say to me, that will restore a purpose to what I do, and a belief in what I speak to these your devoted servants? I have never asked you for a sign before, I have never begged you to answer questions that my faith was once strong enough to push aside. But, Jesus, I was not ready for this test. I was not prepared for this, your greatest challenge. I can not go on without an answer to this question which burns a hole inside me, that shakes my very foundation, that makes me curse restraint, and has given me cause to doubt my own capacity to believe. WHY, in this house, where we offer our devotion to you? WHY, these children who wanted only to serve you, that prayed to you while their precious limbs were being blown apart and crushed beneath the weight of fallen dreams and broken promises? WHY?! WHY?!

His spirit is all but broken as he stands looking to the heavens waiting for an answer. Lights fade and the audience is revealed a slide with the picture of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.. A portion of the "I Have A Dream" speech is played with Billie Holiday's "God Bless The Child" played softly underneath. The slide changes to reveal Malcolm X, as we hear a portion of his speech "By Any Means Necessary." (Black Out)

The darkness is cut by electronic music. Cold, pounding, unrelenting "Do You Wanna Funk". There is a lone bar stool. Lights flash on and off, pulsating to the beat. There is a blast of smoke and, from the haze, Miss Roj appears. He is dressed in patio pants, white go-go boots, a halter, and cat-shaped sunglasses. What would seem ridiculous on anyone else, Miss
Roj wears as if it were high fashion. He carries himself with total elegance and absolute arrogance.

**Miss Roj:** God created black people and black people created style. The name's Miss Roj . . . that's R.O.J. thank you and you can find me every Wednesday, Friday and Saturday nights at "The Bottomless Pit," the watering hole for the wild and weary which asks the question, "Is there life after Jherri-curl?" (Notices someone) Yes, if they be black and swish, the B.P. has seen them, which is not to suggest the Pit is lacking in cultural diversity. Oh no. There are your dinge queens, white men who like their chicken legs dark. And let's not forget, "Los Muchachos de la Neighborhood." But the specialty of the house is the The Snap Queens. (He snaps.) We are a rare breed. For, you see, when something strikes our fancy, when the truth comes piercing through the dark, well you just can't let it pass unnoticed. No darling. You must pronounce it with a snap. (He snaps.)

Snapping comes from another galaxy, as do all snap queens. That's right. I ain't just your regular oppressed American Negro. No-no-no! I am an extraterrestrial. And I ain't talkin' none of that shit you seen in the movies! I have real power. Speaking of no power, Miss Stingy-with-the-rum, if Miss Roj had wanted to remain sober, I could have stayed home and drank Kool-aid. (He snaps.) Thank you.

Yes, I was placed here on Earth to study the life habits of a deteriorating society, and child when we talkin' New York City, we are discussing the Queen of Deterioration. Miss New York is doing a slow dance with death, and I am here to warn you all, but before I do, I must know . . . don't you just love my patio pants? Annette Funicello immortalized them in "Beach Blanket Bingo," and I have continued the legacy. And my go-gos? I realize white after Labor Day is very gauche, but as the saying goes, if you've got it flaunt it, if you don't front it and snap to death any bastard who dares to defy you. (Laughing) Oh ho! My demons are showing. Yes, my demons live at the bottom of my Bacardi and Coke. Let's just hope for all concerned I dance my demons out before I drink them out 'cause child, dancing demons take you on a ride, but those drinkin' demons just take you, and you find yourself doing the strangest things. Like the time I locked my father in the broom closet. Seems the liquor made his tongue
real liberal and he decided he was gonna baptize me with the word "faggot" over and over. Well, he's just going on and on with "faggot this" and "faggot that," all the while walking toward the broom closet to piss. So the demons just took hold of my wedges and forced me to kick the drunk son-of-a-bitch into the closet and lock the door. (Laughter) Three days later I remembered he was there. (He snaps.)

(Dancing about.) Oh yes-yes-yes! Miss Roj is quintessential style. I cornrow the hairs on my legs so that they spell out M.I.S.S. R.O.J. And I dare any bastard to fuck with me because I will snap your ass into oblivion. I have the power, you know. Everytime I snap, I steal one beat of your heart. So if you find yourself gasping for air in the middle of the night, chances are you fucked with Miss Roj and she didn't like it.

Like the time this asshole at Jones Beach decided to take issue with my coulotte-sailor ensemble. This child, this muscle-bound Brooklyn thug in a skin-tight bikini, very skin-tight so the whole world can see that instead of a brain, God gave him an extra thick piece of sausage. You know the kind who beat up on their wives for breakfast. Snap your fingers if you know what I'm talking about . . . Come on and snap, child. (He gets the audience to snap.) Well, he decided to blurt out when I walked by, "Hey look at da monkey coon in da faggit suit." Well, I walked up to the poor dear, very calmly lifted my hand, and . . . (He snaps in rapid succession.)

A heart attack, right there on the beach. (He singles out someone in the audience.) You don't believe it? Cross me! Come on! Come on!

(Looking around.) If this place is the answer, we're asking all the wrong questions. The only reason I come here is to communicate with my origins. The flashing lights are signals from my planet way out there. Yes, girl, even further than Flatbush. We're talking another galaxy. The flashing lights tell me how much time is left before the end.

(Drunk and Loud by now.) I hate the people here. I hate the drinks. But most of all I hate this goddamn music. That ain't music. Give me Aretha Franklin any day. (Singing) "Just a little respect. R.E.S.P.E.C.T."

Yeah! Yeah!

Come on and dance your last dance with Miss Roj. Last call is but a drink away and each snap puts you one step closer to the end. A high-rise goes up. You can't get no job. Come on everybody and dance. A whole race of people gets trashed and debased. Snap those fingers and dance. Some sick
bitch throws her baby out the window 'cause she thinks it's the Devil.
Everybody snap! The New York Post. Snap!
Snap for every time you walk past someone lying in the street, smelling
like frozen piss and shit and you don't see it. Snap for every crazed
bastard who kills himself so as to get the jump on being killed. And snap
for every sick mothafucker who, bored with carrying around his fear,
takes to shooting up other people.
Yeah, snap your fingers and dance with Miss Roj. But don't be fooled by
the banners and balloons 'cause, child, this ain't no party going on. Hell no!
It's a wake. And the casket's made out of stone, steel, and glass and the
people are racing all over the pavement like maggots on a dead piece of
meat.
Yeah, dance! But don't be surprised if there ain't no beat holding you
together 'cause we traded in our drums for respectability. So now it's just
words. Words rappin'. Words screechin'. Words flowin' instead of blood
'cause you know that don't work. Words cracklin' instead of fire 'cause by
the time a match is struck on 125th Street and you run to midtown, the
flame has been blown away.
So come on and dance with Miss Roj and her demons. We don't ask for
acceptance. We don't ask for approval. We know who we are and we
move on it!
I guarantee you will never hear two fingers put together in a snap and not
think of Miss Roj. That's power baby. Patio pants and all.
(The lights begin to flash in rapid succession.)
So let's dance! And snap! And dance! And snap!
(Miss Roj begins to dance as if driven by his demons. There is a
blast of smoke and when the haze settles, Miss Roj has exited and
in place of him is a recording of Aretha Franklin singing "Respect.")

THE END
Post Evaluation

This entire production process has really been a learning experience for which I will be eternally grateful, I think. Just to think that something as wonderful as this began as merely an idea in Dr. Sullivan's Theatre History IV class less than a year ago, gives me encouragement and makes me very excited about the prospects of my career in the near future. It is apparent to me, now more than ever, that theatre is my calling and the reason that God saw fit to place me here on earth. It is my ministry. And I must continue to use it to touch the lives of men and women everywhere I go. I understand fully the power with which I and other actors have been endowed. It is our responsibility to go out and make a difference, to set the wheels of change in motion and stimulate positive critical thought. I am very excited and committed to sharing these ideas with others, and will pursue other venues in which I can continue to refine and perfect this work for future presentation. This work must be done. It is too important a message and I must get it to that point at which I know in my heart and soul it can be. Which leads me to a couple of problems that I feel should be addressed for the good of students who will be required to take on this task in the future.

I'm not sure if the goal for which these projects were designed is truly being met. First, to address the issue of time. It is too much to have the company do a mainstage production and their major Thesis projects in the same quarter. Because we were in production the first half of the quarter, we were only given four weeks to complete a project of which we had to serve as actor, director, and to a certain extent, designer as well. The problem that is created with this situation is that the quality of production suffers. It would be an ideal situation to devote an entire
quarter of work to these projects that eventually becomes very important to the performer, if no one else.

The second issue to be addressed is departmental commitment to these all too important works. After the amount of hard-labor that is put into these projects it is very disheartening to not be given the type of support we so rightly deserve. There seems to be very little interest and/or excitement from faculty, staff, and other members of the department's student body. The rewards should be greater. In other words, not only should there be more departmental interest and support, but professional producers, directors, and agents should be invited to come in and see these works as well. This would not only serve to legitimize the project more, but also act as a springboard into the profession for the third-year MFA actor. Therefore, I suggest that the acting/directing faculty re-think the reasons for which this requirement was first created.

Lastly, in it's present format, the completion of the project is so anti-climatic to three years of training and hard work that it is very depressing to think that there is still two quarters of work remaining after such a major piece of work. If these projects are to remain a requirement for the MFA Acting candidate in the future, I would suggest that it be required during the Spring quarter and used as a launching pad that propels the actor into the world of professional theatre.

I take this opportunity now to thank my committee members Dr. E. Reid Gilbert, my advisor; Dr. E. Beth Sullivan, without who's prodding and encouragement this work would not have been completed; and Professor Ellen Newman, Head of Acting/Directing faculty. I would like to acknowledge the support of my friends and classmates: Frank, Dawn, Jim and Mona. Thanks also go out to Mikell Pinkney, for his wonderful
friendship and never allowing me to get away with anything other than excellence. I'll always remember you for saying "Mediocrity is excellent to the mediocre." Love you Mike!! Also to Jay Blackmon and Avis Bond for your help and support on the project. Dennis Hussein and Chrisha Seibert you too were wonderful, and I appreciate you putting up with all the changes a few days before the show. And lastly, but certainly not least, to the technical faculty and staff: Mark, Jim, Mary, and Dennis. Ron and Julia, for all your help whenever I needed it. And a very special thank you to Dr. Kathleen F. Conlin, for bringing a breath of fresh air and a new attitude to a program that really needed a shot in the arm. You've made this, my final year, more endurable and the vision for the future even more exciting. Thank you all. I AM DONE!!!
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Cleage, Pearl. *Come And Get These Memories*, unpublished.


Come, Ye Disconsolate

1. Come, ye disconsolate, wher' e'er ye languish-
2. Joy of the desolate, light of the stray ing,
3. Here see the Bread of Life, see waters flowing

Come to the mercy-seat, fervently kneel; Here bring your wounded hearts,
Hope of the peni tent, fade-less and pure! Here speaks the Comforter,
Forth from the throne of God, pure from above; Come to the feast of love-

here tell your anguish. Earth has no sor-row that heav'n can-not heal.
ten der-ly say ing, "Earth has no sor-row that heav'n can-not cure."
come ev er know ing Earth has no sor-row but heav'n can re-move.
showcases STADIUM II
3 1:00PM THEATER

A Portrait of the African-American Male on Stage

Performed by Luther Wells
"THE GROWING SEASON" by Is Said
Performed by Dawn Chantel Formey

RITUALS:
"Religion is everything and everything is Religion!"
Poem ("I Feed the World") by Is Said/ Fetakola (West African Harvest Dance)/ Yonvaloo (Iconic)/ Cakewalk/ Juba (Hambone)/ Buck and Wing/ Street Dance (Motif)

THE MUSICAL EXPRESSIONS OF MELBA MILLS

Dedication: From the Director (Dawn C. Formey) - I dedicate this production to Allah (God). I am grateful to be alive, blessed and well. My Mother, Theresa Pamela Gibbs, who has nurtured and supported by educational and spiritual growth. / Special Dedication: To the memory of my great-grandmother, Mable Brown, my grandmother Dorothy Brown, my Father, Horris Formey and the late Mary Ann S. Williams.

Special thanks to: Is Said, Kimberly Jones, Najiyah Muatasid, Ayinde West, Jay Blackmon, Beth Sullivan, Dr. Newsum, Christa, Luther Wells, Frank Barnhart, Mikell Pinkney, Avis Bond, Jelani Johnson, Jay Reilly, Ellen Newman, Mark Shanda, Dennis Hassan, Phil Thompson, Reid Gilbert, Chris Zenkin, Chrisha Siebert and Jim Knapp.

From the Playwright: "With each play written, the writer is giving a bit of themselves. I am an organic gardener, trying to share my perception and sensitivity about life and the things that grow around us, so we may learn to see what is grown, so we may see one another for our own spiritual values in beauty and in PEACE.

- Is Said -

PRODUCTION STAFF:
Designer .............. Dennis Hassan
Stage Manager ........... Chrisha Siebert
Light Board Operator ....... Christopher Zenkin
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