

Summer 2011

Direction of the Play: For Black Boys Who Have Considered Homicide When the Streets Were Too Much

Cynthia Webb-Manly
Central Washington University

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Direction of the Play: For Black Boys Who Have Considered Homicide

When the Streets Were Too Much

A Project Report

Presented to

the Graduate Faculty

Central Washington University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

Theatre Production

by

Cynthia L. Webb-Manly

2011

CENTRAL WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

Graduate Studies

We hereby approve the project report of

Cynthia Laura Webb-Manly

Candidate for the degree of Master of Arts:

Theatre Production

APPROVED FOR THE GRADUATE FACULTY

Date of
Signature

11/21/11

Professor Christina Barrigan
Committee Chair

Date of
Signature

11/29/11

Professor Brenda Hubbard
Committee Member

Date of
Signature

11/21/11

Professor Elise Forier Edie
Committee Member

Please note:

ii

The signatures have been redacted due to security reasons.

ABSTRACT

PROJECT REPORT

For Black Boys Who Have Considered Homicide When The Streets Were Too Much

Central Washington University

Directed by

Cynthia L. Webb-Manly

May, 2011

This project entailed the selection, background research and documentation, musical analysis, casting, direction, vocal coaching, and post-production analysis of a production of *For Black Boys Who Have Considered Homicide When The Streets Were Too Much* At Spooky Action Theatre Company. Documentation includes research and analysis of the play, its music, and an evaluation of the play as a production vehicle for Empowering Artists Dreams. The analysis also includes a discussion as to the non-traditional directorial vision of this production.

CENTRAL WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

Graduate Studies

Final Examination of

Cynthia L. Webb-Manly

B.A. George Washington University, 1986

for the Degree of

Master of Arts

Theatre Production

Committee in Charge

Professor Committee Chair Christina Barrigan

Professor Committee Member Brenda Hubbard

Professor Committee Member Elise Forier Edie

McConnell Hall

Room XXX

Day or Orals,

PM

Courses presented for the Master's degree

Cynthia L. Webb-Manly

COURSE NO.	COURSE TITLE	CREDITS	INSTRUCTOR	QUARTER
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BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Cynthia Laura Webb-Manly

Undergraduate Study:

George Washington University, 1982 - 1986

Graduate Study:

Central Washington University, 2007-2011

Professional Experience:

Middle School English Teacher, (Summer 2011)

Guest Director, 2011

Guest Teacher, 2010 - Present

Professional Actor, 1995 - Present

Middle School Theatre Teacher, 2005 - 2009

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GRADUATE COMMITTEE AND OPTION APPROVAL FORM
CENTRAL WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY
 (Submit the original and three copies)

Webb-Manly 1

Note: This form is to be completed as soon as the student has formed a committee and selected an option from the list below. Submit original and three copies to the Office of Graduate Studies in Barge 305.

Name: Cynthia L. Webb-Manly Birth Date [REDACTED]
 Address: [REDACTED] Student ID [REDACTED]
 Date: 2/17/11

Check option:	Indicate credits to be received for the thesis or option:		
<input type="checkbox"/> Written Exam*	TH 700	Master's Thesis	6
<input type="checkbox"/> Project	Course No.	Title	Credits
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Creative Project	_____	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Studio Project	Course No.	Title	Credits
<input type="checkbox"/> Portfolio Review	MLA 7 th edition	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Thesis (standard)	Style Manual for Thesis/Project	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Thesis (journal-ready)	_____	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Provide journal guidelines plus a recent article from that journal in student's field of study.	_____	_____	_____

*Students taking written exam option may omit items 1-5 below.

1. Proposed Title: Direction of the production of *For Black Boys Who Have Considered Homicide When The Streets Were Too Much*

2. Purpose of Study: The direction of a production of the play *For Black Boys Who Have Considered Homicide When The Streets Were Too Much* as the culminating experience in the theatre arts graduate program

3. Scope of Study: Documentation based upon the preparation of pre-production research, post-production evaluation, the direction of the production (including casting and rehearsing of actors, preparation for the Director's Production Book, and oral examination), shall benefit both the student and theatre arts department.

4. Procedure to be used: Three phases of study shall be include: 1) Pre-Production Research and Thesis Documentation in MLA style, 2) Rehearsal and direction of production; 3) Post-Production Evaluation and Documentation

5. Does the procedure involve collection of data obtained from
 Human Subjects (including use of surveys)? Yes** No
 Use of Animals? Yes** No

** If yes, your procedures must be approved in writing by the Human Subjects Committee or the Animal Care and Use Committee before you initiate your research.

Christina Barrigan
 Committee Chair (typed or printed)

 Committee Chair (signature) Date

Brenda Hubbard
 Committee Member (typed or printed)

 Committee Member (signature) Date 11/15/2011

Elise Forier Edie
 Committee Member (typed or printed)

 Committee Member (signature) Date

Approved by:

Approved by:

 Dept Chair/Designee* (signature) Date

 Dean of Graduate Studies Date

*in the case of interdisciplinary programs, this form should be signed by the relevant Program Director/Co-Director AND relevant Dept chair. In cases where they cannot agree to sign for approval, the approval will be made or denied by the relevant interdisciplinary program advisory committee. GS&R 06/09

Please note:

The signatures have been redacted due to security reasons.

MASTER'S THESIS PROJECT PLAYSCRIPT APPROVAL FORM

(PLEASE MAKE SURE THAT YOU HAVE READ THE PLAY SELECTION CRITERIA SECTION IN YOUR GRADUATE HANDBOOK)

SCRIPT TITLE For Black Boys Who Have Considered Homicide When the Streets Were Too Much

PLAYWRIGHT(S) [If musical, list lyricist/composer] Keith Antar Mason

NUMBER OF ACTS 2 APPROXIMATE TOTAL PLAYING TIME 2 HOURS MIN.

CAST (fill in with the appropriate numbers)

MEN 6 WOMEN CHILDREN OVER 40 2

ROLES REQUIRING PEOPLE OF COLOR 6 ROLES COULD DOUBLE 0

TOTAL NUMBER OF CAST 6

OTHER CASTING CONCERNS: Finding non-union actors who are mature enough to handle the language presented in the play may present some problems and finding those who are available during the rehearsal and production dates that I am proposing. I would also like to cast two understudies to cover any unforeseen incidents with casting in addition to casting the needed actors.

ARTISTIC STAFF (check those needed for this play or production idea)

MUSICAL DIRECTOR DANCE CHOREOGRAPHER x
 FIGHT CHOREOGRAPHER DIALECT COACH SPECIALTY HIRE (specify what kind)
 ORCHESTRA/BAND (specify what size)
 Will you be fulfilling any of the above? If so, which?

Will a guest artist be fulfilling any of the above? Yes If so, which? A Choreographer will be used

SCENERY/PROPS (check those needed for this play or your concept of the play)

UNIT SET? YES NO (CIRCLE ONE) NUMBER OF SETTINGS 1
 HISTORICAL PERIOD no GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION Any urban neighborhood

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF SET CONCERNS OR SPECIAL REQUIREMENTS:
 None

APPROXIMATE NUMBER OF PROPS 12 PERIOD
 DIFFICULT OR UNUSUAL PROPS? YES NO (CIRCLE ONE) DESCRIBE:

WEAPONS OR FIREARMS? HOW MANY 1 DESCRIBE:

A pocket knife will be used in two separate monologues

COSTUMES (CHECK THOSE NEEDED FOR THIS PLAY OR YOUR CONCEPT OF THE PLAY)

APPROXIMATE NUMBER OF COSTUMES PER CHARACTER 2

HISTORICAL PERIOD None SEASON Summer

SPECIAL REQUIREMENTS: None

JUSTIFICATION FOR CHOICE OF SCRIPT

HAVE YOU SEEN THIS SCRIPT PRODUCED? YES NO (CIRCLE ONE)

HAVE YOU DONE THIS PLAY BEFORE? BRIEFLY DESCRIBE YOUR INVOLVEMENT IN THE PRODUCTION:

No. I have never seen a production of the play before, although the author indicates that it was written in response to Ntozake Shange's choreopoem *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When The Rainbow Is Enuf*. I have however, seen several productions of *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When The Rainbow Is Enuf*.

WHY SHOULD YOUR ORGANIZATION PRODUCE THIS SCRIPT?

My intent in directing this play in the greater Washington, DC area with non professional and student actors is to teach them about the art of story telling as it relates to theatre, ritualism and religion. I hope that *For Black Boys Who Have Considered Suicide When The Streets Where Too Much*, will elicit an open and honest dialogue between the actors, audience and members of an advisory panel as it pertains to moments of isolation, a lack of sensitivity and commitment to diversity in the educational arena especially in regards to minority literature.

In addition to this production providing a forum for open and honest dialogue, I believe that it will also serve as a tool that can be used to discuss stereotypes and propel some audience members to become members of society anxious to take action in regards to various social problems facing our communities.

This project will also provide the director with the opportunity to utilize the methods, techniques and practices encouraged through course work provided by the CWU/MA theatre production program. In particular skills used during Graduate Directing 1 and 2, Advanced Stage Movement (Viewpoints), Analysis and Criticism and Improv Techniques.

WHAT ARE THE DRAWBACKS (IF ANY) TO DOING THIS PRODUCTION AT YOUR SCHOOL?

The drawbacks for directing this play are numerous. The most important drawback is budget. I am currently unemployed and do not have an organization that will be financing the project. Second, my pool of actors will be varied as I am looking to cast from the local acting pool. I believe these actors will be at various stages in their training and those with less training will require additional assistance in understanding the dialogue and preparing for this production.

PLEASE GIVE A BRIEF SYNOPSIS OF THE SCRIPT ON A SEPARATE SHEET OF PAPER AND ATTACH.

See Attached

PLEASE INCLUDE A COPY OF THE SCRIPT FOR THE THESIS COMMITTEE TO REVIEW.

SUBMITTED BY: (Printed Name) Cynthia L. Webb-Manly Date Submitted: 1/11/11

(Signature) _____

Thesis Chair Approval: _____ Date Approved: _____

Thesis Committee Members Approval: Brenda Hubbard Date Approved: 11/15/2011

Graduate Coordinator Approval: _____ Date Approved: _____

Please note:

The signatures have been redacted due to security reasons.

Project Parameters and Schedule

To coincide with Black History Month, my production of *For Black Boys Who Have Considered Homicide When The Streets Where Too Much* was to have been placed on the calendar for two weekends in February. A special project sponsored by the Black Student Union, Diversity Club and Office of Student Empowerment at Central Washington University and a means to open dialogue between several different groups. Since my summer meetings to discuss funding, the lack of performance and rehearsal space as well as housing, have become major issues which kept me from producing in Ellensburg and forced me to look at producing this project in the metropolitan Washington, DC area. Casting will take place in mid March with production dates scheduled for May 7 and 8, 2011. The task of having to re-write section one, find a co-producer or sponsor, rehearsal and performance space has been daunting.

I have learned first hand how difficult it is to find performance and rehearsal space in my home town that is affordable and metro accessible. The DC area ranks third behind Chicago in the number of professional, semi-professional and non professional theatre companies. It is this growth which adds to the limitations of finding affordable performance and rehearsal space. Information regarding the auditions will be posted on several local job banks for actors. Initially I will schedule rehearsals for Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday evenings. There will be an evening preview on May 6 and two matinee performances, May 7th and 8th. It is my desire to have five to six weeks of rehearsal as am still looking for a full time teaching position, substitute teaching and juggling another directing job at St. Anne's School in Annapolis, Maryland and working on my thesis project. I also have to consider what the weather has in store for us. Last February we experienced a major snowstorm that totally shut down the area for several days and we have had surprise snowstorms in March and April that have been just as devastating because they were unexpected. My biggest challenge continues to be the budget and finding a co-sponsor.

The play calls for casting six African American men and I will be looking to cast two or three understudies. I am very disappointed that I will not be working with students from Central Washington University, but I believe that casting this production in the DC area will be much easier as there is a much larger pool of African American students and actors who are non union. One challenge I have is deciding whether to cast young men who look as if they are between the ages of 18-25 or a combination of ages. I feel that a mixture of ages and experiences might give the production an additional level of complexity and sophistication.

I have looked at several spaces including one space in southeast Washington, DC, that is very metro accessible, but only seven hundred square feet and very oddly shaped. If I were to use this space, I would have to deal with the additional cost of renting light fixtures, a control board, cable and chairs. It also has a very small area that would be double as green room and dressing room. There is also a single restroom, which would be shared by the cast and audience. The bigger challenge is street noise because the space is located on a very busy road with lots of vehicular and pedestrian traffic. The space I have decided to use is in the basement of the National Memorial Universalist Church at 1810 16th Street, NW, Washington, DC, currently home to Spooky Action Theatre Company. They have a small room that can be used as a rehearsal space and a larger space that is used for various church functions including a black box theatre with a stage space of about 28 x 35 feet, movable acoustic walls, a grid lighting system with computerized light operation and flexible seating. Spooky Action Theatre Company has platforms, theatre cubes and stairs which can be used without additional cost. Also included in the cost of renting the space is the use of their chairs. This space is very accessible via public transportation. It is also the most affordable and allows me the luxury of only having to move a few feet from the rehearsal room to the performance space. In spite of its large size, the use of

acoustic walls, help to define the theatre space and will eliminate the cost and use of microphones for the actors.

Although this project will no longer be produced in Ellensburg and I will be losing the funding and support from the Student Empowerment Office, Black Student Union and Diversity Club at Central Washington University for this project. I am hoping to secure a co-producer who will be willing to share some of the expenses, including production space, buying, renting or building props and costumes as well as with advertisement. My stage manager is also a co-producer and the choreographer is a former student who will work for free.

Finally, my initial plans were to keep everything about this production simple. After several conversations with the playwright, we agreed that there should not be a large or elaborate set and that the costumes and props be kept to what is necessary to tell the story. A variety of music and musical styles will effectively help support the dialogue and action. I have a very sophisticated music library with a large number of old school rhythm and blues and jazz CDs. I will shop for some rap music and additional music artists to add to my choices. However, my primary focus for this project will be concentrating on bringing the playwright's words to life.

Empowering Artists Dreams



February 15, 2011

To Whom It May Concern:

Cynthia L. Webb-Manly, has been granted permission to produce her planned production of *For Black Boys Who Have Considered Homicide When The Streets Were Too Much* on May, 6, 2011. I am aware that this production is part of her Master's Thesis Project for Central Washington University and she has permission to use the facilities at Spooky Action Theatre Company which is housed at the Universalist National Memorial Church 1810 16th Street NW, Washington, DC to complete this endeavor.

Sincerely,

Andre M. Manly
Producing Manager
Empowering Artists Dream

Please note:

This signature has been redacted due to security reasons.

Evaluation of the Play as a Production Vehicle

The audience for this production will consist mainly of community members from the metropolitan Washington, DC area as well as friends and family of the cast and crew. *For Black Boys Who Have Considered Homicide When The Streets Were Too Much* is a play that explores a variety of themes and topics that affect not only African American communities, but other cultures and communities as well. There are several challenges to overcome as the director. The most significant challenge will be the language, which combines free verse and a dialect that is often associated with lower income and less educated African Americans. I will be choosing actors who live in the DC metropolitan area who come from a variety of economic and educational environments and it is my belief that they will be able and eager to handle both aspects of the language and the issues that are communicated in the play.

I will attempt to create a setting for this production, which reflects the playwrights' vision of minimalism. Conversations with Mr. Mason indicate that one of the earliest productions was going to take place in a church. The members of the church gave them use of a space (which they used for rehearsal) and money to advertise the production. The group felt guilty about the donated money by the church. Instead of performing in the undercroft, the group moved the production to the alley behind the church and was able to have more productions than they budgeted. The move to the alley provided them with an edgier and gritty looking performance space. According to the playwright, the stage should be bare with little or no scenery. Mr. Mason suggests that the stage represent a dead end alleyway. I plan to use minimal set pieces and dramatic lighting. A cappella music and stylized movement will also be used to help convey the musicality of the script and to help move the dialogue forward. In my opinion the script needs to be condensed and it is important that the cuts made not take away from the lyrical qualities or message the playwright intended. I believe that the construction of this play heightens the oral

traditions of African Americans and cultures of the African diaspora. I think that the playwright wrote the play in verse and used a variety of other poetic forms, to force the audience and cast members to listen more intently.

The most important issue for directing this script will be determining the most effective way to use it as a vehicle to open the lines of communication within the African American community. I believe the stories shared in this script, represent some universal experiences by men of color worldwide, but are particularly true for men from the African diaspora. I hope that the actors I cast will be excited about sharing these stories and will be able to connect personally to them in some manner. I think the audience will appreciate having the chance to hear men's points of view on many different issues, especially in light of Tyler Perry's recent production of *For Colored Girls* which really ruffled a lot of feathers. For example, Washington Post writer Courtland Milloy suggests the movie should be renamed "*For Black Men Who Have Considered Homicide After Watching Another Perry Movie*" and that "he was too blind sided . . . when superstar Janet Jackson appeared . . . looking like Michael Jackson with breast implants" (Milloy). Mary Pols a writer for Time Magazine stated that Perry's movie version of Shange's play ". . . feels like a ghoulish joke. . . both operatic and tone deaf. . ." (Pols). The theme, tone, characters and situations in *For Black Boys Who Have Considered Homicide When The Streets Were Too Much* represent issues such as love, distrust, frustration, joblessness, and crime. All of these are issues that the African American community and young men of color face everyday.

One idea I have been discussing with the playwright is how to focus my directing of the script on the art of story telling. Mr. Mason and I agree that the audience must feel compelled to listen to these monologues and that there is a relationship between theatre and ritualism. My plan to help the cast with this task is to give them vocal strategies to help them fill the space with their voice, use a variety of warm up exercises to help with diction and to help them decipher their

characters through in-depth character analysis. As the actors learn their lines, understand their characters and recognize their character goals, I hope they will be able to deliver their lines in a more authentic and organic way.

I believe that Mr. Mason used free verse rather than dialogue because it makes the stories more personal and as heightened language, it can be more powerful. It is my belief that the tone of the play can be a little harsh and if I were an audience member, I feel that Mason's use of free verse over that of typical dialogue would be more enlightening and easier to accept.

Although this play is more than fifteen years old, I believe it is timeless, as the issues facing the African American community have not changed since the play was first written and the message is still pertinent. It is my feeling that this play is about empowering black men and helping them realize their full potential and that they can be part of the American dream. The title *For Black Boys* seems to suggest violence and negativity often associated with Black men. I hope that the cast and audience will realize that it is just a catchy title meant to grab the audience or reader.

Concept Statement

America has been described for years as the great melting pot, a place where dreams come true if you work hard and long enough. Unfortunately for many of America's citizens, Black men in particular, success and the American Dream often elude them. Enter Keith Antar Mason, playwright and poet. Mr. Mason's play *For Black Boys Who Have Considered Homicide When The Streets Were Too Much* introduces the director, cast and audience to six very different Black American men. They struggle with the idea of success, are frequently victimized or being the victimizer and some of them feel worthless. Most importantly, they share the fear, hatred, inability to support themselves or their families and being held down by *the man* who is often themselves. Acknowledging these emotions is difficult for many men but not impossible.

As the director for this project, I want to embrace the theatricality found in this script through its content and structure. *For Black Boys Who Have Considered Homicide When The Streets Were Too Much* has many traits Bertolt Brecht might classify as Epic Theatre. "It is written in a way that is both narrative and poetic but it also turns the spectator into an observer...and the spectator stands outside, studies. . ." (Gerould 449). While watching this production, it is my belief that the audience who will be largely African American, will become wrapped up in the story and that they will imagine themselves knowing these men and wanting to help them in their day to day journey. While, Wole Soyinka would probably think of it as ritualistic theatre, or man's attempt to come to terms with the spatial phenomenon of his being (Gerould 478). Mr. Mason uses various techniques in his play. It would not surprise me if the audience felt as if they just left church after watching this production. Pierre Corneille, lawyer and dramatist clarified ideas first put forth by Aristotle in regards to unity of place, time and action (Gerould 153). Mason stated during a conversation that he was a "mythmaker" and there are several selections in his play that seem mythical. Nevertheless, the script is an ensemble

piece written in both a poetic and narrative form with each character having their moment in the spotlight. It is my belief that the characters in this play represent real men rather than the stereotypes often depicted in main stream media, on television and film all of which contributes to how and what America thinks of Black men.

My design concept for this play addresses the geographical and socioeconomic time set forth by the playwright. Mr. Mason's play was published in 1996 in *Colored Contradictions: An Anthology of Contemporary African American Plays*, edited by Harry J. Elam, Jr., and Robert Alexander. Mr. Mason states in the introduction to this play that it was inspired after he witnessed Ntozake Shange's choreopoem *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow Is Enuf* (Mason 177). After my initial reading of the play it was my belief that the play could be set in any urban or suburban environment. I thought it could easily be set in Detroit, Chicago or even Philadelphia, cities with large numbers of African American citizens, but after several conversations with the playwright, we discussed why the play is set in St. Louis, Missouri, his hometown, and location of several similar incidences. Although the play was written over fifteen years ago, I feel that it is timeless and could be set in any decade, I have chosen to set the play in the present day. The author suggests that the scenery represent a dead end alleyway and I will set this production on a mostly bare stage. Metaphorically, I think the dead end alleyway suggests the hopeless and often helplessness felt by black men especially those who do not see the opportunities to escape poverty, drugs, homicide, or even life in prison. Sticking with the authors recommendations, I will hang a noose center stage which will be visible to both actors and audience. Historically, the noose was used as a weapon of intimidation and to keep blacks in their place. I think its presence will heighten the feelings of hopelessness, poverty, drugs, homicide and helplessness. This production will be performed on a set that is very realistic in style. I want the set, costumes and music to be representative of the present but

reflective of the past. I believe the men in this script have known each other most of their lives even with the difference in their ages. In spite of the cards they have been dealt, they all listen to the same music, move in similar ways and dress in similar clothing.

The color palette will represent the harshness of the ghetto repeatedly heated by the summer sun and cooled by the winter winds. Minimal setting, property and costumes will hopefully heighten the author's words and will be most effective and least disruptive. I feel that the action takes place over several hours therefore; there is no need for costume changes or a running crew.

Production Schedule

*For Black Boys Who Have Considered Homicide When The Streets Were Too Much*Subject to change
March 2011

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18 Auditions 6:30 - 9:00 pm	19 Auditions and callbacks 2:00 - 6:00 pm
20	21	22	23	24	25 Auditions 6:30-9:30	26
27 Full cast Read- thru 2:00- 4:00	28 Full cast 6:30 - 9:30 pm	29	30 Full cast 6:30 - 9:30 pm	31		

April 2011

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
					1 Full cast 7:00 - 10:00 pm	2 Full cast Choreography 1:00 -5:00 pm
3	4 Full cast 6 - 9 pm	5	6 Full cast 7:00 – 9:00 pm	7	8	9
10	11 No rehearsal this week	12	13	14	15	16
17	18 Brothers 17, 19 and 8 7:00- 10:00	19	20 Brothers 34, 3 and 5 6:30-10:00	21	22 Full cast Run act 1 6 – 9 pm	23 Full cast 1:00 – 5:00
24	25 Full cast 6:30- 10:00 pm	26	27 Full cast 6:30 – 10:00 pm	28	29 Full cast Run act 1 6:30 – 10:00 pm	30 Load in Tech 9-12 Full Cast Run entire show 1:00 -5:00

MAY

1	2 Full cast Tech Rehearsal 7:00 - 10:00	3 Full cast Tech Rehearsal 7:00 - 10:00	4 Full cast Dress Rehearsal 6:30 - 10:00	5 Full cast Dress Rehearsal 6:30 - 10:00	6 Invited Dress Full cast Dress Rehearsal 6:30 call 7:00 show - 10:00	7 Post show discussion 1 st performance 1:30 call 2:00 show 1:00-5:00 pm
8 Final performance Full cast 2 nd performance 2:00 call 2:30 show 2:00-6:00 pm Post discussion						

Given Circumstances for the play

For Black Boys Who Have Considered Homicide When The Streets Were Too Much

Geographical location

- ❖ The set is described as a closed off alleyway. There is a three step fire escape, up stage right. There is a noose that is hanging down stage center (Mason, *For Black Boys Who Have Considered Homicide When The Streets Were Too Much* 179).

- ❖ Cemetery

this is a cemetery a graveyard

of countless souls screamin' (*For Black Boys* 180-181)

- ❖ Sharlene's house

by the time i was on her front porch . . .

that wuz' as far as i

was goin' (*For Black Boys* 185)

- ❖ St. Louis

that was about 1967 st. louis (*For Black Boys* 213)

- ❖ Ambulance

turn the lights back on . . .

and go faster

faster

turn the siren back on . . . (*For Black Boys* 217)

- ❖ St. Louis University

then i went to

st. louis u

three buildings of
insatiable lust . . . (*For Black Boys* 239)

❖ Office space

finally
i found the job . . .
sittin' behind
my own desk . . .
air conditioned (*For Black Boys* 246)

❖ Jail Cell

i wuz' alone
in a holdin' cell
gettin' ready
to be released (*For Black Boys* 250-1)

Climate/Season

❖ It is summer time

. . . all that early mornin'
and i was sweatin hot (*For Black Boys* 183)

Date/Year

❖ 1967

that was about 1967 st. louis (*For Black Boys* 213)

Time of Day

❖ Just before sunset

and the cool of the evenin' leavin'

purple blazed in his mind

his radio caressed him (*For Black Boys* 187)

❖ Mid day

jus' dust and hot heat

lingerin' heat

and glistenin' black skin (*For Black Boys* 205)

Economic environment

❖ Making money has its prices

whether makin' love or killin'

see death come by two means

both wuz' for money

and hell had a price to be paid (*For Black Boys* 206)

❖ Working, middle class and educated characters

BROTHER # 17. she is counting pennies

endlessly again (*For Black Boys* 214)

BROTHER # 8. i wuz' dedicated to the world

then i went to

st. louis u . . .

three buildings . . .

caverns of unholy

thinking . . . (*For Black Boys* 239)

BROTHER #34. they toasted life . . .

and they saw her . . .

and she needed
the extra
money (*For Black Boys* 242)

BROTHER # 19. had been an intern
and they knew my expertise
and it
didn't cost nothing (*For Black Boys* 247)

Social environment

❖ Struggle within relationships

BROTHER # 19. hey man did you deal with a strong one before
man so strong you didn't know what wuz' up
she out did john wayne
and laid you more than you did her
the strong and silent type . . . (*For Black Boys* 218)

❖ Black men are worthless

dog nigga
chicken shit
motherfuckin'
bastard (*For Black Boys* 219)

❖ Sharing moments of loneliness

BROTHER # 8. i'm used to bein' alone now
the pain of emptiness
let's me know that i am

the loser i wuz' afraid
of bein' . . . (*For Black Boys* 222)

- ❖ As African Americans evolved, rejecting the names given them by their slave masters, they adapted names that represented pride in their African ancestry

mozambique drenched of life . . .
and when white men bet
he would fight
not for the few dreams . . . (*For Black Boys* 205)

- ❖ For many Blacks it is dangerous living in America

the bus rides . . .
all signs of the times
the naked children
dead and strangled . . . (*For Black Boys* 204)

- ❖ *Niggas* and *Niggers* many Black Americans continue to use the *N* word although its use continues to be debated.

take a number
any number niggers are jus' numbers (*For Black Boys* 181)

Political environment

- ❖ Once upon a time there were colored people, Negroes, Jiggaboos, and other unflattering words. These words were used to designate Black Americans as being less human, less than a citizen and not very important in American society.

all niggas are numbers
important only

to coroner's reports

and the morticians business (*For Black Boys* 197)

- ❖ In the Black community after years of abuse, the man (police) is not to be trusted and police brutality is still an issue

the burnin' heat came

from the sheriff's gun barrel

blue smoke and dust

and heat lingerin' round

and this time mozambique

had escaped (*For Black Boys* 209)

- ❖ According to an old African proverb, it takes a village to raise a child

once i wuz' dedicated

to my people's struggle . . .

creatin' new life

is a solid occupation

that black people

invented . . .

i wuz' dedicated to the world

but being' good

is such a task

made harder

by the second

i told you . . . (*For Black Boys* 240)

- ❖ The media contributes to negative stereotypes that paint a picture of Black men as dangerous, out of control, aggressive, untrustworthy and sexual monsters

BROTHER #34. he wuz' hot

as red pepper in greens on sunday

and those that wanted

him on the sheets

had to be more than themselves

he never ever

made love ever-since-she had

left him

he danced . . . (*For Black Boys* 188)

BROTHER # 3. . . . like aggression can only

be symbolized

by me

like the male gender

and colored black means

death carrier . . . (*For Black Boys* 194-195)

Religious environment

- ❖ Respect for the dead

. . . no words . . .

just movements

just pain

don't nobody touch him

leave him alone

this is a cemetery a graveyard . . . (*For Black Boys* 180)

- ❖ Author calls on his African belief system

all boys bein' born

and the swarm of flies

the draft bill

the surge of manhood

the circumcision

all the powerful signs . . . (*For Black Boys* 203)

- ❖ Sacrifices and references to voodoo – ritualism

and sewn lips

all signs all omens . . .

stick pinned

and lynched (*For Black Boys* 203)

- ❖ Baptism is just one of many cleansing rituals that becomes theatrical in many Black households

he stood

naked in front of his mirror

always smilin'

jus' baptized on fish friday (*For Black Boys* 187)

Previous Action

Page 180 The brothers attend a funeral

Page 182 Playing ball is something the brothers do regularly

- Page 183 The brothers relive their youth
- Page 185 Deciding when to have sex is a difficult decision for some brothers to make
- Page 207 The brothers live for the times that can be had at a house party
- Page 209 The loneliness of being alone can be frightening for some brothers
- Page 213-5 For a man, taking care take of a loved one is stressful
- Page 215 Music can soothe the savage beast
- Page 216 Nothing can ever prepare you for dying
- Page 239 For one brother being a social activist was important until he attended college
- Page 242 Love can be as painful and hard work
- Page 248 White boys can be very funny
- Page 250 Hard work was supposed to pay off

Polar Attitudes

- BROTHER # 19: I am adventurous and like a good challenge. I do not let the small stuff worry me. (Beginning)
- I was smart enough to escape the neighborhood but it will always be home and the place that I always return to. (End)
- BROTHER # 8: I am ambitious and brazen. I can be very sarcastic. (Beginning)
- I am disillusioned (End)
- BROTHER # 17: I am a poet, vulnerable and can be extremely moody. (Beginning)
- I see God's work in everything. (End)
- BROTHER # 3: I am an in your face kind of guy and feel it is necessary to always be the center of attention. (Beginning)
- I feel it necessary to be short with others (End)

BROTHER # 34: I am a dreamer (Beginning)

I am sensitive (End)

BROTHER # 5: I feel like I have been abandoned and I am unwilling to make a commitment in a relationship. (Beginning)

I am hopeful (End)

Analysis of Dialogue

Word Choice

“Almost all plays written before 1875 that have survived, have survived because of their ability to entertain audiences, to illuminate the human condition. . . most importantly they illuminate something so profound about human beings that they help us understand who we are” (Hodge and McLain 316).

Even though *For Black Boys Who Have Considered Homicide When The Streets Were Too Much* is, a contemporary play published in 1992. It has survived because it is both entertaining and it illuminates the human condition. The play *For Black Boys* is a collection of monologues that offer alternative viewpoints of what it means to be a Black man in America. It attempts to address stereotypical views of Black men that have been glorified in the media. Using poetry, music and physical movement it attempts to change the way society views these lost souls.

According to Dan Kurland, poetry is:

the most personal and indirect form of fictional expression. The poet can speak directly to an audience, much as a narrator does in a story. Poetry differs in visual form and is ultimately characterized by how it communicates rather than by what it communicates. Poetry relies on the sound of the spoken language and figurative language. Poetry can tell a story, describe an object or situation, narrate an event

and express feelings. It can be characterized by linguistic elements that go beyond standard sentence structure” (Kurland).

Although *For Black Boys* is written in a poetic form, it is also very *urban* in style. If there is such a thing as *Black English*, this play could fit into that definition. It is written in a dialect that is simple, sincere, unpretentious and very ethnic. It is intentionally written in a vernacular that would be inviting and understandable by today’s young actors, directors and audiences. Older adults may also appreciate the play for the references to issues that may have occurred during their youth and are still socially or politically relevant. They may also be encouraged by Mason’s ability to share a fictionalized account of history and that is interesting and accessible to an audience that may have felt that their history has been neglected. Mason goes to great length to keep his play authentic, by using a language that many Black Americans or urbanites could easily identify with, he has stripped away fancy language and other barriers. In keeping with this tone, the playwright foregoes giving the characters proper names; instead he refers to them as Brother and gives them a number. The danger in directing this kind of production with a young cast is how easily the diction might be lost while trying to sound *authentic* and the need to pay close attention to the verse structure, placements of words and phrasing. The actor and director also need to hear the musicality, inherent in the dialogue.

“According to certain scholars *nigger* was a deliberate mispronunciation of *negro*. One of the ugliest racial slurs ever created, *nigger* was used primarily to denigrate Black Americans” (Williams). It seems that over the years, the word *nigger*, has been used by whites while the word *nigga*, has been used by Blacks. In fact, in recent years, several comics and hip-hop artists have made millions of dollars using the terms in their stand-up routines and songs while the

debate continues. Mason uses the word not necessarily in a negative way, but in a way that will make the reader or audience sit up and take notice.

BROTHER # 5. damn take the nigga

off me

take it and don't hurt

nobody else with it

let nigga die

let the nigga die . . . (*For Black Boys* 200)

Ask a Black American over the age of fifty, whether they have been called the *n* word and you might be surprised at their response. According to Dr. Keith Mayes, of the University of Minnesota, as of 2004, “everybody seems to have a *nigger* story” (Williams). While many Black Americans will get angry when a non-Black uses the *n* word, it seems they are more acceptable, when Black Americans use it. Dr. Mayes stated in an interview with Brandt Williams of the Minnesota Public Radio that: “he was called the *n* word by a white kid when he was twelve years old. He was confused because up to that moment he had only heard the word used by other Black people”. Rappers have convinced a generation of young African Americans that it is cool to use the *n* word or at least some variation of it (Williams). While some Blacks use the *n* word very cautiously, others refuse to use the word at all because it can be so demeaning. An interesting example of word choice by Mason is his decision to use the word *niggas* and *niggers*. Mason uses the word, but does not go overboard with it and shows us that it can be used in a jovial manner.

BROTHER #5. promise me

that takin' numbers

don't mean takin'
 names
 cuz'
 ain't no nigga died
 and left you boss . . . (*For Black Boys* 201)

Use of the *n* word will probably never be resolved and its usage continues to make some people very nervous when they hear it no matter who uses it.

American students also learn that English words can often be spelled phonetically and are still correct but sometimes they are misspelled. Mason also takes liberties with the use of 'wuz' and 'was' and leaves the final *g* off words ending in *ing*.

BROTHER # 3. by the time i was on her front porch
 and i swear to god
 that wuz' as far as i
 was goin' . . .
 and wuzn't nobody home . . . (*For Black Boys* 185)

To keep the characters sounding authentic, Mason goes to great length in his play *For Black Boys*. They represent many different Black men that many in the audience might know. Mason strips away the fancy language and other writing barriers to keep the play realistic. He often does this to get the audience riled up by using a very modern almost hip-hop writing style in spite of the negative affects associated with it and its effect on youth.

takin' odds
 ain't takin' chances
 and the countdown

is critical
taken tolls
ain't supplyin' me
with the right that a man
a god-like child
with a future
can understand . . . (*For Black Boys* 198)

“Although hip-hop is seen by many as having a negative effect on the youth of today, music mogul and entrepreneur, Russell Simmons works with rappers who seek to build a progressive political movement and have had success with voter registration efforts” (Roach).

Finally, in many of his monologues Mason uses alliteration, placing two or more words together beginning with the same letter or sound in close succession.

. . . was all the mood made him see
the moanin' moon pale white . . .
when he slept naked
and the heat jus' hung
hung heavy like his
nuts heavy . . . (*For Black Boys* 205)

Choice of Images

Keith Antar Mason is an incredible writer who uses vibrant imagery throughout the text. He has created a play that builds on his experiences in St. Louis, Missouri. Mason calls himself a mythmaker. After researching many of the locations listed in this play, it is difficult to determine whether this play is historically accurate, fictional or something in between. After several

conversations with Mason, the issue is still unclear because he has been incredibly closed mouth because he has had his work stolen (Mason interview). Whether the play is historical or fictional, the fact remains that it is very political with serious undertones and edginess that would be appealing to young audiences. The imagery created by Mason is better perceived when the audience closes their eyes and listens to the words being spoken by each character.

and she wuz'
a princess
a black princess tough and proud
a high priestess of soul
i would close my eyes
and see her
chasin' the werewolves
from around my house . . . (*For Black Boys* 211)

Many Black men refer to the women in their lives as queens and daughters are their princesses. Mason has presented the audience with an image of a strong and beautiful woman capable of incredible feats.

Statistics indicate that Black men die at a younger age, at disproportionately higher rates than any other class of people and often at the hand of another Black man (Smith). The imagery in the monologue below is raw and powerful.

nobody
came
nobody
saw . . .

it wuz' jus'
 another routine
 autopsy
 no i.d.
 wuz needed
 nobody
 came . . . (*For Black Boys* 197-198)

Although the sight of a dead body can be emotionally and physically exhausting, the dead are often just another number to the coroner who needs to stay objective to complete their job. The medical examiner's job is a lonely one, it is unfortunate in this case, that the body has been unclaimed and unidentified. The implication in this section of dialogue is that Black men are not important in society, whether dead or alive, they just do not count. *The Language of Poetry* states: "in ordinary language, the sound of a word is useful almost exclusively in order to identify it and distinguish it from other words. In poetry, its importance is much greater. Poets think of how they want something to sound as much as they think of what they want to say . . ." (Koch 44).

it was rainy
 and my cousin
 had cut his finger
 almost off
 and everybody
 went to the hospital
 to see 'bout him

and left me at home
 to watch
 dark shadows
 alone (Mason, *For Black Boys* 211)

In the above monologue if the audience were to let go of their imagination, it would be very easy to imagine an overcast afternoon. A sudden thunderstorm rolls in and the skies darken. Brother # 5 is left home, alone to cope with the darkening skies and pending storm. Suddenly there is a loud bang and the lights flicker. Alone, scared and sitting in the dark without the television to entertain him, Brother # 5 lets his imagination wander. Mastering the art of imagery is a skill most writers, poets especially aspire to. Mason works very hard to master the skill of imagery in order to convey his story. During another monologue, Brother # 17 recalls a very special woman in his life.

she screams monkey shouts . . .
 she starts to count . . .
 and you don't want
 to remember . . . (*For Black Boys* 214)

The audience should ponder what monkey shouts sound like and who is the *she* Brother # 17 is talking about. Whatever their relationship is, caring for this woman is stressful for him. Someone in the audience may be able to relate to this story. In this passage, it is not just that *she* is screaming, but how she screams, what she is screaming about and what the response is of the person from whom she needs attention. Another possibility is that her actions are something of a daily occurrence and that death is not far away and while he hears her screams, he manages to mostly ignore her until she does something that requires his immediate attention.

Phrasing and Sentence Structure

What appears as a missing element at first glance in *For Black Boys Who Have Considered Homicide When The Streets Were Too Much* is basic grammar and punctuation. In grade school, most American students learn that nouns and pronouns, are capitalized especially when they refer to a person or place, and the first word of every sentence is capitalized and each sentence ends with a period, question mark or exclamation point.

BROTHER #3. yeah, yeah, yeah

i know what you said

you love me

but i don't think

you meant it

see a mouth

can say anything

and yours

an unsated lust

addicted to sayin'

you love me

and makin' it all right

after you done

been

good-bad mad as hell . . . (*For Black Boys* 233)

This monologue seems to ramble on endlessly and it makes one wonder whether the speaker ever stops to catch their breath. But it is this rambling that lends an air of simplicity and lightness to a

script that borders on being melodramatic. Although Mason's play is far from being a comedy, there are moments where the lines are full of excitement and movement representing the energy that can be heard when the speaker is trying to impress any number of listeners and where and when the story needs to move along.

It is extremely important that the director and actor quickly become aware of Mason's writing styles that include basic grammar issues, and phrasing and sentence structure that are missing in his work. In several monologues the missing grammar, awkward phrasing and sentence structure are easy to find. In other monologues, the job is much more difficult. Finding a word or phrase to emphasize, the end of a line or what Mason's thoughts were is a daunting challenge. Re-reading the monologues is a definite must if the actor and director are to get the full meaning of each monologue and to make a decision about where to put the punctuation and breaks in order to make sense of some of the monologues. Often when reading free verse poetry, the actor and director will need to sit together to determine where the playwright intended punctuation to go. Baakari, who played Brother # 19, was having a particularly difficult time with one monologue. After reading the passage several times to see where the natural flow was, we sat down together, placing punctuation where we felt it was most appropriate. Deciding where to place commas, question marks, exclamation points and periods was a challenging task especially since punctuation was rarely used by the playwright. Below is our example of where we thought punctuation was needed.

BROTHER # 19. baby what happened to your strong and silent

image (?)

stonewall (.)

the strong and silent wonder woman of the

third millennium(!)
 cracked
 and somehow (emphasize) i got knee deep(,)

 in the definitive female trouble(.)

 every month it seems.

 and i ain't (emphasis) scared to tell

 you 'bout yourself . . . (*For Black Boys* 220)

The phrasing and sentence structure used by Mason and his characters initially seems to represent the education level formally received through school and informally through the streets and their ability to survive. It is my belief that the characters in this play are a byproduct of both. Regardless of whether you live in the 'hood' or not, it is not impossible to imagine these characters living most of their lives surrounded by the sounds and attitudes of the streets and how they tell their stories. Dan Kurland states that poetry can tell a story, describe an object or situation narrate an event or simply express feelings (Kurland). Brother # 5 recalls the loneliness he experienced as a young child.

. . . and knowin'
 that Nina wuz
 singing to me . . .
 see Nina
 could put a spell
 on me and keep me safe . . . (*For Black Boys* 210-11)

The deep and sultry voice of jazz vocalist Nina Simone, becomes the savior for a scared little boy who sleeps alone, worries about wetting himself, the shadows that invade his imagination, is

frightened by the noises of the night and disturbing his adult caretaker who is entertaining her male companion. The mismatch use of word endings *in* rather than *ing* is yet another part of Mason's writing style.

Mason also uses the *caesura*, which is a special kind of pause or break in a line (Webster 93) in his play. Mason uses caesura to help the reader, audience and actor hear words that need special emphasis and to change the rhythm of a passage of verse. Caesura allows words preceding it to "sink in before the listener must deal with more words . . . it separates phrases, which are often the characters thoughts, and allows the listener to hear them one at a time" (Van Tassell 25). "Verse lines without punctuation will take a caesura, usually somewhere in the middle. Arguably you could place caesuras anywhere that the thoughts change . . ." (Van Tassell 26). Below is my example of where I believe caesura helps a monologue become more effective.

so what // if I'm desperate
 we have all // been desperate
 at one time or another . . . //
 for a smile or a trick
 or treat surprise called //
 love (*For Black Boys* 221)

Peculiar Characteristics and Language Structures

Mason's play *For Black Boys Who Have Considered Homicide When The Streets Were Too Much* challenges the director, and actor to vie for the audience's attention on many levels. According to Hodge and McLain crafting theatrical is about "theatre craft that does not lie in the visual alone but in its balance of the oral-aural experience. A play is not a motion picture on stage, it is a sensual experience that reaches us through the ear as much as the eye" (Hodge and

McLain 139). One tool Mason uses frequently in *For Black Boys* is repetition. During the opening moments each performer enters repeating the following phrase:

who is my god

who is my mother . . .

do you love me (*For Black Boys* 179)

As each character says his line, the stage directions indicate that the players should strike a pose to help emphasize the words. Repetition of a sound, phrase, syllable or line is a basic unifying device used in poetry. Poets will use repetition as a commentary or static point that helps the development of their ideas.

BROTHER # 8. i'm used to bein' alone now . . .

i'm use to bein'

a nothing of a man

i'm used to bein' alone . . . (*For Black Boys* 222-223)

Another tool that Mason uses in this play is call and response. Call and response is deeply rooted in many early African American and the earliest African ritualistic activities. Call and response as a literary form is a powerful force, allowing the audience to be fully participatory (Young 300). This practice of call and response was carried through the Middle Passage, landed in America, further cultivated on plantations, eventually used in churches and other religious practices. Finally, the use of call and response has been used by the playwright and is included in his stage work:

BROTHER #19. . . . my dance is too well thought out

to be turned out

ALL BROTHERS. my dance is too well thought out

to be turned out

BROTHER #5. my dance is too 4 corners

to be turned out

ALL BROTHERS. 4 corners . . .

BROTHER # 34. my dance is too psychedelic soul

to be turned out

ALL BROTHERS. psychedelic soul . . . (*For Black Boys* 193)

As the brothers state their individual lines, the others echo while being physically expressive through a choreographed set of movements.

Mason also uses a dialect that some observers might consider, *street*. This dialect while seeming to be representative of urban dwellers, is used also to heighten this play. *For Black Boys* is written in a dialect that could be associated with a lack of education, the characters being from the south, or just trying to be cool. Mason's work could be compared to that of Zora Neal Hurston and Samuel L. Clemens. While Zora Neal Hurston was educated at Howard University, she was born in Notasulga, Alabama but spent many years in Harlem honing her writing style. She traveled the United States and documented the experiences and lifestyles of African Americans. Some of her best work includes *Her Eyes Were Watching God* and *Mules and Men*. Samuel Clemens on the other hand spent his youth in Missouri. He also traveled the United States, Europe, Asia and South America, writing about average folks. He is best known for his stories about *Huck Finn* and *Tom Sawyer*. In both cases these great American writers wrote their stories and used the dialogue and dialect of the characters they met. Whether these characters existed as real individuals is difficult to determine, but one thing is certain – Ms. Hurston and Mr. Clemens; wrote about characters whose lives were larger than life. The same

could be said about the Brothers in Mason's play. Like the characters found in Hurston's and Clemens's works, Mason's characters sound like they grew up in the south because of the slur of the words and missing endings. The feeling however in Mason's play, which is set in St. Louis, Missouri, is urban and edgy. It is possible that these young men have ancestors that came from states further south and with each generation their dialect has become less southern and more urban.

Hodge and McLain state:

that most modern plays have prose dialogue because of its likeness to the reality of everyday life, but a few are written in verse forms as were many plays of the past. Verse forms are obviously more artificial . . . The effect of verse is often as potent as physical body movement especially since it can convey intensive inner feelings . . . (Hodge and McLain 22- 23).

Ironically, while *For Black Boys* is written mostly in verse, but would hardly be considered artificial, as it maximizes the cultural overtones of African American speakers, and works incredibly well as a vehicle to communicate a powerful message to an audience that will hopefully be very socially, politically and ethnically diverse.

While re-reading *For Black Boys* it was not difficult to read and hear the a musical connection in Mason's play. Barry Wallenstein in his essay entitled *The Jazz Poetry Connection* states:

that the ingredient of improvisation is central to both jazz and poetry.

Improvisation or the act of inventing on the spur of the moment, has more or less defined modern jazz and the effect has been endlessly innovative music.

Likewise, the movement of the poem is its internal performance, the way in which it gets to where it finally ends. The way lines release other lines, the leaps of emotion or emotions along these releases . . . is the real performance of poetry and of jazz (Wallenstein 143).

BROTHER 34. and the cool of the evenin' leavin'

purple blazed in his mind . . .

ernest would step

like fog leans up against

the lakes in forest park . . .

he wuz' hot

as red peppers in greens on Sunday . . . (*For Black Boys* 187-188)

Imagine the mellow sounds of a saxophone solo. Riffs played endlessly and soulfully, building with intensity as the poem develops. While scripted, questions arise of what may have been improvised during rehearsal or a performance and incorporated into the first and subsequent productions.

Structure of Lines and Speeches

For many children, reading becomes a safe haven for them, giving them the ability to escape bullying from peers, disappointment from parents and the grim reality of living in poverty or a world of chaos. In the playwright's notes, Mason states that he "escaped into the fantasy world of books" (*For Black Boys* 177). His father purchased a baseball glove when he indicated his desire to become a dancer. Mason's rebellion against his father and his immersion into the world of books was just the beginning. It sparked a love of reading and obviously affected his desire to become a writer. The idea of Mason rebelling against his father's dream to pursue his

own dream is evident as this story develops. It is possible that Mason's rebellion is what allows him to ignore the usual conventions of grammar and punctuation. As a poet, Mason has written lines of poetry for his characters in a way that often encourages them to speak directly to the audience in the same manner that a narrator would in a fictional story. Through their lines we see that poetry can be very personal and an indirect form of fictional expressions.

BROTHER # 3. i must be mistaken

for some monster . . .

i can tell by the way you look

at me . . . (*For Black Boys* 194)

Although there are moments that the men talk to each other and share their stories, there is only the occasional interaction between them. Each monologue should be evaluated as an individual moment.

Analysis of Dramatic Action

In the play *For Black Boys Who Have Considered Homicide When The Streets Were Too Much*, there are six characters with unique characteristics and life experiences. Each character shares their own stories with the audience through a series of monologues. If the author was to eliminate a character, the play as a whole would not be any less enticing, but there would be one less individual to get to know. After reading this play several times, it is my belief is that Mason wants the audience to walk away from this experience having learned about each character as an individual and with a better and fuller understanding of Black men in America. He also wants us to realize that the stereotypes often portrayed by the media about Black men, is very different from Black men in reality. The audience might imagine that they (the brothers) have known each other for years and perhaps they are returning to the neighborhood of their youth. The audience

has only to drive through an urban community to witness a group of brothers (Black, Latino and other ethnic groups), hanging out on a stoop, the corner or even the parking lot of 7-11 store sharing the stories of their lives.

Although a dramatic play *For Black Boys* is not so dramatic as to be considered a tragedy based on the definition given by Aristotle. *For Black Boys* deals with humanity's relationship to forces outside the mundane, but in the end, none of the characters die. The playwright hopes that the audience will be encouraged by his words but whether the audience will truly feel pity for any of the characters is debatable.

Mason has cleverly included musical interludes throughout the play and including call and response which was widely used during African and early African American religious ceremonies. Therefore, *For Black Boys* is a play that should be considered a melodrama. Music seems to be very important in this production. I will be using, a wide variety of music to enhance this story. In the first publication of Mason's play, compositions by Stevie Wonder and Michael Jackson (a pop star and a rhythm and blues artist) were used. The choice to include these artists is very interesting, especially since neither is a hip-hop artist or rap performer. Given the format and tone of the play, there might be the expectation of hip-hop or rap music. Also included is a reference to Nina Simone and Teddy Pendergast. Ms. Simone who some consider to be the queen of jazz, is known for having a smooth and soulful vocal quality. In a monologue by Brother # 5, he finds listening to Nina Simone the loving and tender voice that seems to be missing from his aunt.

but the only thing
that saved me wuz' a voice
on one of

my auntie's
records
i wuzn't
supposed to touch . . .
NINA SIMONE
and she say hush little
baby don't you cry
late at night . . . (*For Black Boys* 210)

This first publication of *For Black Boys* also includes the balladeer Teddy Pendergast singing *It Don't Hurt Now* which is followed by a monologue by Brother # 19 who talks about being with a strong woman and the mistakes he made during this relationship.

she out did john wayne
and laid you more than you did her
the strong and silent type
gave it up before she realized and suffered . . .
only called to say that she should could would
 luv' you
but never did when she got there because
bein' silent wuz' golden and she wuz' jus' be-
 ing a lady . . . (*For Black Boys* 218)

During a conversation with the cast, someone asked why relationships were so difficult to maintain. The discussion that ensued included the idea that many Black men will say they want a strong woman, but are rarely able to vocalize the ways in which they want these women to be

strong. There was an agreement that very few Black men have not had to deal with at least one strong Black woman in their lifetime who often acted more like a man than they did. Another thing we talked about was that Black women are often more financially stable, independent, and strong-willed which is often seen as *Attitude*. These women are often seen as bossy and will not tolerate a lot of poor decisions from them men in their relationships. It is almost as if many of these traits should only be associated with men. We concluded our discussion with the idea that Black women will often take on stereotypical male traits in a relationship and when that happens, someone is bound to get hurt. In the above monologue, by Brother #19, it seems that the *she* he is talking about, makes the speaker feel like he is the one on the emotional rollercoaster and he has lost control in the relationship.

Mason also uses a fair amount of heightened language but the play is hardly about the level of violence and suffering that the title suggests. Aristotle was very specific about works that are to be considered tragedy. He defined a tragedy as:

the imitation of an action that is serious and also, as having magnitude, complete in itself, in language with pleasurable accessories, each kind brought in separately in the parts of the work, in a dramatic, not a narrative form; with incidents arousing pity and fear . . . (Gerould 49).

Not convinced that Mason's play is either tragedy or comedy it was necessary to consider the definition that Hodge and McLain put forth regarding melodrama. They state: "that melodrama has been used for approximately two centuries to describe plays that have theatrical activities dominating the dramatic action. Melodrama since its earliest usage has meant drama supported and enhanced by exciting music" (263). After re-reading *For Black Boys* is it interesting to see where and how Mason uses music to heighten his play.

A monologue by Brother # 3 brings back unpleasant and very personal memories.

Brother # 3 talks about being in an ambulance en-route to a hospital, mid-way there, the siren is turned off. The ensuing autopsy seems heartless and cold; unfortunately both experiences are jolting accounts of living Black in America.

As the audience watches this story unfold, there is an expectation of specific changes in moods as the play moves forward in a cause – effect progression. As Hodge and McLain point out “a unit of action, well played generates a mood appropriate to the action . . .” (47). This then leads to a discussion of the unity of time, place and action. The unities: time, action and place were first discussed and described by Aristotle and later by Horace. Eventually, Corneille offered a more complete theory and stated: “the term unity of action does not mean that tragedy should show only one action on the stage . . . there must be only one complete action, which leaves the mind of the spectator serene . . .” (Gerould 155). As a writer, Keith Antar Mason uses his knowledge of classical theatre to create a piece of literature that unfortunately does not conform in its entirety to the theory of unity of action. Unlike some of the classics, Mason violates the unity of action because there is no single character in *For Black Boys* that is more important than another character. The action in this play for some viewers will not be serene, but will be jarring in how it hopes to alter the perception of Black men. *For Black Boys* is an ensemble piece with each character being important to the development of the play. The plot though loosely developed is ultimately about the good, the bad and the ugly, and culminates with the dangers of being Black, young and male in America.

The second part of Corneille’s discussion about the unities, focuses on unity of time. Corneille states that Aristotle suggested that unity of time “ought to enclose the duration of its action in one journey of the sun . . .” (Gerould 161). It is believable to see that Mason’s play

takes place over several hours in a single day, beginning either at dusk or sunrise and ending twenty-four hours later. There are moments however, in which the reader or audience member might be confused especially as the characters take us from one story to the next. Mason uses individual monologues along with delivery of some dialogue or stories by the entire group. It is these group presentations that can be confusing and cloud the presentation of unity of time.

ALL BROTHERS. and slush funds

and hideaways

and late brides

and dizzy spells

all signs all omens

the marked cup of death's drink

and favorite sons . . . (*For Black Boys* 202)

Generally, the playwright does an incredible job taking the audience on a journey between the past and present. There are moments in which the audience may question what is happening or what just happened.

Unity of place is the last of the unities discussed by Corneille and it the last issue in Mason's play to be addressed. Corneille states:

that I find no rule concerning unity of place in either Horace or Aristotle and that this is what leads many people to believe that this rule was established only as a consequence of the unity of one day and leads them to imagine that one can stretch the unity of place to cover the points to which a man may go and return in twenty-four hours (Gerould 164).

On the surface, it seems that Mason violates the definition of unity of place. His story takes us from a cemetery to the lake for a Friday night fish fry, St. Louis University and even to the coroner's office. If you listen deeply to the monologues you only have to engage your imagination to realize the locations, where these stories occur could be reached in one day's time. Mason plays with time – past and present merging them into the here and now. As the characters share a little of their personal history, we are transported to the places of their dreams and nightmares. Early in the play, Brother # 5 states:

don't nobody touch him
 leave him alone
 this is a cemetery a graveyard . . .
 we are bones
 children of the hellfire . . . (*For Black Boys* 180)

In this monologue, a journey through a cemetery is but a reminder that it should be a solemn and respectable place. Other places alluded to include a visit to St. Louis University.

BROTHER # 8. i wuz' dedicated to the world . . .
 then i went to
 st. louis u
 three buildings
 of insatiable lust . . .
 then i went to
 201 north grand boulevard . . . (*For Black Boys* 239)

The description of St. Louis University sounds extremely realistic and it was amazing to discover that it actually exists in St. Louis, Missouri. My research led me to discover that the

college was established by an order of Jesuits. It began with three buildings and eventually spread over several city blocks. Listening to this speech one could imagine several multi-storied gray stone buildings that look more industrial and identical rather than a place of higher learning, but to a young Black man they represent so much more. Thinking about what an institute of higher learning has to offer the many Black Americans, attending and graduating from college are but small steps to achieving the American Dream. It is unfortunate that statistics indicate that the numbers of African American men who graduate from college are incredibly low. The reasons for the high dropout rates are numerous.

One thought is that too much emphasis is put on becoming a professional athlete. As a whole Blacks value participation in sports more than they value education. Unfortunately, the average African American student spends less than four hours per week studying. It has been discovered that very few African American students are mentored by African American professors and when students do not see educators who look like them, they suffer. (Watkins).

Another factor to consider is that, very few American cities spend as much on education as they do on incarceration and a major contributing factor to incarceration is illiteracy. In the final scene, one of the most powerful images and bit of action comes from a monologue by Brother # 19 who after working his way through college, completing a prestigious internship and landing a job as a white collar professional, is accused of a crime and dragged away from his place of employment.

it was saturday . . .

i laughed

drank my coffee

and went to my own
 desk . . .
 the parking lot
 was empty at first
 . . . then
 sirens and lights
 and a hundred blows
 against my head . . .
 and mouths
 screaming
 ugly words (*For Black Boys* 248)

This particular monologue is one of the most intriguing and troubling speeches in the play. Law abiding citizens do not necessarily go to work one day and suddenly find themselves naked, bloody and in jail the next day. There are numerous unanswered questions about this monologue including what this brother has gotten himself into and why was he arrested. He seems to be a law-abiding citizen, but for some reason he is beaten and caged like an animal as were many of his ancestors.

In addition to a discussion of Corneille's theory of unities, "all action" according to Hodge and McLain "is reciprocal". Action is defined:

as the clash of forces . . . The cycle goes as follows: A does to B; B feels the force as action and decides what action to take; B does to A; A feels the force of Bs action (adjustment) and decides what to action to take. This cycle then begins again, but this time on a somewhat new and different level . . . all dramatic action

is also reciprocal . . . Dramatic action therefore, could be seen as the actor's ability to respond to a stimulus and to interact and re-act to what others have done or said as well as his or her environment (28-29).

For Black Boys is a modern play and is composed of multiple acts, it has many similarities found in Greek plays and Shakespeare. For example, "Greek plays appear to be only one-acts with choral interludes and dancing whereas, in Shakespearean theatre, the division of action was accomplished by using rhymed couplets or shifting to another part of the stage with another character entering or exiting" (Hodge and McLain 30). Mason combines the styles from both the Greeks and Shakespeare. Although his play is divided into two acts, it could be read as a one act, with many smaller scenes. There are no formal choral interludes but there are moments when movement is suggested and should be used because of the nature of the play. There are also moments within Mason's play when it seems appropriate to use a combination of modern and classical play techniques when dealing with the dramatic action in his play such as shifting from one play area on stage to another while any number of characters enter or exit.

Dramatic Action Analysis: Moods

Scene One Unit	Mood Adjective or Metaphor
Unanswered questions	adventurous, ambitious, devilish, innocence loving, passionate
Scene Two Unit	Mood Adjective or Metaphor
Revelations	firm, intense, tender, reassuring, unyielding, magnetic, fluid, rare, odd, knowing, informingly, smooth
Scene Three Unit	Mood Adjective or Metaphor

Secrets	playful, sarcastic, brazen, boisterous, sweaty, indecisive, brave, weak, cool, nervous, chill, brave, afraid, unbelievable, aroused, bashful
Scene Four Unit	Mood Adjective or Metaphor
Damaged goods	boastful, pungent, musty, dreamy, aware, distant, saucy, spicy, detached, dominant, egotistical, sensual, sexual, damaged, deceptive, narcissistic, broken, macho-man, forced, erotic, drive, feverish, unbelievable, arousing, passionate, enlightening, heaviness, biblical, satisfying, agitated, unfamiliar, unfinished, sultry, moody, forced, comic
Scene Five Unit	Mood Adjective or Metaphor
Need To Be Seen As Human/Whole	aggressive, furious, funky, erratic, corrosive, explosive, volatile, caustic, gritty, complex, dominant, afraid, demand, judgmental, courageous, ambitious, alarming, soothing, glaring, faint, repetitious, lopsided, painful, mocking, damned, nonchalant, nomadic, sarcastic, liberate, release, absolve, plead
Scene Six Unit	Mood Adjective or Metaphor

Searching	blatant, cower, poetic, gusto, disenchanted, ritualistic, disjointed, ritualistic, gash, arid, gripping, shattered, repetitive
Scene Seven Unit	Mood Adjective or Metaphor
Hopeful	stinging, smooth, athletic, grim, weary, soulful, heavy, restrained, massive, divine, ornate
Scene Eight Unit	Mood Adjective or Metaphor
Little Boys Don't Cry	cautious, enchanted, excitement, overwhelmed, comforting, floating, satisfying,
Scene Nine Unit	Mood Adjective or Metaphor
Death and Dying	special, methodical, comforting, decaying, gripping, homely, limp, remembering, feeling, twisting, begging

**for black boys who
have considered
homicide when the
streets were
too much**

Keith Antar Mason

Character Analysis of Main Characters in

For Black Boys Who Have Considered Homicide When The Streets Were Too Much

Keith Antar Mason's play *For Black Boys Who Have Considered Homicide When The Streets Were Too Much* is the story of six men of African American descent who grow up in St. Louis, Missouri. Information about the major and supporting characters will be taken from the script.

Character Analysis of Brother # 3

- ❖ Brags because he wants to fit in

boy it was hot all of a sudden
and kool-aid wuzn't gonna do
nothin' . . .
but she pulled me
and her waist
jus' jus' touched
my waist . . . (*For Black Boys* 184)

- ❖ Feels that he has to tell the best story and he feels the teen pressure to have sex or to pretend to have had sex

seems like
ole' cody
decided that he might
catch some action
with the fellas
and everybody knew

I wasn't no fool . . . (*For Black Boys* 184)

- ❖ He is physically changing from boy to man

but it was hot
that mornin'
my white tee shirt was gray
with sweat
and my body was changing'
and playin' ball
wasn't the only
thing i felt like
playin' . . . (*For Black Boys* 184)

- ❖ He is nervous about this interaction with Sharlene but he wasn't going to be considered a punk by a girl

. . . and her waist
jus' jus' touched
my waist and
she noticed my tremblin' (*For Black Boys* 185)

- ❖ As he grows older he feels like he is feared by society

i must be mistaken
some monster . . .
i can tell by the way you look
at me . . . (*For Black Boys* 194)

❖ Questions why he is treated so negatively

but seekin' no sympathy

please

jus' remove

the bitterness

remove the anger

jus' keep it away

from me this pain of bein'

dehumanized and programmed . . . (*For Black Boys* 199)

❖ Feels abandoned by his parents and the women in his life

and it hurt me

not to be kissed by you and held by you

and i wanted you to hold me

and i know black boys are not supposed to

want to be

loved . . . (*For Black Boys* 224)

❖ Desires physical intimacy but unable to commit to relationship with others

. . . i am not able to be

can't get it together without you . . .

to be the only thing in my life

that can heal me

see me and feel

the wounds and doubts (*For Black Boys* 225)

Character Analysis of Brother # 8

- ❖ Likes to tease only as boys and men like to tease

you got took out by

a friend's gal (*For Black Boys* 186)

- ❖ Seems worldly and highly intellectual

... jus' dust and hot heat ...

the moanin' moon pale white ...

mozambique drenched of life ...

with big coarse hands that touched ...

mozambique had escaped ...

all life forged them a god

creativity ... (*For Black Boys* 205-8)

- ❖ Supportive

i come from a world

where a word is word

and the only thing that I wanted wuz'

for your success ... (*For Black Boys* 239)

- ❖ He could be a community leader but for some unknown reason, he gave up the dream.

Somehow, higher education changed him.

once upon a time

i wuz' dedicated

to black people and our

culture then

i went to

st. louis u . . . (*For Black Boys* 241)

Character Analysis of Brother # 17

- ❖ Was raised by grandmother or other older female caregiver whom he loved dearly

she taught you to

count by giving

you kisses . . . (*For Black Boys* 214)

- ❖ He is afraid of death

her face is lax

and her tongue

is swollen . . .

she's bleeding again

from the nose

you rush

cold water startled

the flesh spasms

you smell yellow cold

phlegm . . . (*For Black Boys* 215)

- ❖ He is a poet

i am the rain

in the forest

the footprints

left by the hunters

playin' life and death games . . . (*For Black Boys* 227)

Character Analysis of Brother # 19

- ❖ Can be extremely boastful and full of himself

can you see

me

on some dance floor

all red not subdued . . .

i'm sizzlin' hot (*For Black Boys* 191)

- ❖ Feels that everything that has happened to him is not his fault

she out did john wayne

and laid you more than you did her . . .

a killer - - holdin' everything in

and seemingly lovin' you and bein' there (*For Black Boys* 218)

- ❖ Insensitive

and if i made a fool

of you

all the good guys don't win

and ever since

i lucked up on myself (*For Black Boys* 221)

- ❖ Living the American dream, as member of the white collar professional group

. . . i found the job

that promised me

some happiness. . .

and my education

has paid off . . .

my own desk

a systems design engineer (*For Black Boys 246*)

❖ Educated

five years of hell

and then I graduated

guaranteed job . . .

and they knew my expertise (*For Black Boys 247*)

❖ Dresses well

. . . straight laced

shirt and tie

but i could deal with that . . .

jus' to be comfortable (*For Black Boys 247*)

❖ Fearful of the *man* who still wields a lot of power in the community

. . . sirens and lights

and a hundred blows

against my head . . . (*For Black Boys 248*)

❖ Angry

. . . i woke up

late Saturday . . .

in a cell . . .

written off (*For Black Boys 250*)

- ❖ On higher plain of consciousness than other brothers

. . . i'm jus' startin'

to move

the way

the water rolls

the way brazil

curves into the

atlantic

the way l.a.

slides

into the pacific . . . (*For Black Boys* 191)

Character Analysis of Brother # 34

- ❖ Uses words to create great imagery

ernest would step

like fog leans up against

the lakes in forest park

softly he would touch

jus' enuf for them to know

that music ran with him (*For Black Boys* 187)

- ❖ Narcissistic

and he would baptize himself again

and pour himself out

a river

while she would gather herself

and watch for a while him bathin . . . (*For Black Boys* 189)

❖ He is desperate to be loved

i wanted your trick or treat

surprise called love

cuz' you knocked at my door . . .

no disguise you needed my love (*For Black Boys* 222)

❖ Uncertain about his place in society

the threesome

good brothers

the blood

in each

the same . . .

if one wuz' pete

the other wuz repeat

the other

redundant . . .

it hurt

too much

and drinkin'

and watchin'

the ice melt

was a strange habit . . . (*For Black Boys* 242-244)

Ideas of the Play, Identification of the Main Ideas

Mason's play *For Black Boys Who Have Considered Homicide When The Streets Were Too Much* combines storytelling, conjuring, healing ritual, testament and incantation rolled together to form one incredible play. He brings to the stage the horrors, healing and rebirth of six men referred to only by number. When asked why the characters were only referred to by number and whether the numbers were significant, he replied with "What's in a name? A name is just a name." (Mason interview).

To understand fully *For Black Boys* one has to understand what is a ritual or ritualism. This play shares many traits found in studies of ritualism. According to Beverly J. Robinson: "two ritual elements universally common to theatre are dance (movement) and storytelling (oral tradition)" (Robinson 332) Ms. Robinson further states, "ritual can be defined as a recurring pattern of action that represents the desire to begin life anew and the need to find some way of expressing that desire" (Robinson 332). In her essay *The Sense of Self in Ritualizing New Performance Spaces for Survival* she also states that "awareness of communal traditions includes things like language, humor, religion and other forms of folklore that survived the journey from Africa to the Americas and slave labor over the years" (Robinson 332). Based on Robinson's discussion of ritualism and its presence in some theatre productions, it would seem that Mason was right when he said the stories he tells are in his blood (Mason, *From Hip-Hop to Hittite: Part X* 383). The monologues in *For Black Boys* are a combination of storytelling and movement.

In spite of having their language and most of their customs taken away from them, the Africans bought and sold into slavery survived and so did the rituals they held dearly. No

discussion of rituals and ritualism would be complete without discussing the physical spaces where these celebrations took place.

During the Middle Passage the deck of slave ships were synonymous with survival but also served as ritual space. Additionally, as these men and women were moved, bought and sold from one plantation to another plantation the fields they worked in, the pulpit and churches where they prayed and finally the stage became the place for their rituals to grow and be honored (Robinson 334).

From the slave ship, to the plantation, the next logical place for Blacks to perfect their theatre skills was the preacher's pulpit. "The preacher's pulpit became the arena for cultivating African American theatre, because many preachers could not read conventional English this led to the development of oral sermons which were memorized" (Robinson 338). Eventually the proscenium stage became a place of ritual theatre. "Signor Commeali who promoted a vending song and a New Orleans stage helped with the establishment of the African Theatre Company in 1821. Their first performance was of Shakespeares *Richard III*" (Robinson 342). Fast forward, hundreds of years later and Mason states in an early interview that he, too, had performed with regional theatres but preferred the openness of parking lots and school gyms. He felt it was more important to take his performance art to the people (Fusco). African Americans are survivors and they have managed to survive by sharing the stories of their homeland and those who have journeyed to the other side. They keep alive the spirit of those whose lives ended before their time. *For Black Boys* is about surviving, sharing, keeping the spirit alive and breaking boundaries.

Many college productions of *For Black Boys* pair it with Shange's choreopoem *For Colored Girls Who Have Committed Suicide When The Rainbow Is Enuf*. The two choreopoems

work together when you realize that both celebrate the lives of African Americans. Both authors use the art of oral traditions, improvised storytelling, and song and dance. Interestingly both authors want the audience to focus on the words and action. One critic stated, “neither play has an elaborate set or other theatrical effects that would muddle the message” (Young 299). “The spiritual traditions African Americans delight in, come from the Yoruban people and other tribal groups from Africa and incorporate music and movement. These two powerful elements enhance any production because they amplify, contradict or emphasize the spoken word” (Young 300). Although many critics indicate that Shange’s play leaves the audience thinking that Black men are worthless, Mason shows us in *For Black Boys* how dynamic Black men can be.

In an era of self-help books and various kinds of therapy, one cannot help but ask who is responsible for the mental and physical health of young African Americans. How a family interacts has been studied by therapists for many years. Unfortunately, African American families have only recently “become a particular interest to therapists during the 1980s because of the need to study culture specific family patterns. The risk of making generalizations led to stereotypes about African American men in particular as they were compared to European men who were seen as the norm” (Kane 1). Researchers like John C. Gaston reported that as far back as 1987, “the bulk of the time and energy of African Americans is still spent ‘filling other people’s pockets’ . . . Current political and economic trends clearly indicate that the cure for the African American community’s ills must be found internally” (Gaston 1-2). Mason, poet and playwright, a young African American coming into manhood during the 1980s is a great healer. As author of *For Black Boys* Mason offers his own viewpoints on what it means to be a man and an African American and presents us with characters that seem hell-bent on healing themselves.

By the mid 1990s, many negative stereotypes and generalizations were popularized through various media outlets. Historically, Hollywood has assisted in perpetuating these so-called realistic views and stereotypes of Black men in America. As Black Americans moved west joining the ranks of white Americans, so did the myths. Over time, Hollywood created what it claimed to be realistic views of Black Americans through its “hood” films. These films were notorious for portraying young Black men as violent and prone to heinous criminal acts (Pierson 2). Even worse is the number of Black film makers who continue the trend that white film makers began. *Do The Right Thing*, *Boyz N The Hood* and *Menace II Society* are just a few examples of films by Black filmmakers that show stereotypical views of Black men. The images of Black men portrayed in these movies and similar movies, become hard to question and almost impossible to change. Hollywood refuses to take responsibility for their part and as long as Black film makers contribute to the problem, the responsibility for educating the masses is ignored. Not only are these Hollywood stereotypes harmful, to African American communities they have had a lasting impact on the world views and attitudes about African American men.

Studies have shown that the news media has also maintained racial stereotypes. New racism allows racist views to be maintained and supported under the guise of discussions about issues like welfare, drugs and crime. . . . A study of Boston area newspapers indicated 85% of the stories about two predominately Black neighborhoods presented Blacks in a negative light, portraying them primarily as drug addicts, thieves and perpetrators or victims of violence (Pierson 4).

Mason and his script, *For Black Boys*, are unique in light of the stereotypes shown through television and the film industry. An argument could be made that he is just another Black man and we have heard this story before. It is important to remember that Mason does not just tell the

story of one man, but the stories of many men. Each having a unique set of circumstances that have shaped them into the men they are and are yet to become. *For Black Boys* is a story told by a Black man about other Black men in St. Louis, a city known for racism, where it was very normal for a Black man to have some kind of run-in with the police. Mason writes an incredible story in *For Black Boys*. The story seems like it could be a montage of the Black boys he knew as a young man, and the stories shared by older black men. It is exciting to read about these Black men who are not necessarily walking around with a chip on their shoulder and the attitude that the world owes them something because they are Black. It is too difficult to ignore the differences among this group of people. As with other cultures Mason's play attempts to make a contribution to dispel some of the myths about African American men.

Published in 1951, Langston Hughes' poem *Harlem* he asks, "What happens to a dream deferred . . . or does it explode?" (Hughes 1606). These questions could be applied to the characters in *For Black Boys* and its author Keith Antar Mason. The idea of success and the fulfillment of the American Dream is a concept that for African American men seems difficult to attain. "The reason that success or the American Dream is difficult for African American men to attain, may be because success as a term or goal was initially limited to male, white middle class citizens" according to Lawrence Chenoweth and Richard M. Huber (Miller 20). "Success and the American Dream are almost synonymous, even though it seems to exclude minorities (women, recent immigrants and Blacks) except that combined these groups are not the minority at all" (Miller 20). Huber's book *The American Idea of Success* charged: "that the only path to wealth was a laborious development of moral virtues. It stimulated ambition, encouraged self-reliance . . . hard work and deferred gratification" (Miller 20). *For Black Boys* is written by a Black man about Black men who have worked and played hard while they struggle to find success and the

American Dream. For example, the playwright is a college graduate, which for some groups in society is considered a stepping stone in the pursuit of the American Dream. His success as a playwright however, could be debated. Like many revered playwrights, Mason is a college graduate who studied the art of playwrighting. His play has had some limited success having been done mostly on the college level, but has not been produced by a major theatre company. His name does not have the same acceptance or recognition as August Wilson, Richard Wright, Suzi Lori Parks or even Lorraine Hansberry in spite of the number of publications to his credit. Even in *For Black Boys* there is a character (Brother # 19) that seems to be on the path to success and the American Dream. He is college educated, has a well paying job, but is subjected to the ultimate humiliation when accused and arrested of rape. His life will never be the same and his guilt or innocence will always be questioned.

There are several issues raised in *For Black Boys* that might be disturbing to the audience. In the first production, it was determined that a noose be hung center stage by either the set designer or director. Strangely, though in the first production, it is not referred to in any dialogue or is it acted upon by any character. I believe that Mason used the noose as a metaphor which induced a sense of helplessness by Black men. The noose is significant because historically it was tool of harassment and fear especially in southern cities. Members of the Klu Klux Klan and other white supremacist groups used the noose to intimidate Black Americans and to keep them in their place in society, which they believed showed a necessary and much needed sense of subservience to whites. Unfortunately, use of the noose was not limited to southern states and it continues to be used as a tool of harassment and fear. In 2007, at the University of Maryland at College Park, a noose was found outside a campus cultural center that houses the Black Student Union and other offices (Martin).

The finding of a noose on this large diverse college campus which sits in the heart of a predominantly African American county, was seen as a threat by students and faculty members who witnessed its presence and the community as a whole.

Professor Ron Walters who teaches government and politics, states that the noose is still a tool used for oppressing Black people (Martin).

A particularly disturbing monologue is by Brother # 3 who seems to be having an out of body experience. As he lays semi or totally unconscious in the back of an ambulance, he realizes that the ambulance is no longer racing to the hospital. It has slowed down because someone has determined that there is nothing more to be done to save him. Someone has decided that this man is not worth saving and therefore resources are better spent on someone else deemed worth saving. This monologue I hope will have a lasting impact on surviving family members of those men who lost their lives because of senseless violence and inappropriate responses from first responders.

There are also many moments of excitement in *For Black Boys*. One of the funniest moments is Brother # 3 explaining how he lost his virginity or how he dealt with the idea of loosing his virginity.

. . . boy i wanna play house . . .
real low and winkin'
you know how to
play
house don't you . . . (*For Black Boys* 185)

In June 1964, Malcolm X addressed an audience and reminded them that “we must recapture our heritage and our identity if we are ever to liberate ourselves from the bonds of

white supremacy” (Zangrando and Zangrando 142). This protest led by an extremely powerful figure was seen as a threat to White Americans and their view of the roles played by African Americans. Malcolm X was considered a militant by many including law enforcement officials. Law enforcement officials investigated him and other Muslims and Malcolm was believed to be a victim of a conspiracy spearheaded by these same law enforcement agents. The same could be said about Keith Antar Mason who as a young man was told that he did not belong on a college campus. While one segment of society lived for the American Dream other groups were being repressed. Mason quietly says: “our process is about making a commitment to telling our truth just like James Baldwin asked us to do to tell our stories over and over and over . . .” (Mason, *From Hip-Hop to Hittite: Part X* 385). He also says that “as an African American, it is necessary to take back your identity and recapture your heritage” (Mason interview).

The title of this play *For Black Boys Who Have Considered Homicide When The Streets Were Too Much* seems both symbolic and metaphorical. For many African American men, the problems they face are daunting and homicide is one way they deal with their problems. But in the Black community, the problems plaguing Black men are much deeper and for some, the ability to change is impossible because of outside influences. Black on Black crime is a huge problem in America. What forces Black on Black crime continues to be debated especially after another life ends senselessly. The title of Mason’s play is symbolic in that it seems to follow the media’s perpetuation of Black boys having an extremely violent streak. The title is also metaphorical in that for many Black boys, the act of committing homicide (the actual taking of another life) is only a thought.

Finally, it is very possible to believe that Mason has written this play in an attempt to reach the audience in the most primitive manner – emotionally. He attempts to break the mold of

what we as a society have come to accept as the kind of Black men we live with (i.e., those violent, unemployed and sexually starved men) or at least the kind of Black men we want to live with.

Tempos

Unit	Title	Tempo
Unit 1	Unanswered questions	Medium slow
Unit 2	Revelations	Slow to moderately fast to slow
Unit 3	Secrets	Fast to moderately fast to moderately slow
Unit 4	Damaged goods	Moderately slow to moderately fast to moderately slow to moderately fast
Unit 5	Need to be seen as whole	Fast
Unit 6	Searching	Moderately fast
Unit 7	Hopeful	Moderately fast
Unit 8	Little boys don't always have to be brave	Moderately fast to moderately slow to moderately fast
Unit 9	Death and dying	Slow to fast
Unit 10	Unfaithful	Moderately fast to very fast to moderately fast to moderately slow to moderately fast to moderately slow to slow to moderately fast to fast to moderately fast to moderately slow to

		moderately fast to slow
Unit 11	Unexpected	Moderately fast to moderately slow to moderately fast
Unit 12	Threat to society	Fast to faster to fast to faster to fast to moderately fast
Unit 13	Empty promises	Moderately fast to moderately slow to moderate
Unit 14	A History Lesson	Moderately slow to moderately fast to fast to moderately slow to fast to moderately slow to slow

Tone

Live to dream and dream to live.

Summary of Previous Reviews of the play

An unconventional blend of storytelling, music and movement, *For Black Boys Who Have Considered Homicide When The Streets Were Too Much* is a play about living life as Black and male while living in an often cruel and unforgiving society. *For Black Boys* was first produced in 1983 and has often been compared to and paired up with Ntozake Shange's 1975 play *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When The Rainbow Is Enuf*. One of the first reviews of Mason's play that was produced in 1988, indicate ". . . the prevailing tone is bitter instead of buoyant" (Shirley). In 2005 in Atlanta, writer Lamar Wilson thought *For Black Boys* was "a cathartic journey through the fury, fear, and self-loathing shaping the black male experience in America's killing field" (Wilson). In 2006, the play was teamed up with Ntozake Shanges' *For Colored Girls . . .* at Harvard University and directed by Jon Gentry. "Mr. Gentry

believed the play addresses male – female relationships in the Black community. The creative focus on the play’s language requires audience members to keep a keen ear and cue into what is being said as well as what is not said” (Kan). The message from this play is often direct and timeless. Mason attempts to take hold of the audience and captivate them with these stories. In her review published in the Harvard Crimson in 2006, both plays according to Jennifer Y. Kan deal with what it means to be Black in America (Kan). Together the plays look at the intersection of gender and race, as well as common themes of African American experiences such as the innocence of youth and the power of love.

In a blog, reviewing a production of *For Black Boys Who Have Considered Homicide When The Streets Were Too Much* staged at the Studio Theatre at Edna Manley College in Kingston, Jamaica, the writer states “the director provided the community with a production that was soul – stirring, provocative and innovative, theatre that was transformational art.” The reviewer feels that the play is “often repetitive and emotionally straining and the imagery on stage is captivating” (Jamaica Gleaner). Another review of this same production said “feels repetitive and emotionally strained, there’s no denying that the on-stage imagery is captivating and the performances endlessly revealing. The gorgeous lighting, exquisitely sparse set design and apt music are wondrous additions to the experimental ambience created . . . (*Young, Gifted and Black*).

Background information on the Playwright

Keith Antar Mason is a playwright, poet, author, director and visual artist. He is also the artistic director for the Hittite Empire, a performance art group based in Los Angeles, California. Mason was born in St. Louis, Missouri in November 1956 and was raised a Black Catholic in a community of protestants. He is a graduate of Webster University with a double degree in

Language and Literature and Political Science with concentrations in creative writing and public administration commissions. When he was seventeen years old and still a high school student visiting a college campus, he was attacked by a white cop who beat him down in the quad, physically assaulting him and told him “n*ggers don’t belong on campus” (Revolutionary Worker #875). Mason states that he grew up at a time when being a young Black man meant you were just automatically a suspect. It is this belief that he feels should inspire a people to rise up and struggle against police brutality (Revolutionary Worker #875). He moved to Los Angeles in 1985 and began performing his work there in 1987. In an interview with Coco Fusco, Mason indicated that he did regional theatre but found it less than satisfactory and that is why he prefers performance art (Fusco). As a visual artist, Mason attempts to create work as a response to graphic violence and discrimination in many American cities and urban areas.

Works published include:

- ❖ *New Wine and Black Men’s Feet*
- ❖ *Man in the Belly of a Slaveship*
- ❖ *49 Blues Songs for a Jealous Vampire*
- ❖ *Underseige Stories*
- ❖ *Mask Men and the Blue Drum Incident*
- ❖ *Keep It Clean Project, Olympic High School*
- ❖ *Ring Cycle Remix*
- ❖ *Anatomy of Deep Blue*
- ❖ *lovers on ground zero*
- ❖ *friday night*
- ❖ *a walk to the pacific*

- ❖ *Where do I want my theatre performed?*
- ❖ *The Harsh Reality of Toys*
- ❖ *Comparative Pain and the Safe Word*
- ❖ *Revisionist Examination*
- ❖ *From Hip-Hop to Hittite: Part X*

Mason's socio – political views

- ❖ In an interview with Adda Birnir on January 6, 2010, Mason stated that segregation and racial tyranny bred in him a deep abiding anger towards white America (Birnir)
- ❖ Mason collaborates with various community groups to discuss and explore the experiences of young African American men and men of the African Diaspora
- ❖ Rather than performing before audiences that sit and watch silently, Mason prefers to perform in the streets, parking lots, church basements and schoolyard playgrounds
- ❖ “As Black men, we add a good deal of joy, wealth and value to the world. But most of the time we have to seek (that affirmation) out for ourselves” (Arkatov).

Visual Art productions

- ❖ “The Osiris Show – covered a wide range of abstract, spiritual and political themes. Housed at the 18th Street Arts Complex in Santa Monica, the “Osiris” exhibit was described as the moment of information, truth, the finding of a ‘Golden Tomb’ in one’s journey in life without bias, wish or desire . . .” (The Artists of Refuse and Resist Network)

Awards Include

- ❖ The Brody Arts Fellowship in the Performing Arts
- ❖ The Midwest Black Playwrights Award

Choosing *For Black Boys* was almost a no brainer as I scoured plays both well known and unknown. The one disappointment I have in choosing this play is that there are no earlier or later published versions available for comparison. Most of the libraries in the greater Washington, DC area including the local colleges had very few offerings of Mason's work and there was almost nothing that could help me with my research at Central Washington University including the anthology where I originally found the play. Mason in one our exchanges stated that his work has been ripped off and he was reluctant to republish this particular piece. One of his other pieces that I discovered includes an essay entitled *From Hip-Hop to Hittite: Part X*, included in an anthology called *Black Theatre: Ritual Performance in the African Diaspora*. Interestingly the title of this essay is published in capital letters. I debated whether it was his choice or a publishing choice especially since his play *For Black Boys* is published in small letters.

The opening paragraph of *From Hip-Hop to Hittite: Part X* begins with Mason stating "I cannot write this essay about the Hittite process unless I confess that our stories are in our flesh in our genetic memories in our ancestral callings and responses . . . an angry son who wants more than what his father settled for in his lifetime" . . . (Mason, *From Hip-Hop to Hittite: Part X* 382). In the introduction to *For Black Boys* . . . Mason tells the reader that his father gave him a baseball glove when he told him that he wanted to be a dancer (Mason, *For Black Boys* 177). As if somehow a career in sports is the African American man's salvation and road to the American dream. In the years that have passed between the two projects it is obvious that becoming a writer has had a lasting effect on him and that writing is more satisfying than playing ball could have been. Close observations show us that Mason has written both pieces without regard to punctuation or capitalization except that in *From Hip-Hop* . . . there are a few occasions

where he uses capitalization as if to give those words and phrases more emphasis especially since it is not a performance piece. In one paragraph, he states, “. . . murdered in the Rock House Wars . . . and . . . War on Drugs in Amerika” . . . (*From Hip-Hop* . . . 382). Another interesting issue regarding these two works is that they both address issues African American men face almost daily. While reading *From Hip-Hop* . . . there are similarities in Mason’s explanations for his writing style and its evolution. His work could be compared to that of Wole Soyinka. Reading these two authors’ work, one can see that they write because they believe that the theatre experience is ritualistic. Mason says his stories come from “our bones, from our blood” (*From Hip-Hop* . . . 383) and Soyinka offers that African theatre came about because man was trying to explain his existence in the universe. One thing is for sure, Mason writes to offer the world alternative views of African American men.

List of Learning Goals

Theatre performance is a collaborative, creative and exploratory process bringing together the playwrights’ words, the directors’ viewpoints, the skills and imagination of the cast and crew and the open – mindedness of the audience. By participating in this production of *For Black Boys Who Have Considered Homicide When The Streets Were Too Much* it is my hope that as the director I am able to share with my cast and crew my fascination for this script and that they will learn new skills for problem solving, exploring their own creativeness and expand their existing skills as performers and crew members. As we explore this script and embark on this journey, I hope that the cast and crew will share their experiences as students, actors and members of a society that does not always treat them as valuable members of that society. I also hope they will learn and be willing to share their knowledge about stereotypical viewpoints regarding African American males in general and those that have been directed at them

personally. I believe that theatre can be a valuable tool for students, actors, playwrights, directors and audience members. It is my plan to use *For Black Boys Who Have Considered Homicide When The Streets Were Too Much* in a way to facilitate dialogue between various members of the community regarding diversity, multi-culturalism, individuality, stereotypes, and the dangers of assimilation. I further hope to help them

1. Develop a greater appreciation and understanding of poetry and the art of story telling through performance.
2. Work with actors to create an ensemble production using dynamic stage pictures, movement and music to enhance the story.
3. Gain a deeper understanding of stylized movement on stage and how it can be an effective theatrical tool.
4. Learn to show respect for all humans and treat them as individuals.
5. Help actors learn that life is art and that good art can and should educate, entertain and enlighten.
6. Discuss the role that media plays in portraying negative stereotypes of Black men and who is responsible for helping deter these negative stereotypes.
7. To my help performers become fearless, positive thinkers, and to reflect on what is holding them back as performers.

Production Journal

January 15, 2011

The task of having to re-write section one, find a co-producer or sponsor, rehearsal and performance space has been daunting. I have looked at two very different spaces. Blank Space SE is located in southeast Washington, DC. It is very accessible via DC's metro system (public transportation system), but the space measures a mere seven hundred square feet and it is very oddly shaped. If I were to use this space, there would be many additional cost including renting a light control system as well as individual lighting fixtures. I would also have to rent chairs at \$1.00 per chair. It also has a very small room that would have to double as the green room and dressing room. This room is too small, there is not enough room for six adult men and there was not enough room for more than two chairs and perhaps a mirror. Another challenge is the single restroom, which would have to be shared by cast members and audience. Finally, the biggest challenge is the street noise. Blank Space SE is located on a very busy road with lots of vehicular and pedestrian traffic.

The second space is a black box theatre and home to Spooky Action Theatre Company, which is housed in the basement of the Universalist National Memorial Church in NW Washington, DC. It is a flexible space that could hold approximately 75 people. This space is located on 16th Street NW and it is not too far from the DuPont Circle Metro stop, U Street – Cardozo Metro stop and is on a major bus route. In addition to the performance space, there is a rehearsal room, which will double as green room and dressing room, which is just a few feet down the hall. This space is incredible. It offers me almost everything I could want. I will not have to rent chairs, a light control panel or lighting fixtures and Spooky Action's lighting tech,

will teach me how to use the software program to operate the lighting instruments. This program should make our first tech rehearsal very easy.

I love the idea of not having far to move when rehearsals are over and we begin the performance part of this project. What will be interesting is the size difference between the rehearsal room and theatre space. Although the cast will have to share the restroom with the audience, there are separate facilities for men and women. There are also multiple stalls in the men's restroom. I like this space because it offers me the most for the budget I am working with. In the event any actors have to rely on public transportation, Spooky Action is an easy commute. There is limited parking on the street, because the church is in a residential area. There is some parking on both 16th Street NW and neighboring streets. The exception is the east side of the street, which allows parking after 6:30 pm and on the weekends. I need to send Richard a rehearsal and production calendar to see if the space is available. It seems like there is another company wanting to use the space at the same time as my show. If I cannot get this place, I will either look at other spaces or settle for Blank Space. I don not want to settle for Blank Space. It will cost in many more ways.

March 1

I got the space at Spooky Action and the dates I was looking for. Yeay!! I spend a few minutes getting my audition notices and announcements together to get email. I did get the job in Annapolis directing the 8th grade musical (*Honk!*). Too bad I did not grab a copy of the *Honk!* script from Stone Ridge. I hate not being in control. Waiting on the scripts is tiring and frustrating to me. I have re-read *For Black Boys* looking at music notes, sound cues and props. I am trying to keep the expenses to a minimum. I think I have narrowed the props list down to the

essential. I also consider whether we need an assistant stage manager and put a call into the Actors' Center and Brian Dragonuk's site without any takers unless there was money involved.

I sent emails off to Gonzaga High School, DeMatha High School and Georgetown Prep High School, The Actors' Center Hotline, The Galvanize Group, Brian Dragonuk's list and a few personal emails to invite actors to audition. While the Actors' Center is a for fee service membership, the DC Galvanize site and Brian Dragonuk's site are free to anyone who subscribes to them.

March 9

I held auditions or so I thought. The weekend is not over yet. No one showed up Friday night and after sitting in an old, cold and smelly rehearsal room, no one showed up today. I am exhausted. Not having any actors show up was really disappointing and disheartening especially since I had phone calls from parents wondering if their fourteen, sixteen and seventeen year old sons could audition. Although I do not like to think of myself as a censor, there is quite a bit of profanity in this script and the subject matter is better suited for an older actor as well as an older audience in my opinion. I also emailed a few actors that I knew were not members of Actors Equity Association (AEA) but they are all busy with other projects. One thing for sure, the business is not like it was when I was exploring life as an actor. Although this industry is still female heavy, when I was entering the business back in the late 1980s, there were quite a few men. They were all-eager to work and rarely turned down an audition. All of those men are now union and many of them have moved out of the DC area or they are not acting any more. There seems to be few people interested in stage work. I now have a week to stress over what to do about this project, more time to devote to *Honk!* And time to look for work.

March 21

Richard, my contact at Spooky Action Theatre emailed some photographs and resumes of some male actors that he saw at League of Washington Theatre Auditions recently. I invite several of them to come and audition on Friday night.

March 23

I put my stage manager to work calling a few more actors, still need one more brother to fill out the cast and maybe even get an understudy out of this. Aye-Aye-Aye! This process is incredibly stressful. I wonder how my classmates get through this process while teaching. There is one thing that is different for us. I doubt if any of them had the casting issues that I did. I also do not think I would be directing this piece unless I was in an urban school nor had a very progressive principal and head of school. The subject matter is mature, not to mention the profanity. I love my choice, but understanding and analyzing poetry is not my strength and that is why this project was such a challenge.

March 25

I went back through my contacts to email a few of the people that I had cast in *A Raisin in the Sun* at Prince George's Community College a year ago. I guess this was what I needed to do. Two of them are very interested in auditioning. I am exhausted today because I was in Annapolis with the eighth graders. I left home early to get my finger printing done, I then arrived at the school to get some painting and other prop work complete. If the scripts had come in early, I might have considered changing my thesis project in spite of all the work done already on *For Black Boys Who Have Considered Homicide When The Streets Were Too Much*. I left Annapolis a little later than I hoped, but the traffic Gods were looking out for me and I made it into DC in an hour and even found a legal parking space in front of the church on 16th Street, for my rehearsal. I am concerned that I might not find the sixth male actor and will have to put off this

project. I do not want to start all over. There has to be a non-union actor of color out there who wants to work on stage. I also hope that I get a job soon.

I had five men audition and of course, I will cast all of them (at this point I cannot be too choosy). Two of them I know from Prince George's Community College. The two actors who were most impressive were the actors Richard had seen at Leagues. Both seem very comfortable using their full bodies as instruments. Now to just get the last character cast.

March 26

I am exhausted, my hips and feet are killing me. The kids at St. Anne's are not really dancers and I am working really hard to keep the choreography simple but challenging for the few who seem really committed to the project. No rehearsal or auditions tonight but I will get together with the cast to do a read-thru on Sunday. I am still missing the last brother.

March 27

What was I thinking? My legs are bothering me and then I help Richard get set up for a children's performance of *Tempest* before my read-thru. He evidently did not get my email that we would need to use the rehearsal hall today. I have four of the five actors because one of the actors is in another show. I finally had the chance to hear the different voices. I am happy with my casting choices. We put out additional feelers for one or two additional actors, who I will see on Monday.

March 28

I had two additional actors show up to audition for this project. I cast one of the actors as Brother #17. He is significantly older than the other guys but I am sure it will work. I would have liked to have had two older guys but just one will work as well. The other actor who showed up to audition is much older than all of us. He has to look at his schedule to see if he can join us as

an understudy. Chuck the oldest man is more interested in directing not being an understudy. We had a long conversation and he has had some interesting experiences. I do not think we will be hearing from him.

March 29

OK what was I thinking about when I agreed to substitute today? Chuck did not call or show up, for rehearsal but I expected that. Monday was productive, I have a cast – six actors who all seem very eager to get started. We finished the read-thru with the recent addition and even blocked about nine pages. I will not have to worry about microphones because these guys have no problem filling the space with their voices. I will however, have to work on diction for a couple of them. They are products of their environment and speaking clearly is not something they are used to doing. It almost seems like they are in competition to see who can be the loudest, of course since the rehearsal space is in the basement of the church it is like being in an echo chamber. I spent Monday afternoon putting some music choices together, now I have to remember to take the boom box. Two of my actors have strong dance training and I have decided to have them use their dance skills to help choreograph the show. My former student is not available because she has been cast in the musical at her school and they are in rehearsals. Not only will they (Jon and Bakaari) be helping me but it will be something they as young actors will be able to put on their resume.

I need to get started on the works cited and consulted section, finish proof reading and revising section two. I also need to follow-up with Scott to be sure he has my dates on the calendar. I will also start photographing and videoing rehearsals, as soon as possible. I need to finish the poster and postcards, get them reproduced, and get the release and check to the playwright. I am still working on some detailing for the postcards and flyer because I cannot get

a clear idea of what images to use or style of print. You should see what I have done thus far. Everything looks amateurish, I never said I was a visual artist and it shows.

No rest for the weary, I am in Annapolis again on Friday and Saturday, plus rehearsal in the evenings in DC. I have to teach additional water aerobics class at the pool for my colleague.

April 3

Andre set off the alarm at the church. I get a panic telephone call from Richard who sounded a little upset that I was not at the Church yet. I did not get away from Annapolis until late. My tech person for *Honk!*, wanted to do a rough focus that I totally forgot about. I managed to get to the church around 3 pm in the middle of a hailstorm. Fortunately, I found a parking place only a block away. I got there just as the cast was finishing their warm-ups. Missing was the last actor I cast Lorenzo – Brother #17. He had missed the previous rehearsal too. He decided he was too sick to continue with us and dropped out. I should have known this was going to happen. Andre thinks he dropped out after he was told that he would not be able to wear his African garb. Part of me is very glad he dropped out, because he is a very high maintenance kind of actor. The other part of me is very disappointed because that means I now have to re-cast that character or decide whether the producer/stage manager will fill in. That also means I have to either find a light-board/sound person or do it myself. After Saturdays' rehearsal, I decide to use a few chairs and a garbage can to help create some levels when all the actors are on stage, rather than watch some of the actors struggle as they try to get off the floor. I have several actors who are close to six feet tall and Hodge is all about creating levels, so I decide to add chairs which can be used in various positions. Overall, I am impressed with the work the cast is doing. They are getting the stories and becoming better storytellers. Jon who plays Brother #5 is so willing and eager to try anything. I have to continue to remind Wes and D'Metrius about the nervous

pacing and the gestures that I see as nervous ticks as well a means to upstaging themselves. Wes says he is aware of it but old habits are hard to break and he has never had anyone tell him or explain what upstaging means. We are very new to the idea of what it means to be an actor. I was especially careful to cast him in another role (from the role he played in the reading at Prince George's Community College). He claims that the previous director was not as picky and particular about what or how he delivered his lines. As I explained my role to him as director and how I hoped we would work as collaborators. D'Metrius is a great student in that he really listens and tries to make corrections and suggestions well. We do need to work on his diction issues. He is a product of his environment – Prince George's County Public Schools. I also seem to recall him telling us that his family was interspersed throughout the southern parts of the United States. D'Metrius has to work on finding the levels in his monologues. He has a very powerful voice but it often comes across as anger.

My producer/stage manager will be joining the cast as Brother #17. I have exhausted all resources and unless I want to cast a fourteen year student who worked with me on *Raisin* . . . which I do not, I will have to consider eliminating a character or putting off my project.

I must think I am superwoman because I spend a lovely afternoon on my deck working on props for *Honk!* I also spent several hours with my replacement actor/stage manager/producer work on his monologues. I need to finish section two to get it off to Tina. Sometimes, I ask why I am doing this to myself. There are so many other things; I could be doing with my time. I need to prove to myself that I can finish this program even if it means being in debt and unemployed. I started two other graduate programs but I will finish this one regardless of what it takes.

I received an email from Elise saying she was going to be coming to see my show. I had hoped that Tina and Jerry were coming especially since Scott made such a fuss about Tina

needing to come see the show and being the chair of my thesis committee. It will be great to see Elise. I seem to remember her telling us in a class that she grew up in the DC area. I hope coming into town will bring back some wonderful memories.

I have my work cut out. I am a list person and I made a list of all the things left to do ground plans, costume and light plots, PR stuff, contract off to playwright, coordinate time for choreographer to come in to teach cast some step routine and yes, finding another actor. The very young Wes called to say he was thinking about dropping out because of some conflicts. I asked him to get back to me in a day or so after he figures things out. I am back to brow beating a friend who owes me big time. He is always calling me to cry about not being able to find acting work and now when I need him he is reluctant to commit. His house was recently burglarized, and he is a little paranoid about leaving home for too long, but I really need him or I will definitely have to cut a character. Andre the stage manager and producer will call him in a few days to see if he is available.

I am proud of my actors and myself. Most of the project is blocked, it will need some tweaking as I get everyone on stage but overall it is sounding good and not looking bad. The stories are coming along nicely. I am afraid to start costume shopping in case another actor drops out. I do however; need to get my music choices narrowed.

April 5

I am not sure how I am surviving. The commute to Annapolis is physically draining and I forgot what it feels like to work with middle schoolers. I am getting lots of resistance from the students and the music director. Very few of the students or the music director, are committed to this project and the music director seems very overwhelmed being a new teacher at the school. On the other hand, things went well at rehearsal tonight. We were dissecting one of the

monologues about masturbation and what the “she” had walked off with. When we were finished, I felt as if I had one of many sex talks with my sons. I can only imagine what parents go through when having honest dialogue about sexual relationships with their children regardless of whether they are young or old. As we worked through some of the other monologues, there were moments when we all got silly. I have decided that we will be opening the show with a Temptations song – *My Girl*. The cast will also dance to *Rapper’s Delight* by the Sugar Hill Gang, later in the show. *Rapper’s Delight* is an old rap song that was played often in the clubs back in the 1980s. I used to love dancing to it and it seems that my mostly young cast likes it too. I need to go shopping for a vinyl album and CD by Nina Simone, RUN-DMC and Pharoah Sanders, good luck with that.

I have so much left to do, include job hunting. I think I am going to loose my mind.

April 7

The week is over and I am not sure how I survived. Tuesday was a long day with a visit to Brooklyn Friends School. I tried to work on section two on the train but it was the bumpiest ride I have taken in a long time. Looking back at rehearsal on Monday, I feel like we got a lot accomplished. I had a long conversation with Baakari who plays Brother #19. One of his monologues talks about Pharoah and we could not decide if it were a biblical reference, historical reference or referencing Pharoah Sanders a jazz musician. I emailed Keith (the playwright) who says it is all three. Keith and I are supposed to speak this weekend. I hope to get other questions answered. On Wednesday, I saw some incredible growth especially with Jon who worked himself into a tearful moment as we worked through one of the most powerful monologues in the play. We talked about how it felt to be dumped by a lover and the seven stages of grief that were proposed by Elizabeth Kübler Ross. Jonathan also did some nice work with his monologue. Just

need to get him to open up more to the audience. I am not sure why he is unwilling to work the diagonals. I know that he is a young actor and probably has not worked like this before (he had difficulties playing the diagonals during rehearsals for *A Raisin in the Sun*). I purposely moved the chair to the furthest corners of the rehearsal room and for whatever reason he ignores the chair.

I got the call from Wes that I was expecting and he is dropping out. I will consider splitting his monologues or cutting them entirely if my friend cannot join us.

I finally had a chance to get on-line after a few days away from the computer. I received a frightening email from Tina about missing sections one and two. I know I had sent the revised section one but somehow she did not receive it. More work to do with section two. I keep having issues with what I think I have saved on the memory stick and what was transmitted to my advisor. I am also having issues as I re-open the memory stick and the changes I had made do not appear. I have spent so much time on revisions I think I will go crazy. I will be operating now straight from the computer. Finally off to bed.

April 13

Tech week for *Honk!* which means more late nights, gave my adult cast the week off, so they can concentrate on their lines, take care of the things they need to take care of and so that I can concentrate on *Honk!* and another job interview – this time at a school near Philadelphia. I had expected to speak with Keith over the weekend but there was some miscommunication. He has asked that I email the questions to him and I hope he clarifies some things for us.

I sent section one and two to Tina and received lots of comments back and need to fix them. I realized I was missing some things; no, I was actually missing many things. I sent out a SOS to my classmates, because I was not sure about the section called initial action/conflict

analysis. I still have much work to do and so little time to get it finished. I feel like I will be calling in lots of favors.

April 19

I have several issues to deal with today, including a few medical problems. I drove like crazy from Philadelphia after a long day interviewing for a position at the Episcopal Academy. Glad that our rehearsal went well, I had two new actors come in to read for Brother 8. One of them is a long-term friend who always calls to complain about not finding any acting work. The other was an actor I had worked with on *A Raisin in the Sun*. There is one long monologue that I did not want to cut and Obinna read it very well. He has some conflicts with finals coming up (he is also a college student). He will look over his schedule to see if he can commit. My friend is a little upset that I was going to split the character but the reality is he was really not good reading the longer monologue and with so little time to prepare him I felt it would be easier to double cast Brother #8. What have I gotten myself into by casting Joe? He is more high maintenance than Lorenzo or maybe it is just a different kind of maintenance.

April 20

I received a call from Obinna, who has finals during tech week and really cannot make the commitment. What do I do about the longer monologue? I think Joe will be capable of doing the shorter monologues assigned to Brother #8 but not Mozambique. He is both relieved and pissed off, but as the director I had to make a choice about how much more stress to put myself through.

April 21

I decide to let D'Metrius, Andre and Jonathan read the Mozambique piece. Andre and D'Metrius have the physical look to pull off the piece but not the vocal quality I am looking for.

Jonathan on the other hand is smaller but has much better vocal quality and can do the piece with a dialect. We decide he will take on yet another long monologue. I still have my doubts about whether I should just cut this monologue but hope that I will have the time to help Jonathan get through it and really connect with it.

April 22

I ran as much of the show as we could with missing cast members. Videotaped bits and pieces so that I could figure out what music goes with which monologue. Baakari watched some Temptation videos to pick up their dance steps and modify them for our group. It was funny to watch Andre and D'Metrius attempt the steps. D'Metrius struggles slightly. I think because he does not think of himself as a dancer. Andre looks like one of those toys with the round bottoms that sort of roll all over the place. He has always been self-conscious about his ability to dance. I have always said to him what difference does it make, because he is unlikely to see any of those people at the club in a different environment. It is funny as he struggles with the sequence. I picked them up quickly so that I could work with him at home. We have been big followers of *Dancing With The Stars* and he always comments about the large footballers that try to make it to the finals on the show. If I could get him to pick up his feet and bend his knees, he would not look so bad.

April 23

We went shopping for missing music this morning. We spent over fifty dollars, and managed to find some RUN DMC, Nina Simone, and Pharoah Sanders and the sound track for *O' Brother Where Are Thou?* O' Brother has a chain gang chant that works really well with one of the monologues. We got to rehearsal early, Baakari was the first to arrive and we listened to Pharoah Sanders to see if it works with one of his monologues. Everyone else sort of trickled in.

Joe was late and his work was disappointing. After all I have been through, I am faced with the decision of cutting Brother # 8, and I know that if this was a middle or upper school project I would have to justify my decision to cut an actor to my head of school. I somehow always feel like I have to give the underdog the benefit and since Joe was the last addition to the cast I am very reluctant to cut him. He will take a lot of work to catch up to the ensemble. Jon called to remind us that he was still out of town. Two weeks and counting, I will be glad when this is over but will miss the cast. Baakari taught Jonathan the Temptations choreography. He picked up the steps quickly, which was great. Watching them all move together and then into the first moments of the play was an incredible moment. Seeing it come together is like WOW, I do know what I am doing. I like this first picture. We manage to get to the piece that starts act two. Joe arrived late and we take a break to pull him into the choreography. His knee is giving him problems with the choreography; I make the decision to make him the old man in the group who tries hard to dance but cannot keep up with the younger cast members. It is funny watching both Joe and Andre try to move like the young men.

April 24

I spent today importing music purchased yesterday into I-tunes so that I can put them onto CDs and later onto my IPod for the show. The stage manager called the cast to let them know I need information for the biographies for the playbill. I hope to have that information as soon as possible. I need to get to KINKO's to make postcards this week. I want the information on the back to be landscaped while the front of it is portrait so sending them to Andre to print at work will not work. I want to get them in the mail to all the local casting directors/theatres. I hope someone from the theatres will come to see the show, but I know they are overwhelmed with the number of requests from actors who want them to come see their show. My thought is

that if I can help the cast get acting work that would be great and who knows, I may even get work as a director. I would love to get some flyers off to a few more high schools in the area but it would be so much easier and cheaper to send them electronically. It is 80 degrees outside, too nice to be sitting inside on the computer so I am going to sit on the deck and do more work.

April 28

I am sitting on set for *Game Change* an HBO movie. I worked yesterday and thought I would have to miss rehearsal but I was just late. We ran some problem areas and new choreography for the *Slush Funds* piece, which looks great and is really what I wanted. Jon used his time off to come up with the choreography for *Slush Funds*. It works perfectly with my vision. The plan is to have the cast come in from opposite corners onstage and cross each other, and then they will split into two groups. We take at the performance space and realize that having them enter from the corners is not going to look as effective because the space is rectangular rather than square and the risers that the steps sit on, block a good portion of the downstage left corner. Monday's rehearsal went well in spite of not having all the music because I left it at home in another bag. I need to get a little better organized so that I am not forgetting important things that I need for rehearsals. It has been too hot to leave stuff in the car to melt and CDs have been taken when my car was broken into. I will spend as much time on Friday getting the music organized and onto my IPOD so that I do not have use a bunch of CDs and the boom box. While I was sitting on set, I did a rough music cue plot so that organizing the music is easier. I also did a rough light cue plot, so that I can transfer it to the script. We start tech week on Saturday. It is so hard to believe that this project is almost over. I am still tweaking the opening number and some of the other group pieces. I have not been able to get them to work these sections as a single voice. I plan to share more Viewpoints exercises with them in the next

day or too. Although my cast was not completely eager to learn about Viewpoints, it was amazing to see them use some of the Viewpoints concepts on certain pieces. I have a bunch of work left including shopping for costumes, building the noose and finishing the playbill. I have not seen any comments from Tina and I guess that they will come some time next week. I need to send Tina the script with the verbs and beats. Finally found out what initial action/conflict analysis is or at least what everyone else thinks it is. As if I needed anything else on my plate, I got a call from Christine about a possible job in Hamilton, Massachusetts. The problem with this position would be the need to reschedule my orals because the job would run June 23 through July 29 and tentatively having a job at National Presbyterian School teaching drama this summer. I also need to send Tina an email saying that I would like to Skype my orals because I really cannot afford to fly out to Ellensburg and pay for the credits. My friend Leris gave the poster a more sophisticated look – added some color and repositioned some things. After I looked it them harder and noticed that, she transposed the name of the church. I do not have money to do color copies, so I just emailed the new postcard to people I had not previously sent a notice about the project to. I need to call Eddie to see if he can come Wednesday to videotape the dress rehearsal and then on Sunday the final performance. I have taped a couple of the rehearsals but realized that the cable I have is for my old Mac computer when I was at Stone Ridge and I am missing an editing DVD. I need to take more photographs, so tonight I will try to take them while watching and listening to what is going on. Urrgh so much still to do.

April 30

I survived our first tech rehearsal. It was incredibly easy compared to other technical rehearsals. Spooky Action Theatre has a lighting technician. Their lights are operated via a software program on their computer. The lighting instruments include six LED Fresnels and two

Source 4s. We only had to do a slight refocus of the lights to cover more space on stage. After the tech programmed the lights, it was time for me to learn how to run things. Richard asked about the music, I had planned to use an Ipod but it was at home still synchronizing. I am glad that I had everything on CD. We hooked up a monitor to the computer and ran the music through Windows Media Player. As far as the load in there is something to be said about keeping it simple. I have a minimalistic set, so other than a few chairs from the rehearsal room, a garbage can and a little trash scattered about it took almost no time. I do think there needs to be a few more pieces scattered around and I will probably add a few more bottles and bags. While the tech was putting in the light cues, the cast ran lines for act one. Saturday was the first time we had everyone present. I was glad to see D'Metrius feeling better, especially since he had an asthma attack Friday night and went to the ER. Evidently, he had not been using his inhaler and with the high pollen count over the last few days, he was suffering in a major way. After running and finishing act one, we addressed a few problem areas. Baakari and Joe had not been present one day when we blocked a section with Brother # 5 talking about "Numbers" (Mason 198). The cast is still unsure of the lines in this section and this poses a problem with opening night approaching. We worked the lines with the cast sitting in a circle then got them up on their feet to do some blocking and exploring how we can really make this section pop with excitement and energy. As the end of our time in the space was approaching, we all felt a surge of energy and almost wanted to go on a little while longer, but I wanted to be respectful of everyone's health and time, and knowing that this upcoming week would be a long one.

This is the second night of tech. I tied the noose last night and planned to hang it today. It was strange tying it especially since I have been in the Navy. Tying knots was something we did in basic training as well as shipboard. I never served on a ship and only occasionally tied knots

when doing a macramé project. Tying a noose should have been simple but it was not that easy and was rather emotional. I hung the noose before the cast arrived. When Baakari and Joe arrived, I asked their opinion as to placement and height. They both thought it maybe needed to be a little lower and perhaps more center over the stage. I noticed that there was a small hole in the ceiling grid that was more center and decide that is a better location. I need to bring in some kind of hardware for the noose. I do not have time to go to Home Depot so I will see what I have at home that could work. After hanging the noose Joe and Baakari leave the space to go into the rehearsal room to warm-up. When Baakari returned, he stated that there was a strange energy in the room. Slowly the other cast members enter and we talked about the hanging noose that was now a part of the set.

As I watch this rehearsal, I wish that I had introduced Viewpoints to the cast earlier. I explained the Viewpoints concepts as including things like repetition, topography, shape, architecture, tempo, duration, spatial relationships, time, emotion, movement and the story. It is ensemble driven and there are moments when they seem very aware of each other on stage and other moments when the single actor mode takes over. There are two specific scenes where I really wish I had had more time to work with the cast and had the chance to introduce the Viewpoints concepts earlier. We called the first scene “Numbers” and the second one we call “Open Your Eyes.” “Numbers” is about each character calling each other “Nigga.” There are moments when the cast is talking as an ensemble but they are having a difficult time speaking as one voice. The other piece was presenting issues because it deals with rape, mutilation and a hanging. After looking at the words and deciphering the playwrights meaning we figured out that the best way to perform this section is to create a group of white men who commit this heinous crime and brutally attack a young Black woman. As we talk as a group about what we know of

lynching in America we decide that the this attack takes place in an isolated section of woods that has been cleared and was repeatedly used for this kind of activity. It is a scary kind of woods with sounds that creep you out. The men have had their moonshine to drink. They know each other very well and they are not afraid of being discovered by others. They see nothing wrong with what they are doing. By the end of rehearsal we like where the pieces are going. We know that before every rehearsal and performance that we need to incorporate bits of work from these scenes into our warm-up. I still need to cut some time off the total running time and I think we can do this if we pick up the entrances and exits and some of the pacing within a few monologues.

I brought costumes in for fittings. I liked the look of almost everything, two issues however; the jacket I purchased for Jonathan is too small (the arms are short) and of course like many young people who do not like some item of clothing he tried the jacket on with all his clothes on underneath it. The other issue was a shirt that I purchased for Baakari that was also too small (the sleeves were too short). I need to make a few alterations for the vests that I purchased for Baakari and Jon. I will throw everything that I have that is washable into the laundry and iron them by Wednesday.

It is 10:20 pm and will be around 11 pm when we get home. Both of us are exhausted. Good thing I can sleep late tomorrow.

May 3

I woke up at 3:30 am this morning, thinking about all the things still to do, as well as work already done and was unable to return to sleep because my mind was racing with things yet to do. I got the noose up and Baakari was the first to notice it and said he felt some new and different energy. I adjusted the noose and will continue to work out the perfect placement over

the next few days. Overall, it looks good, but I do wish my research talked about the kind of rope that was used for tying a noose. My noose looks very new and although I am satisfied with it, I think it reminds of all us that racism is still alive in America. I also like the way the trash can looks, just slightly banged up. I do not think things have to be so broken up or used looking because they play takes place in what the playwright says is the *hood*. Although I purchased it in early March, it still looks new. I go back and forth between pulling out an old beat up rubber trashcan that would not be able to support anyone and keeping the new slightly shiny one. The aluminum trash can wins. The second night of tech went well; we started with a speed-through of the lines. The second act is much shorter than the first act so the actual running of the second act allowed us time to work two problem areas. Both needed an infusion of energy and if we can keep it up it will be an incredible experience for the audience. I hope to find some mason jars that can be used as glasses for one of the monologues. If I cannot find them, I will use some plastic cups. I love the lighting software at Spooky Action. I thought I was going to have some problems hooking things up or opening the program but it was a simple task.

Day 3 of tech and after hitting two different thrift stores, I decide the Mason jars are not that important. I do have one Mason jar so it will work and we will use plastic cups. I find another jacket and shirt (they are a little more than I wanted to spend but I need them). I do not think about another light colored shirt until much later in the day and will run out Wednesday to see what I can find.

We start rehearsal with a vocal and physical warm-up and run "Numbers" and "Open Your Eyes." The cast members are really beginning to have fun with "Open Your Eyes", almost too much fun and it is looking great. We discuss the use of the word *Nigga* which is part of the

“Numbers” scene and talk about whether it is ok to use *Nigga*, by whom, why, when and how it is used today and how it has been used throughout history.

We manage to knock another ten minutes off the running time. I decide to have a fifteen-minute intermission so that we can offer the audience an opportunity to purchase refreshments and support the upcoming Susan B. Komen Breast Cancer walk. I figure that if needed I can cut a few minutes off the intermission.

Baakari asks if the cast has to exit or enter through the theatre doors because they squeak really badly. I write a note to myself to bring in some WD40. The floor remains unpainted and mismatched. It actually looks like it might be the deck of an alley including some old tapelines, which gives the impression of a faded basketball court. I would almost prefer that Richard not paint the deck but I know he has a show that comes in right after ours so he is trying to get as much done as possible. As I watch rehearsal tonight, I wish I had thought about placing a basketball backboard on stage but with limited funds and no place to make one, that idea is cut as quickly as it enters my mind. As we wrap up rehearsal, the cast comments that the stage needs some condoms on it especially since they can be found in alleys all over Washington, DC. This idea sounds gross but I am intrigued. I recall working on a movie several years ago off Florida Avenue NW, there were tons of used needles and used condoms laying about. While working on that film everyone was warned by the production staff to watch our step. I say to the single cast members that if they have an empty box of condoms it can go on the stage with the trash but not any used condoms. There are four single people in the cast, so we will see if the condoms show up. Every night we have added to the trash collection with hints of color.

May 4

Tonight is the second night with the noose on stage. It does add a different feeling to the show. Every now and then, it is caught up in a breeze or is hit unintentionally and the movement makes me feel a little weird. Watching the shadow of the noose gets a little eerie, as it almost seems like there is someone hanging there. We talk more about clothes making the man and we talk a little about what each actor thinks his character does for a living and why they (the men in this production) are coming together. As I watched this rehearsal, I start second-guessing myself and think there is too much black, too much white, and not enough variation in the tones. The blue sweater with the diamonds that is being worn by Joe is the wrong color. I was really hoping to find the sweater in gray or black but it is almost Spring and most stores have put their summer styles out and I do not have time to search on-line for a replacement.

Joe continues to be my weak link in the show. He is still struggling with his lines and entrances. The worst part is that he asks for criticism and direction but then is reluctant to take what is given to him because it does not fit in with his earliest thoughts and perceptions. He is so reluctant to listen that it is very frustrating for me. I am trying to be understanding of the fact that he has not had the four and one half weeks of rehearsal that the other cast members had. I really feel bad for him and if I cut him, it means re-blocking most of the show. If I had the luxury of replacing him, I would seriously think about doing that. I do hope that he will pull it together. I am just a little tired of having to explain to him, that this is my vision for the show and his character. The other cast members are beginning to find him a little annoying because he always has something to say.

We avoided a catastrophe today. A friend was supposed to come and tape the rehearsal for us, but he got a late notice of a videographer's conference in Connecticut. The only other videographer I could think of would charge me a small fortune. Ed Grogan and his wife are very

expensive. I used their services when I was at Stone Ridge and was mostly satisfied with their work but I am not sure they would be available at this last minute. Andre begins to brainstorm people he knows and makes two telephone calls and finds a videographer who can video a rehearsal and a performance.

I am still tweaking the set and trying to find the right balance between just enough trash and too much trash. The used condoms do not make it to the stage neither does an empty condom box.

I have to label the CDs! I make a major mess of act one bringing in rain during the “bus” scene and helicopters during “Nina Simone.” The sound effects do not sound badly, they were not a part of my original concept, and were added as I watched the monologues develop. I hope to get to label the CDs tomorrow.

May 5

After setting up the computer and the monitor, I listen and label all the CDs while the cast warms up, run act 1 and try to get pumped up for tonight’s run. I have the music organized so that there should not be any mess-ups. I am still struggling with Joe who seems to be unable to concentrate on his lines or blocking. Joe follows “Open Your Eyes” and part of his delay for coming back on stage is time needed to decompress from being a rapist and murderer. I have to add a blackout to cover for the delay of him coming back on stage. Unfortunately, I do not have the time to listen to more music to find the right piece.

We do however manage to cut another five minutes off the total running time. This means that act one is running almost fifty minutes. Act 2 also runs about fifty minutes. I still feel like the costumes need something but cannot think what to add or change. Joe still needs to work

on picking up his entrances and exits. Baakari also needs to come on at the top of act two a little faster than he has been.

Tomorrow we have our first audience and Elise who is on my thesis committee will evaluate me. I think we are ready for what ever should come our way.

May 6

I have to run out to KINKOS to print up the programs. I had hoped Joe would be able to do them at work but he did not say anything about getting them via email. It does not take me very long, which is great because I need to figure out what I am going to wear tonight. I get the photocopies of the program folded with the inserts placed in them and get home to check my email. Once again, I am having problems with my hotmail account. It seems it has been hacked again and I cannot log in. This is just what I need.

Oh no, it is 4:30 pm and I realize that I did not go to the bank to get cash. I run off to the bank and return in record time to take a shower, dress and hop in the car to get to the theatre.

Time gets away from me and before I know it, it is 7:00 pm. Time to open the house and of course I turn around and there is Elise. I feel like I am running around with my head cut off. Keith our house manager for the night has not showed up. We get by somehow. I think the theatre gods are watching over us. The show gets started at 7:35ish and the cast is off to a great start. During intermission, I am asked if Andre Manly is my son by an audience member and after some confusion and clarification, I let the audience member know that Andre is my husband and the actor in question is someone I had previously worked with. I guess I should have put pictures of the actors in the playbill. Although the audience was small, they were great. I think it really helped the cast knowing there were people in the audience to feed off. The show ends around 9:40 and I try to power down everything and speak with Elise. I thought we would

go out somewhere for drinks or coffee so we could talk about my production but she states that she has an early flight. I tell her that I hope to Skype my orals because I just cannot afford to go out to Ellensburg. Overall, she tells me there were some very interesting and powerful moments. She complimented Andre for his performance, as she was amazed that this was his return to the front of the stage after a long run behind the scenes as stage manager. I do wish we could have had more than a few minutes to talk about things that I could have improved especially since we had two more performances. I guess I have to wait until I get the written report to see what she really thought.

May 7

We have an afternoon show today, Andre's cousin is supposed to be house manager along with our friend Leris. Leris was late and Natache is already setup with the cash box and begins collecting money. We have a nice size audience for an afternoon show. They were eager and when they hear the comic moments and are not afraid to laugh. They also hear the somber moments and by the end of the show there are quite a few teary eyes. The last moment of the show is a monologue about finding a great job and then waking up one morning in jail. The character is accused of rape and is beaten by the arresting police officers. Another cast member who is also in jail hears his moans and wants to help but knows that his hands are tied and there is not much he can do. In the end, the men reach out to each other.

I knew there were some moments in the play that would bring tears to the audiences' eyes. I also knew that the key was for the actors to stay in the moment. It was great to see it happen.

May 8

Today is the last performance of *For Black Boys Who Have Considered Homicide When The Streets Were Too Much*. I was hoping for a large audience but we only had about twenty people show up. I did my part by bringing in friends, family and associates so it was very disappointing for the cast and it seems they were not able to bring in many friends or family. Traffic was terrible getting to the theatre today. Part of the reason for the heavy traffic had to deal with the fact that it was Mother's Day, it was a beautiful Sunday afternoon, and everyone was out in full force trying to enjoy the day. We have our hands full with this last performance. The space has to be completely struck and I had planned to have a post show discussion. One friend who was to help lead this discussion did not show up. Thank goodness Quanti showed up. He took notes in the script prior to coming and while watching the show. He made some interesting comments that actually made me think about the message of the play. He suggested that it would be a great show to take into an all male independent upper school to facilitate a discussion about racial identity.

I spent much of my day thinking about Elise's initial comments and wondering what she would send to me. I was surprised to see her taking notes almost immediately after she arrived. When I think back to looking over the binders in the graduate office last summer I guess I was so wrapped up on what section one included and looked like that I did not take any notes on the other sections or even spent much time looking through them. I find myself wondering if her report which has to be included in my binder, has to be numbered and how do I number it. Feeding it through my printer will be somewhat problematic especially trying to get it to line up on the upper right hand corner. I need to purchase some plastic sleeves to include things like the program, copies of the CDs, DVD, ground plan and other renderings. I pull out some of my earliest drawings for the flyer and postcard and laugh at my lack of artistic abilities. On the other

hand, the costume renderings do not look bad and my purchases are not far off from what I rendered.

During the post-show discussion, Joe does exactly what I was hoping he would not do. He has a bad habit of talking too much. No one wanted or needed to hear about his home being burglarized especially since it had nothing to do with the show. He also went into a long discussion about how a woman he had dated dumped him and that was his inspiration for his monologue about getting used to being alone.

Final entry

Hindsight is twenty-twenty. I was thinking today about things I could have done differently. One minor change would be to have stressed the hangman's noose. I could have boiled a pot of coffee or tea or even used some day old coffee. I also have some stage blood that I could have used sparingly. I was really hoping that the audience would have gotten the idea that while lynching or hangings do not occur as often as they did during the early to mid 1900s that they still happen in the twenty-first century. I also wanted the audience, which I knew would be mostly African American, to feel the intimidation and fear that has been associated with such a heinous crime. I believe that it would not have mattered to the audience what kind of rope I had used for the noose or what color it was, for it to be an effective tool of intimidation. I also had a few rain soaked posters that I removed from a utility pole in my neighborhood that could have had some Velcro attached to the back of them and placed them on the acoustic walls. I used the alley behind the church for my initial inspiration, because I live in the suburbs and we do not have alleys. I also drew from my childhood my experiences, sweeping the alley behind our house because my father believed a clean alley would keep rats away. Most important was the fact that

he was the Block Association, President and we had to set an example. Looking at the alley behind the church it was clearly absent of graffiti, excessive trash and condoms.

I also wished that I had more time to find a sponsor or co-producer who could have shared the expenses and perhaps brought in an audience. Although I feel like the cast was happy with the turnout of the audience and that the play is perfectly suited for an intimate space and audience, it would have been nice to see a body in every seat especially for the post-show discussion. My friend Quanti who is the Director of Multicultural Affairs at a local independent school stated that research shows that children make gender identities around age seven but do not make racial identities until around age ten. He believes that this is an incredibly strong story that raises some interesting issues and that I should look into taking the play into some of the all male independent schools in the Washington, DC area and that it could be used as a tool to discuss racism and racial identification.

On Saturday afternoon, the show was seen by someone who works with the DC Black Theatre Festival who thought that our play would be a great addition to the festival line up. I sent an email to the playwright to get his permission and Andre called the other cast members to check availability and interest. There would be no payment in spite of the Festival producers charging the audience but it would be a chance for the cast to be seen by other directors and possibly by various casting officials.

As I begin gathering everything that goes into the Appendix section, I look over the playbill and realize that I should have included a line about there being a fifteen-minute intermission and perhaps a little blurb about each act. I also need to go back to Wal-Mart or Home Depot to get a few other paint chips to complete the splashes of color that were used on stage.

**CENTRAL WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY
THEATRE ARTS GRADUATE PROGRAM**

THESIS PROJECT/ PRODUCTION PERFORMANCE EVALUATION

STUDENT- Cynthia Webb Manly



UNDER CONSIDERATION IS DIRECTION OF: “For Black Boys Who Have Considered Homicide When the Streets Are Too Much” by Keith Antar Mason

EVALUATOR’S NAME: Elise Forier Edie

TITLE: Assistant Professor

PLACE OF PERFORMANCE: Spooky Action Theatre, Washington, DC

DATE OF VIEWING: Friday, May 6, 2011

DESCRIPTION OF PERFORMANCE VENUE:

Spooky Action Theatre operates out of a church basement on 16th Street in downtown Washington, DC. The space is a converted multipurpose room, half of which has been commandeered to serve as the theatre, the other half as backstage and/or lobby space. The house held about 60 seats on plywood risers at one end of the room, with additional seating on the floor and to the side. Black curtains and black flats surrounded a large (30x30 foot) stage, also made of plywood. About eight lighting instruments hung from a grid over the stage. Sound and lights were operated by Cynthia from a desk adjacent to the risers.

DESCRIPTION OF CONCEPT:

Cynthia’s concept statement included creating an ensemble piece that would focus on the poetic language of the script, as opposed to lavish scenery or lights. The set would suggest a dead end alleyway. Lighting would include contrasting colors. The central image of the set would be a noose hanging center stage. Cynthia says in her statement, “I think the dead end alleyway suggests the hopeless and often hopelessness felt by black men especially those who do not see opportunities to escape poverty, drugs, homicide, or even life in prison.” Cynthia also wished the costumes and music to be timeless, “representative of the present, but reflective of the past.”

DESCRIPTION OF THE ACTUAL PRODUCTION DIRECTION AND/OR REALIZED DESIGN OF SETS, PROPS, COSTUMES, LIGHTING, SOUND:

Trash littered the almost empty stage. Five chairs and two rehearsal blocks ringed the set on the upstage and stage left sides. A trashcan slumped a little right of center. A noose hung from the ceiling center stage. The lighting design offered lots of color, contrast and mood change. Actors wore a constantly shifting array of clothing in shades of black, white and gray. In all ways, Cynthia held to her original concept statement.

Some of the set details left a bit to be desired. The trashcan, while a nice, old fashioned metal can, (a great choice visually), was obviously brand new, shiny and clean, without dents or marks. It took away from the idea of a real “dead end alleyway” or even the idea of “hopelessness.” Its brightness and newness conveyed more of an upwardly mobile, shiny clean image—not what Cynthia was going for at all. The chairs on stage were the same chairs the audience sat in—again, not really conveying an alleyway, but reminding us instead that we are seeing a play, in a theatre, and nothing “real” is going on at all. The noose was made of cheap nylon rope, limp and a little unassuming, not really embodying the “weapon of intimidation” that Cynthia mentioned in her concept statement.

On the other hand, the silvery, gray, shifting, black-and-white costumes were very effective at conveying the play’s themes, ideas and characters and the Cynthia completely got the most out of her eight lighting instruments and sound system, making wonderful use of color and shadow, music and ambient sound, to create different moods and support different environments.

Cynthia kept the focus of the play on the language, allowing each poem, story and song to remain the center of each moment. As audience members we were invited to listen actively to the words of the piece. In a theatre era that places so much emphasis on spectacle; it was a delight to feast on music and dialogue, some of it very exquisitely rendered and performed.

HOW DID THE PRODUCTION DIRECTION OR DESIGN IMPLEMENT THE IDEAS EXPRESSED IN THE CONCEPT STATEMENT?

The set did not really transport me into a dead end alleyway. Instead, I got the feeling that Cynthia didn’t have a whole lot of time to devote to the set, and so used the chairs she had available, took a trip to the hardware store and bought a trashcan and a rope, threw some garbage on the stage and called it good. That is really what the set looked like, which is too bad, because with a little more thought, and she could have supported the script more effectively. The trashcan could have been made to look less new. She could have dispensed with the chairs altogether and found some alternatives, ones that might actually be in an alleyway, for instance. The rehearsal cubes could have been painted as cardboard boxes. Milk crates are often found in alleyways, and her actors could have sat on those, instead of chairs. Old folding chairs, even a busted out couch or scratched up lawn furniture could have conceivably been found in a dead end alleyway. Graffiti or some kind of treatment on the flats and floor would have also helped convey location. Cynthia either didn’t think to find more authentic props, or did not have time to find them; she either couldn’t afford to buy paint, or didn’t have time to paint the set. I really believe at least some effort spent finding a really effective, scary noose would have served her well. The noose was one of the central metaphors of her concept—the noose she used looked like clothesline, an afterthought, a gesture.

The sound design was very nice, including a terrific preshow line-up that had music from a variety of genres, styles and times, jazz, folk songs, hip hop, blues. Incidental sound—rain, sirens and so forth—was entirely appropriate and well operated.

The costumes were an effective amalgam of gray, black and white clothing, representative of a variety of ages, styles and backgrounds, from slouching hoodies to straight laced ties. All the

costumes were masculine, and the strong choice to always clothe her actors in various shades of black, white and gray helped convey the play's themes very well.

Cynthia did a great job with the lights, making beautiful effects, using brilliant color and contrast when appropriate, and keeping her actors always seen. She wanted the color palette to represent "the harshness of the ghetto repeatedly heated by the summer sun and cooled by the winter winds." I think Cynthia did make that harshness with her lights, but she also brought a hallucinatory patina to some of the more poetic, imagistic moments—greens, oranges, blues--that I thought also served the play very well.

Cynthia's actors handled the heightened language with varying degrees of success. For the most part, the actors knew what they were saying and communicated their stories and ideas actively. There were exceptions, however, when I felt I was hearing a recitation of lines, instead of a character, actively engaged in obtaining a specific goal. The actor telling the story of Mozambique, for instance, seemed utterly unconnected to a purpose or action, so much so that I lost track of the thread of the narrative and even now have no clear idea what that part of the play was actually about.

APPROPRIATENESS OF CHOICE OF SCRIPT FOR ABILITIES OF PERFORMERS, AUDIENCE, VENUE, AND/OR ACADEMIC SETTING?

This was a very appropriate choice of play, suited to Cynthia's actors and to her community. The audience, though small, was respectful and invested in the performance, and the actors were committed to each other and the material. The play was well suited to the space—this is not a "big" show, and the intimacy of the venue served the play's needs very well.

ADDRESS THE FOLLOWING IF APPLICABLE: CLEAR DELINEATION OF UNITS OF ACTION, MOTIVATED BLOCKING, VISUALLY INTERESTING COMPOSITION, VISUAL EXPRESSION OF METAPHOR, USE OF PICTURIZATION IN STORYTELLING, CLEAR AND BELIEVABLE CHARACTERIZATION, ADEQUATE USE OF BODY AND VOICE, UNITY OF PRODUCTION ELEMENTS, CREATIVE PROBLEM SOLVING.

As a general note, I did not see Cynthia employing a great deal of sensitivity or ingenuity in composition or the use of picturization. Cynthia most often grouped supporting actors in an upstage semi circle around whatever character was delivering a monologue, or else she placed an actor alone on stage to deliver a monologue. The semi-circle formation was particularly frustrating at the beginning of the play, when an actor was sharing the very funny and sweet "Playing Ball" monologue about losing his virginity. He kept having to turn upstage to connect with the other actors, cutting himself off from the audience. A different stage picture would have solved that problem easily and helped support the story as well.

The production was not without good staging, however. "This is Not a Love Poem" had a very memorable stage picture for the ensemble and "I Found God," near the end of the play, had a truly beautiful ensemble stage picture that summed up the play and supported the text beautifully. The circle of actors under the noose for "Niggers and Numbers" was also extremely

effective, but that composition reappeared in Act 2 as well, which took away from its effectiveness and ingenuity.

I believe part of the problem with composition and picturization had to do with Cynthia's ground plan. She placed chairs on the upstage and stage left edges of the stage only, leaving most of the playing space completely empty, without obstacles or means for actors to play with levels and space. The chairs stayed in the same place, more or less, until one of them was placed center stage for delivery of a monologue. Some of the younger actors would stand on a chair occasionally, or sit or lie down on the floor, which created some levels, but I believe there were many more potential levels on stage, many more physical compositions to be made, much more visual support that could have been devised for each piece.

Another problem had to do with the placement of the audience. Audience surrounded the stage on two sides, but for the most part, the monologues were delivered to only one side of the house. Lucky for me, I was sitting on the "good" side of the house, but I wondered what the experience was like for audience members sitting on the other side, often looking at actor profiles. On the other hand, I thought Cynthia did a very nice job coaching her actors and getting believable, interesting performances from most of them. As is customary with community theatre productions, the acting was uneven, due to a wide range of talent, training and experience; however there were some stand out moments, clearly the result of solid rehearsal, expert coaching, and very good casting. The younger members of the ensemble were particularly effective, willing to embrace the heightened language, connect with the audience freely, and buy fully into the given circumstances. The storytelling for "Nina Simone" was very good (and very dramatically supported with sound and lights), as was the truth and heartbreak of "I Was Going to be Comfortable the Rest of My Life." It was also clear to me that for the most part, the Cynthia had worked with the actors to ensure they formed a tightly knit ensemble, a crucial element in a show such as this. They supported one another, maintained a tight connection to one another and worked well together throughout, with one major exception. Unfortunately Joe Day, one of the older actors, was terribly weak, delivering many of his lines to the floor instead of connecting with the audience, seemingly unable to create any kind of emotional truth and distractingly unsure of his lines, particularly in the ensemble chant "Who Am I? Not the Boogeyman," (so much so, that I wound up worrying about the other actors having to work off of him, instead of listening to the words). I became curious to know what he was doing in the show at all and look forward to reading Cynthia's rehearsal journal to find out why someone so utterly unskilled was allowed to be the weak link in an otherwise tight, close, skilled and engaging ensemble.

Overall, Cynthia kept the pace of the show moving. The tempo rhythms were sufficiently varied as to keep the audience's attention and allow them opportunities to feel and experience different moods. I noticed Cynthia consistently directed her actors to play "soft," focusing mostly on smooth, tender, loving, sad and soulful actions, when passionate, thrusting, jagged and pointed actions would have worked equally well. On the one hand, this was a nice change from the media's usual portrayal of black men (cynical, jaded, hard, furious, dangerous), showing us sensitive, loving, embracing, supportive, needing human beings. On the other hand, I got tired of all the tears. Tears are great, and it's a wonderful release when characters cry—but it is also a wonderful release when characters try to punch the living daylights out of each other, or laugh

uproariously at one another, or give into paralyzing fear and shout at one another. Particularly at the beginning of Act Two, when the characters were celebrating and mourning their loves, I felt a sameness of expression to each investigation that might have been better served with a more in depth analysis and variety of interpretation.

WITHIN THE CONFINES OF THIS PARTICULAR PERFORMANCE VENUE, WAS THIS PRODUCTION SATISFACTORY OR UNSATISFACTORY?

This production was very satisfactory.

My heart really went out to Cynthia, as I watched her open the house, then go to the sound table and program her computer to play the preshow music, then set the lights for the preshow, then walk across the stage and turn down the house lights and then proceed to the lobby where she could sell tickets and concessions, before having to run the house, sound and lights for the performance, too. Keeping in mind that she had also directed and produced the show herself, I feel Cynthia did a solid, truly professional job with this production. She showed real ingenuity and aplomb in her light and sound designs, a true gift for eliciting honest and committed performances from her young actors, and an intrinsic understanding of the importance of tempo and rhythm in directing a theatre piece.

Self-Evaluation

The concept for this production of *For Black Boys Who Have Considered Homicide When The Streets Were Too Much*, laid the groundwork for the development of several strong production elements that were clearly visible to the audience. I believe I kept the elements of my production to a high standard of excellence as much as possible. Looking back at this production there were some details that I could have fine-tuned and a few details that changed when I moved from paper to reality. I chose to represent the playwright's words using a minimalistic approach to the set. During the first production, the playwright suggested that the set represent a dead end alleyway, with a set of stairs opening to a fire escape. I feel I was only able to achieve this concept partially because of limited funding and set building space.

My initial reading of the script left me with the realization that there were two things important for my concept to be effective. I knew there was going to be a noose center stage even though there was no direct reference to it by any of the characters or through any of the lines. I also knew that there had to be a sense of hopelessness and helplessness represented and I would use a very monochromatic color scheme with a few splashes of color.

I used two very different locations for inspiration. The first area was the alley behind the theatre. While many individuals know DC as "Chocolate City", the area surrounding 16th and S Streets NW, is home to a more socially, politically and racially diverse, urban, and contemporary resident. I also explored other neighborhoods in the metropolitan Washington, DC area and used memories of the Detroit neighborhood I where I spent my youth. While my Detroit neighborhood is probably more accurate and closer in ethnic and socioeconomic makeup to the neighborhood in St. Louis that the playwright uses as his background, I believe the combination of these neighborhoods break the stereotypes often conveyed in movies and on television. In

addition to the noose, I purchased an aluminum garbage can that I planned to leave outdoors to stress naturally and a cotton fiber rope to tie the noose. I spoke with Richard about procuring a step unit and tried to think of other ways to create levels on stage. I thought that my garbage can was probably still too new looking even after sitting outdoors for several weeks and rather than building or borrowing a step unit, I was provided with a set of rehearsal cubes which was used to represent a step unit. As I looked at the rehearsal cubes that were configured to look like steps, I thought they looked like rehearsal cubes and I did not consider using more of them because they looked really out of place to me. I used several wooden chairs that were the same as those used by the audience. I never considered using different chairs because in the neighborhood of my youth, I saw many dining room chairs on porches, backyards, and in the dining room. Many of my neighbors were unable to afford lawn chairs and simply used what was available especially during hot summer nights. I was also surprised to see how many homes in DC had similar furniture being used for multiple purposes. I believe that Black neighborhoods represented on television and in film, often misrepresent the neighborhoods that many Black children live in. In Detroit, we had regular trash collection and you rarely saw old furniture in the alley, on porches or curbside. Torn between whether my set should be sloppy or minimalistic, I decided that something in between was best. In addition to the trashcan, I used several empty glass bottles (green, brown and clear), several grocery bags, bread wrappers, soda and beer cans as well as sandwich wrappers. The walls of the theatre space were covered with black fabric because they serve two purposes (used to frame the space and for acoustics). Because of the fabric covering the walls I left them bare although I thought about putting up some posters that I had removed from a utility pole near my house. I could have put some Velcro on the back of them and attached them to the walls but I decided otherwise.

On Thursday evening after our rehearsal, Richard painted the floor and it reminded all of us of a brand new imaginary asphalt road surface. The floor was so discolored that prior to being painted it looked like many of the road surfaces in large urban cities. There was the appearance of what could have been an imaginary basketball court. After Richard painted the deck, we all thought it looked too new and it was still tacky. By the time we arrived at the theatre on Friday just before curtain time and it was too late to make any changes to it. Thinking back on my project, I think I could have created a more two dimensional look by placing the chairs on the downstage side of the stage rather than upstage and blocking some scenes with actors who were not talking in the downstage position and forcing the actors who were speaking to react and interact with each other and perhaps spilling some milk, gray paint or something else to take away the newness of newly painted floor.

I think that my set was representative of what I wanted. It was monochromatic with hints of color. I think I was most successful with my vision of the costumes. I believe I accomplished what I had planned to do as far as the costumes were concerned. I was able to find almost everything I had sketched for my costume renderings. I listened to my actors and made a few changes based on their input. Initially I chose to put Jon in a plaid shirt with a black turtleneck sweater. He mentioned that he suffered from heavy perspiration. His costume changed in part because of his comments, but also because I could not find a plaid shirt with the color scheme I was using. I substituted a black shirt and black and white vest. Jon brought in a white tie and it completed the look. In my opinion, he looked like a waiter in an urban bar setting. I also planned to buy a solid black hoodie for D'Metrius that I planned to pair with a white or gray tee shirt. The only hoodie I could find in his size had red stripes and I could not find a solid white or gray tee shirt so I settled for a black tee shirt. I also added at the last minute a gray muscle type tee

shirt for Jonathan to wear during the second act. Not having a lot of time to return to the thrift store, I purchased a new tee shirt from Wal-Mart. If I had thought about it, I could have purchased two lighter colored tee shirts. I choose to use shades of black and white for the costumes. I wanted to show through the costumes a variety of images of Black men and believed that I accomplished that. According to the cast members Joe, aka Brother #8 was referred to as the professor because he wore a sweater vest, white shirt and tie. D'Metrius aka Brother #3 wore a black hoodie with red stripes and was somewhat intimidating in stature, became known as the Hood Rat. Through the costumes, I hoped to represent a wide variety of economic and social standings for each character. I purchased many of the costume pieces at local thrift stores, to save on expenses and to have a worn look, while the boots, slacks and shoes belonged to the actors. I also think I achieved what I wanted through my music choices including a variety of music styles which worked with the production rather than against it.

I was very fortunate to have found Spooky Action Theatre. In particular, they were willing to work with our budget. They have a grid lighting system, which includes six Fresnels LEDs and two Source 4s. The light fixtures provided ample lighting for the space but I do wonder if the Fresnels were angled in a more downstage position and into the corners would that have helped the cast move downstage. I do think that asking actors to play the diagonals when they are working on a proscenium stage is a difficult concept for most to play. Rather than a traditional light board, Spooky Action Theatre operates their lights via a software program on the computer that was very easy to operate. Once the light cues were entered, I came up with some very creative names for them rather than using a number system. I was able to use lots of coloring in the lights, which looked interesting and helped to heighten certain scenes. I would have liked to sit with the technician as he programmed the lights into the program but I guess

that will have to happen during another project. I think learning how to program the software would have been the icing for my cake. The total cost also included use of the rehearsal room, so I did not have to find an additional space. It was a very easy move down the hall.

Choosing the music to use for this production was the most time consuming and challenging. I wanted to honor the playwright's words and considered prior choices, which made my decisions even more difficult. According to the published script, music choices included references to artists such as Stevie Wonder, Michael Jackson, Nina Simone, Teddy Pendergast, and RUN DMC. Conversations with the playwright also included a reference to saxophonist, Pharoah Sanders. When I read this script for the first time, I thought I would use mostly early hip-hop or rap music but as I re-read the script, I knew I needed to use a combination of music including folk, jazz, gospel, rhythm and blues, rap, and rock. It was through the music that I felt I would be most able to transport the audience to a variety of places and take them on an emotional journey through the words of the script and music.

I had hoped to have a former student come in to help with choreography especially a step routine. Her schedule unfortunately did not allow her to join us. I guess it must have been kismet to have two actors in the production with dance backgrounds. Baakari was able to choreograph the opening number and Jon choreographed the step routine. Both numbers looked good. Since I had been incredibly busy with my other directing project, I felt overwhelmed with the idea of choreography for my show. Since I had originally planned to use my former student's skills, allowing my actors to choreograph these two numbers was an easy decision. They also gave me exactly what I had envisioned. I grew up watching the Temptations perform on television and the young men in my neighborhood who wanted to sing and dance just like them. In addition to their choreography, I used some of the exercises learned in our Viewpoints class last summer, to help

the cast with movement and getting the lines into their bodies. Using Viewpoints to help block the show was awesome. Since the cast was a combination of younger and older actors, many of them have never had the experience of studying Viewpoints. Most of the cast had never heard of Viewpoints I think because it seemed like it was used mostly on the west coast. I think if I had had more rehearsal time, I could have used more of the components of Viewpoints earlier during rehearsals. I did spend an evening explaining the multiple ways that the Viewpoints concepts are used but I condensed a week's worth of my class work into a few hours.

Finding my cast was a lot harder than I thought it would be especially here in Washington, DC. Times have changed from when I first entered the world of being an actor. I placed announcements for my project on several job banks for actors. The first weekend we had absolutely no one show up. This was very disturbing and depressing. I mentioned this to Richard, my contact at Spooky Action, and he forwarded several headshots and resumes to me. Of the headshots and resumes that Richard forwarded, two actors showed up and were cast. The other two actors were students from Prince George's Community College. I met those actors during my short-lived stint as director for *A Raisin in the Sun* back in 2009. I went back to my pool of actors who I knew were still non-union and everyone was busy. I guess that during the few years that I had taken a back seat to performing, things have really changed. I am not sure how many new theatre groups have started since my absence but obviously, the competition for good actors is much more difficult. Andre called our contact at Prince Georges Community College who put the word out on campus and one actor showed up who had been a part of their staged reading of *For Black Boys . . .* he joined us for a few weeks and in mid April decided he was too stressed out and unable to continue working with us. He was the second disappointment as far as casting was concerned. My first disappointment for casting was an older actor (Lorenzo) who I had

worked with before. Although I knew him to be a high maintenance actor, I was willing to take a chance with him. He attended one rehearsal and I am not sure whether it was our conversation about costumes or whether he was seriously ill, but he decided to leave us. This news meant that Andre would step in to replace him. That still left me one actor short and I was willing to either cut the character or split some of his monologues. In the end Andre brow beat another friend into joining the cast. Joe was having his own drama but he joined us on this journey. If I had had more time to really search for actors I would not have settled for this particular friend. Looking back at the process, I think it was unfair to assume he could memorize his lines and would gel with the ensemble in two weeks. I was still working at getting the other cast members to trust each other and having him join the cast so late in the rehearsal process was not fair to him or the other cast members. Not that I think he hated the experience, I think this was his first experience with an all male and all BLACK cast and director. While he got the language and historical references, he had a problem with some of the musicality and choreography as he has a bum knee. He tried working without his brace, but felt the instability in his knee. We jointly decided that he would sit on the garbage can during the first choreographed number. The second choreographed number did not have any lateral movements and therefore he was able to be a fuller participant in that number.

I wish that I had been able to find a co-producer or co-sponsor for this project. It was unfortunate that I did not find out until late in December that I would not be going to direct this project in Ellensburg. Many of the high schools in the metropolitan Washington, DC area have theatre teachers who also direct their shows and the schools that do not have theatre programs generally submit their budgets for the year, three or more months before the end of the prior school year. Many of the non-profits that I had targeted also plan their calendars a year in

advance so that their members know what time commitments they have to make. I believe that had I had a co-producer or co-sponsor who would have been able to contribute to the budget, we would have been able to have full color postcards, flyers and posters as well as different kinds of set pieces. I would have also used their contributions to place an advertisement in one of the smaller newspapers like the City Paper or The Washington Blade. I gave each actor a small stack of postcards and flyers to share with friends, family and colleagues along with four complimentary tickets for the Saturday and Sunday matinee. My thinking was that if they each brought in four audience members and Andre and I brought in four audience members we would have at least twenty-eight people sitting in the chairs for all of the shows. I posted a notice of the production on my Facebook page, sent personal emails to associates, friends, family and former colleagues and mailed some flyers to friends and family who do not have email or computers that they log onto regularly. I was hoping that some of my relatives, who live in Delaware and Philadelphia, would have made the ride down. They are always talking about being such dinner theatre supporters but they were no-shows.

I think my taking the job in Annapolis was also a hindrance. Although the salary I made directing *HONK !*, enabled me to complete my directing project, taking that job meant, I lost a little over a week of rehearsal because of tech rehearsals in Annapolis. It did mean however, that my cast could spend an entire week learning their monologues, developing their characters and taking care of personal issues. It was unfortunately, a long time not to rehearse.

Finally, my ideas, concepts and plans were mostly successful and exceeded my expectations. I do wish that I had had another week of rehearsal to work with Joe in general and with Jonathan who performed the Mozambique piece. I also wish that I had a few extra dollars in the budget to help with additional costs.

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Joe Day

FBB

5/7/11

Black or
Gray Sweater
vest

White shirt

Black/

gray tie

Black

slacks

19/20 neck

37/38 sleeve

2x or 3x

Sweater
vest



Sweater vest

Blue not

gray/black



Brother 19

1002Karl

FBB
5/7/11

L

Gray or
Black leather/leather

Black Tshirt

Black Jeans



Added Gray Dress
Shirt



Brother 34
Jonathan Randall
FBB
5/7/11

Med Tshirt
42 R suit
Jacket



black ^{spot} jacket
grey Tank top
Black Jeans



Actual costume
black linen shirt
Black slacks
Black plaid sport
coat

Brother # 3

Cemetrus
Durrell

Black hoodie zip up

Black jeans

gray t-shirt

FBS

5/7/11

hoodie

XXL

Tee shirt

XL



Actual costume
Black hoodie w/
red stripes
Black t-shirt



Brother 17

Andre Masly

Black Suit

Black Shoes

Black Suspenders

5/7/11



ACTUAL COSTUME
INCLUDED:
Additional
Black
Gray
print shirt

John Adams

FBR
5/7/4

gray jeans
gray plaid
flannel/cotton
short
Black/white
Turtleneck

15 1/2
34 sleeve
Med



ACTING COSTUME
Black shirt
Black Turtleneck
B/w vest



Appendix A
Costume Plot
Brother # 5

✓
Slush funds
front & top light

publicity image for Wayne McGregor's *Dido and Aeneas*
© Teatro alla Scala

✓
top, front and
SR side light
p248-49

publicity image for Wayne McGregor's *Dido and Aeneas*
© Teatro alla Scala

http://www.ballet.co.uk/magazines/yr_06/aug06/mv_rev_la_scala_0706.htm

Appendix B
Lighting Inspirations

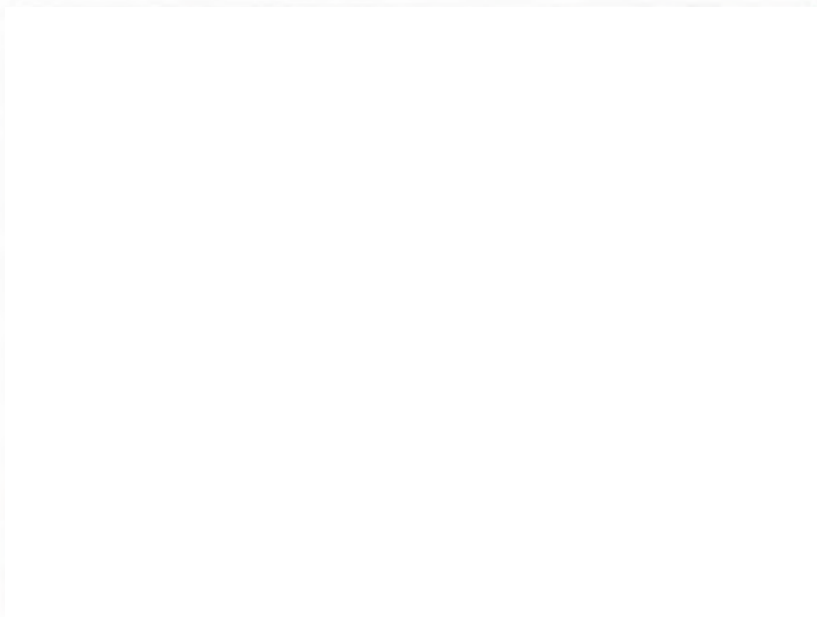
✓
end of
show

✓
Early AM
Top of show

Appendix B
Lighting Inspirations

Please note: Content on this page was redacted due to copyright concerns.

Dido and Aeneas: Sorceress and Witches.



TOP light red ✓
All others general
wash Blue
187

Dido and Aeneas: Final tableau.

<http://qcpages.qc.cuny.edu/music/index.php?L=1&M=53>

**Appendix B
Lighting Inspirations**

special on guy w/
umbrella, top light

Purcell's Dido and Aeneas at Glimmerglass, directed by Jonathan Miller

<http://berkshirereview.net/2009/09/purcell-dido-aeneas-glimmerglass-theatrical-holde/>

mozambique ✓
front light
or
top light

From left to right: Sandra Simon, Meg Bragle and Abigail Haynes Lennox - The Sorceress and The Witches. Photo © 2009 Steve Wagner

<http://www.mvdaily.com/articles/2009/02/dido.htm>



✓

Bright Day
Full light
Top
Front
Back

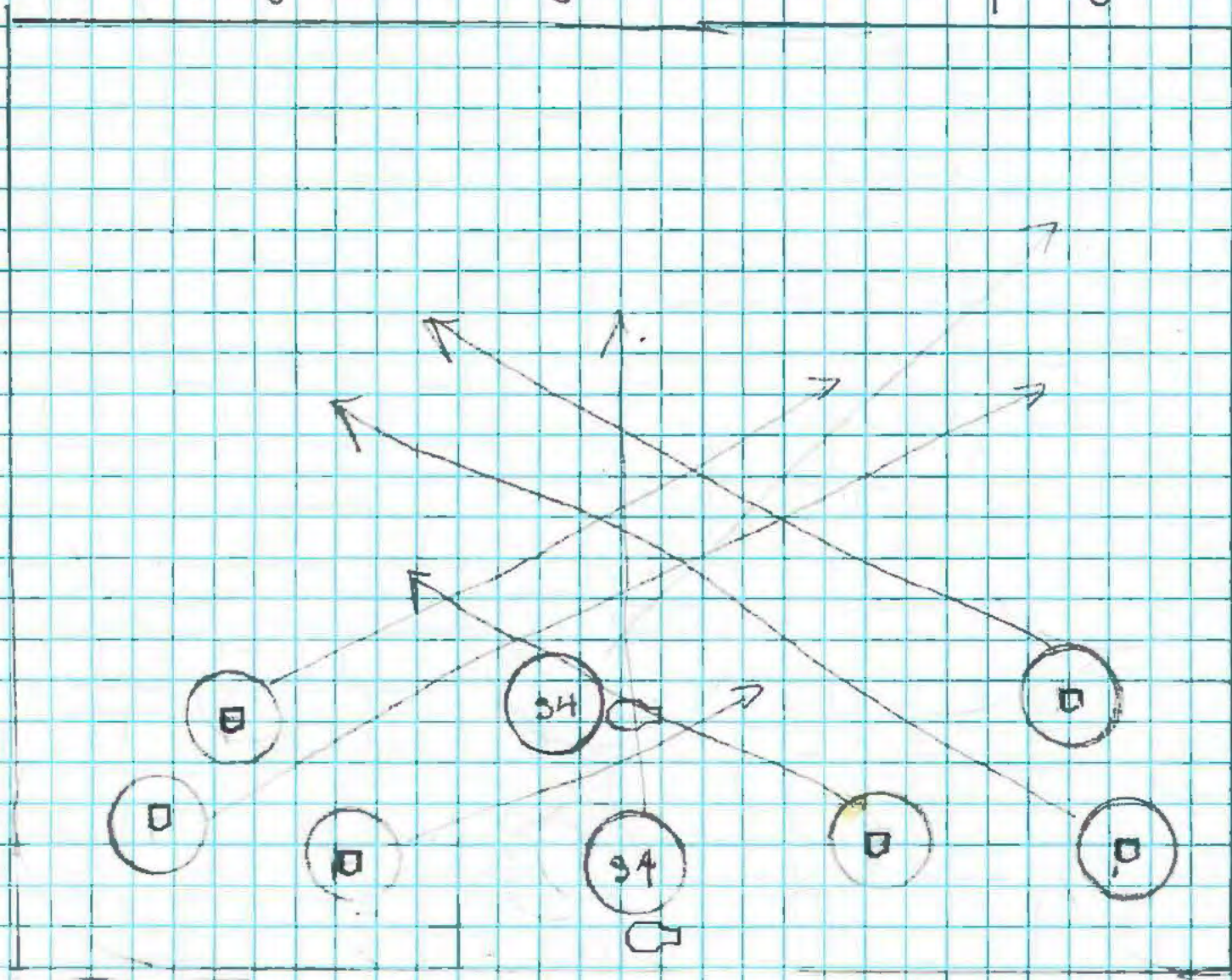
Appendix B
Lighting Inspirations

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Lighting Inspirations

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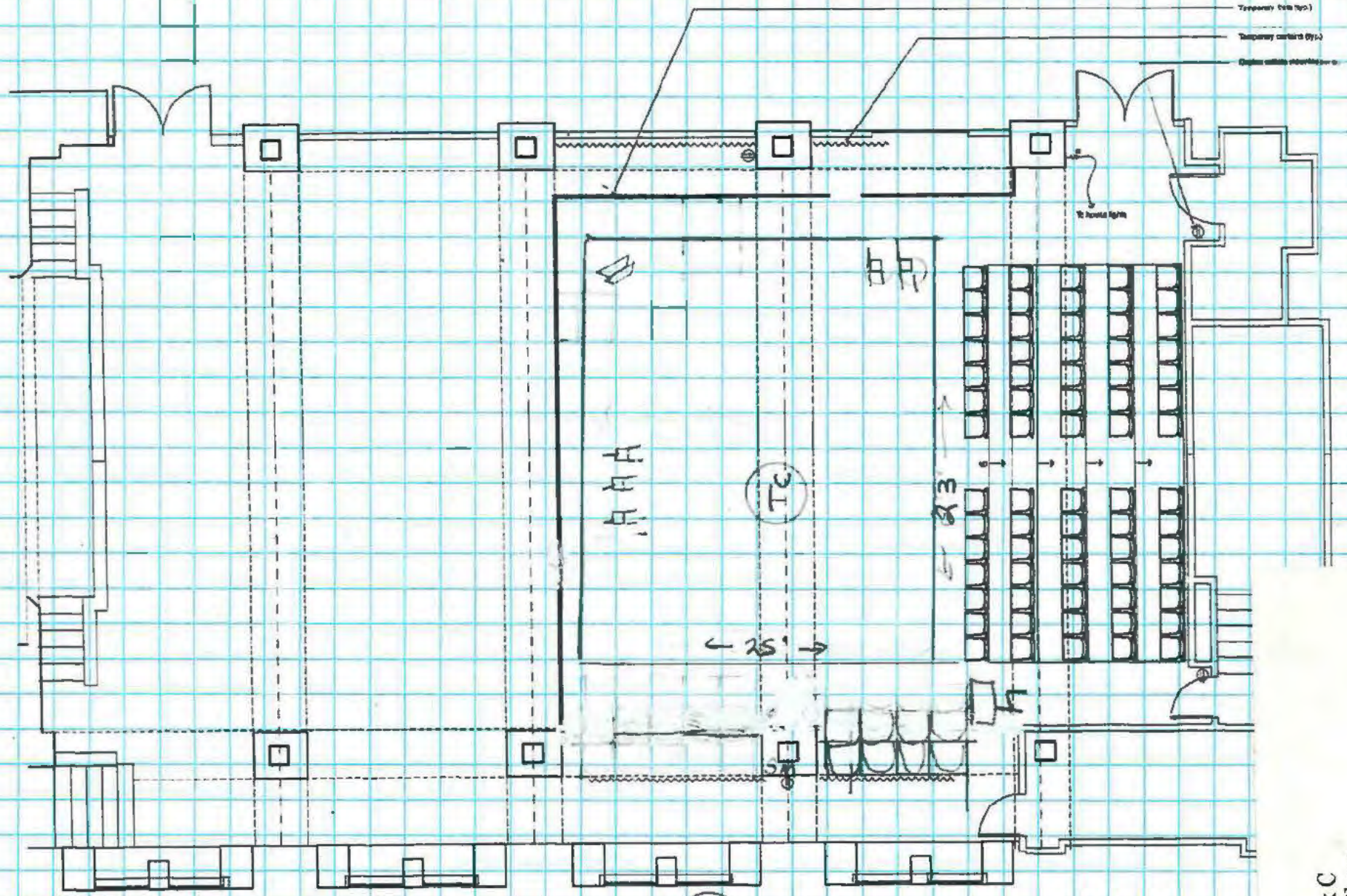
For Black Boys Who Have Considered Homicides
When the Streets were too much
Light Plot - Cynthia L. Webb-Manly May 2010



○ = 2 Source 4s (NO color)

□ = 4 Fresnels (LED)

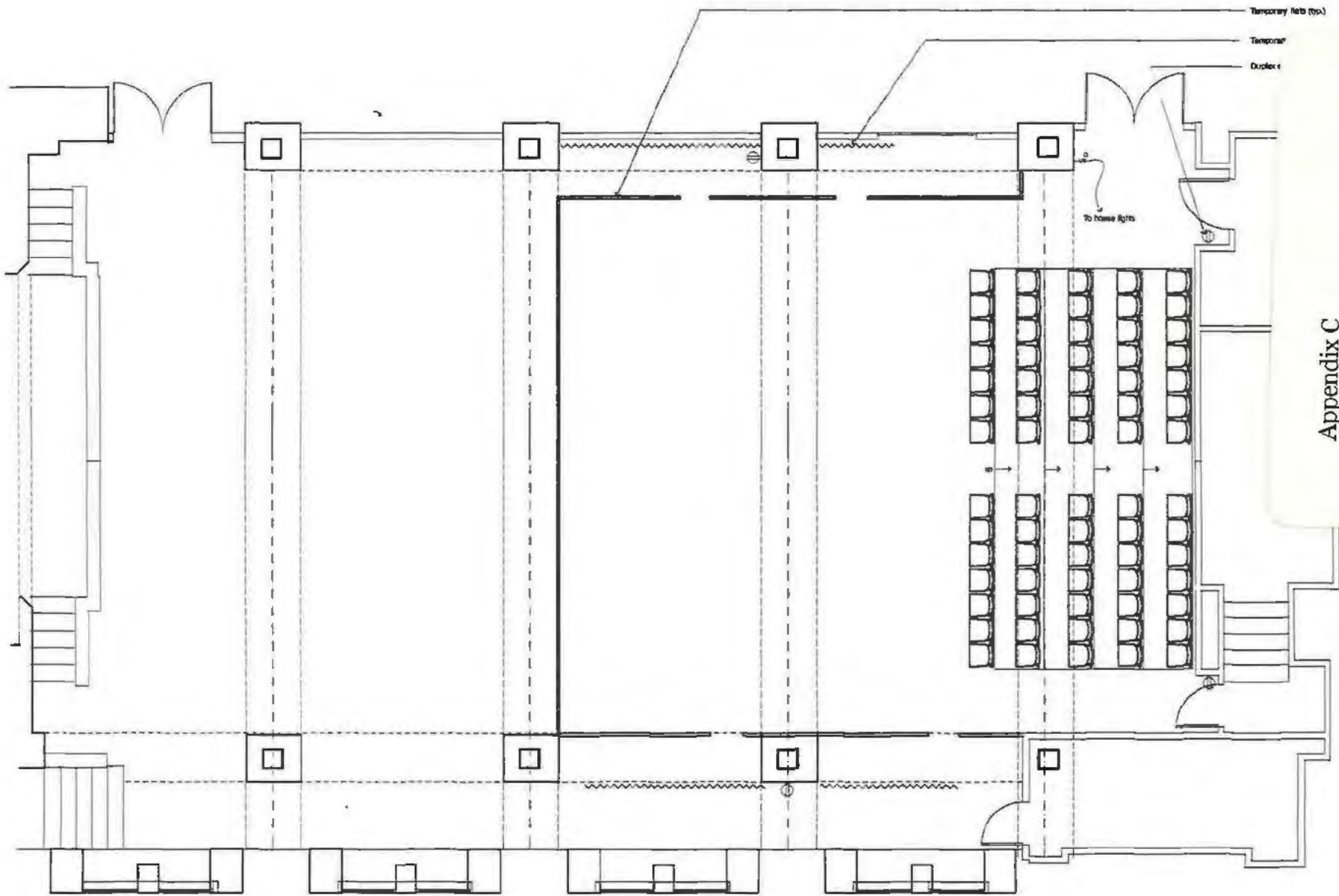
FOR BACKBOYS WHO HAVE CONSIDERED HOMICIDE
WHEN THE STREETS WERE TOO MUCH



Theater Floor Plan
Scale: 1/8" = 1'-0"

- - trash can
- - sm table
- ⌌ = 5 chairs
- h - sm chair
- ⌌ = stairs

Designed by: Cynthia L Webb-Mankly
5-6-11



Appendix C
Ground Plans

 **Theater Floor Plan**
Scale 1/8" = 1'-0"

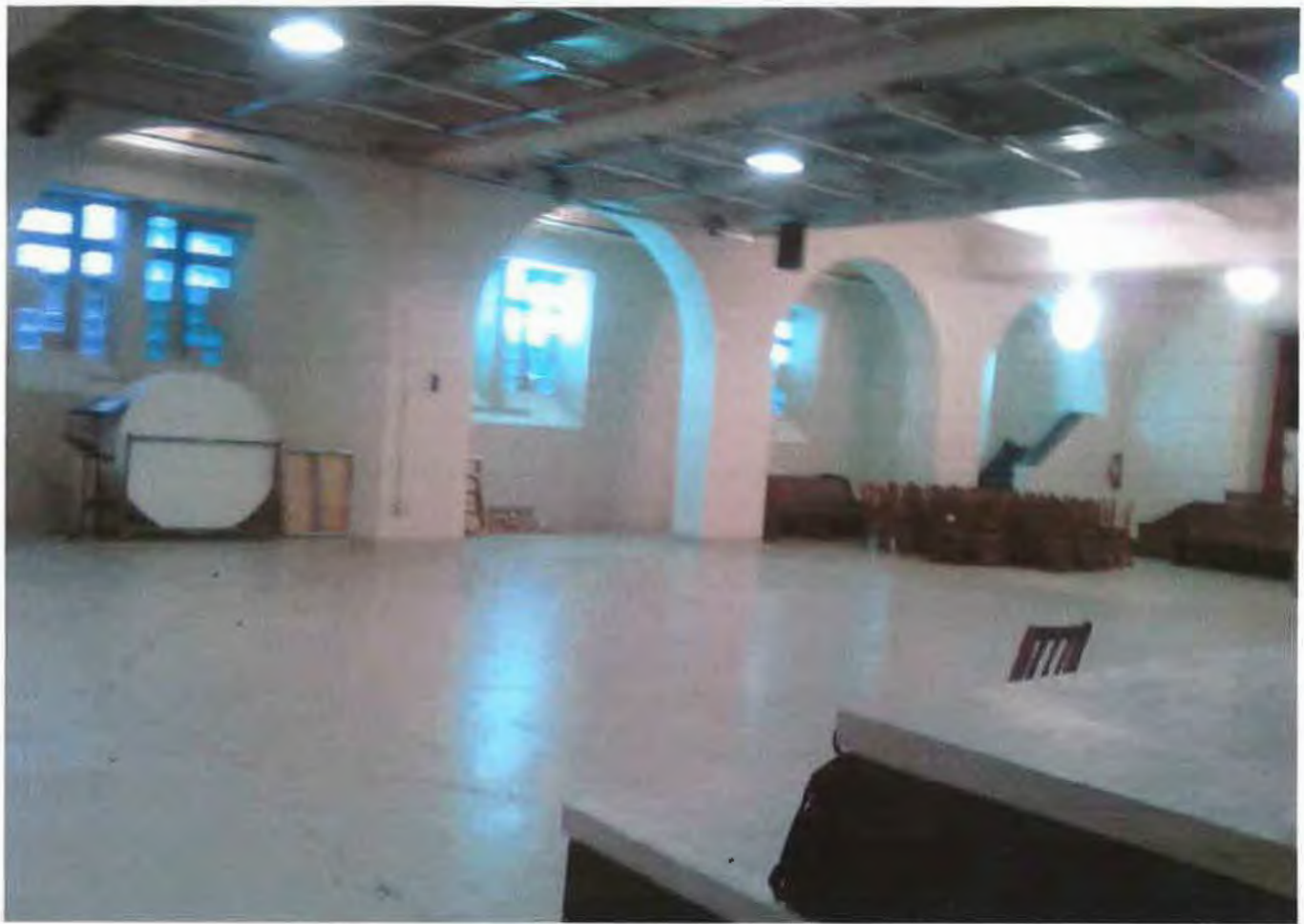


Appendix D
Set Inspirations



The Alley behind Spooky Action Theatre

Bare Rehearsal space



Love the arches too bad they'll be hidden
by the acoustic panels



Appendix C
Bare Theatre Space





Appendix E
Rehearsal Photos



04/24/2012



04/28/2012

Appendix E
Rehearsal Photos



04/24/2012



04/28/2012



04/28/2012



04/28/2012



05/01/2012

Appendix E
Rehearsal Photos



Appendix F
Production Photos





Appendix F
Production Photos



Appendix F
Production Photos



Appendix F
Production Photos





Appendix F
Production Photos

Empowering Artists Dreams

presents

**for black boys who have considered
homicide when the streets were
too much!**



Written by: Keith Antar Mason

Directed by: Cynthia L. Webb-Manly

Preview Friday, May 6, 2011 7:30 pm

Matinee Saturday, May 7, 2011 2:00 pm

and

Sunday, May 8, 2011 2:30 pm

Performances at

Spooky Action Theater

Universalist National Memorial Church

1810 16th St. NW Washington, DC

Students and Seniors \$10.00

General Admission \$15.00

The Production Staff

Producer	Andre M. Manly
Director	Cynthia L. Webb-Manly
Choreography	Baakari Wilder Jon Odom
Stage Manager	Andre M. Manly
House Managers	Natache Muschette Leris Bernard
Videographer	Christopher Coley

Special Thanks

Richard Heinrich and the staff at Spooky Action Theatre Company for working with my limited budget. The Ministry Staff of Universalist National Memorial Church. Ginger Moss and Martha Karl at The Actors' Center of Washington, DC, Brian Dragonuk, The Galvanize Folks, Professor Christine Barrigan, Central Washington University for listening to me cry, Professor Brenda Hubbard, Central Washington University for encouraging me to direct this project and introducing me to some incredible administrators, Professor Scott Robinson, Chair of the Theatre Department at Central Washington University for fatherly advice, Jasmine Simon, Prince George's Community College for helping with last minute casting, Keith Fulwood for sitting and waiting and finally all the Friends and Family who supported this endeavor.

Empowering Artists Dreams Present

**for black boys who have considered
homicide when the streets were
too much!**



Written by: Keith Antar Mason

Directed by: Cynthia L. Webb-Manly

Preview Friday, May 6, 2011 7:30 pm

Matinee Saturday, May 7, 2011 2:00 pm

and

Sunday, May 8, 2011 2:30 pm

Spooky Action Theatre Company

Universalist National Memorial Church

1810 16th St. NW Washington, DC

Director's Note

Directing this project has been an incredible journey for me. I read *For Black Boys Who Have Considered Homicide When The Streets Were Too Much*, back in 2008. I believed that the topics discussed by the playwright raised were issues that still plagued the African American Community. I loved that this play was written as a response to Ntozake Shange's play *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When The Rainbow Was Enuf*. I want the audience to walk away from seeing this production thinking about how they can become change agents and how they can become more active in their community. I have been blessed to have an incredible cast that has been eager and willing to take this journey with me. I have learned a lot from this cast about living Black in an America that has not always embraced them. Thanks to God and an incredibly loving and tolerant husband – I love you Andre!

Playwright's Note

In 1982, cabanne branch library hired us to mark their 25th anniversary we had started the afrikan's people art continuum theatre in st. louis mo for three days i got sick a fever and i wrote this choreopoem because Ntozake Shange was also invited to return to st. louis as this was her library when she lived here the reason i wrote this work was because the other co-founders were theatre majors and they complained that it wasn't any good monologues for them so i sat down at the office at Christ Church Cathedral and wrote this text i didn't even tell them i let them continue to rehearse another play that i had written for the library event then about month away i called our company members together for an informal reading that would take place at my mother's house it was a summer's day hot humid and my mother prepared a great feast for us to do this reading they sat and they read the text and i could tell that it was a workable script they all agreed and wanted to do this script for the library event we did and the community loved it New Sunny Mount's Choir and Arts Director gave us money to pay for the costumes and to put an ad in the local Black News Paper \$150.00 we bought colored t-shirts and ironed on their number and they each bought their own pair of jeans the add cost \$63.00 the show opened in Aug of 1982 and ran all the week through the

week before Christmas we had to do the Christmas Show at New Sunny Mount we performed a Christmas show and presented to New Sunny Mount a check for \$1500.00 because we found out what they had given us was the entire arts budget for that year.

i tell you this because creating a theatre ritual has always been a prayer to me even when i was just starting as a playwright and i wanted to write something as powerful as the work that Shange had created for those colored girls see we are black boys we know what color we are no matter what i hope i just reached into that spiritual place and revealed they way we fit in the hand of God

you can create community when you make theatre later on we became the Hittite Empire and we toured with this work all over the US and most of Europe when it first came out the press the black press didn't like it because they thought it was just going to be an attack on sisters but the Black audiences who saw the work always would come out to support the work so i hope you as an audience enjoy this version of my work i pray that you see the hand of God at work. Amen

keith antar mason 4-27-2011

Cast (in order of speaking)

Brother #19 Baakari Wilder

Brother #8 Joe Day

Brother #17 Andre Manly

Brother #3 D'metrius Durrell

Brother #34 Jonathan Randle

Brother #5 Jon Odom

Jonathan Randle – Has been in numerous productions in the area. He was recently seen in the Source Festival and Capital Fringe Festival.

Training: Howard University and Duke Ellington School of the Arts.

Past Credits include: *A Raisin In The Sun* at Prince George's Community College.

Baakari Wilder – is currently studying theatre at the University of Maryland at College Park, where he will be receiving a Bachelor of Arts degree in the spring of 2011. Past stage credits include:

(Ensemble) *Am I Black Enough Yet*, Cholly in *The Bluest Eye*, (Original cast member on Broadway) *Bring In Da Noise Bring In Da Funk*. He

received a Bessie Award for his performance and later replaced lead

actor/dancer Savion Glover. **Film Credits include:** *Bamboozled* by

Spike Lee.

Cast Bio's

Joe Day – Usually enjoying a comedic role, I have found this dramatic role a challenge. I am a native Washingtonian and member of Screen Actors Guild. I have acted on television, commercials and in many film projects, is also known for doing impersonations and stand-up comedy. As always I thank God for my acting and comedic abilities.

D'metrius Durrell – I am honored to have the opportunity to work with Cynthia and the immensely talented cast of *For Black Boys . . .* (Andre, Baakari, Jon O. Jon R. and Joe). **Training:** Howard University, Studio Theater Conservatory, Prince George's Community College, and The American Academy of Dramatic Arts in NYC. **Past credits include:** Walter Lee Younger in *A Raisin in the Sun* at PGCC (Hallam Award Best Leading Actor, Irene Ryan Regional Semifinalist), Zentasho in *Image Sounstage*, Studio's *Jonah, a Whale of a Tale*. Phillip in *So What Are we Fighting For?* in the Capitol Fringe Festival, and several local commercials and films.

Andre Manly – I am humbled and thankful to be a part of this production. I have watched its development from behind the scenes for sometime and I thank Cynthia for this opportunity to return to the stage. **Training:** Encore Theatre Company (Keith Fulwood and Daniel Brookings) and Shakespeare Scene Study with Douglas "Sincere" Johnson. **Past credits include:** Ramdoss in *The Little Princess* at Adventure Theatre and Crown in *Porgy and Bess* at American Century Theatre Company.

Jon Odom – I recently finished a tour with Open Dream Ensemble, an arts integration program for elementary and middle school students and the first children's web series, *The Adventures of The Open Dream Ensemble*. **Training:** North Carolina School of the Arts. **Past credits include:** Chino West Side Story 50th Anniversary at the Ravinia Festival, *Darren Take Me Out* with Theatre Alliance, *Tony Bangin'* at Waightown Stage, *Selig Gem of the Ocean*, *Jacques As You Like It*, *Poins Henry IV* and *Smerdykov The Brothers Karamaov*

Empowering Artists Dreams

presents

**for black boys who have considered
homicide when the streets were
too much!**



Written by: Keith Antar Mason

Directed by: Cynthia L. Webb-Manly

Preview Friday, May 6, 2011 7:30 pm

Matinee Saturday, May 7, 2011 2:00 pm

and

Sunday, May 8, 2011 2:30 pm

Performances at

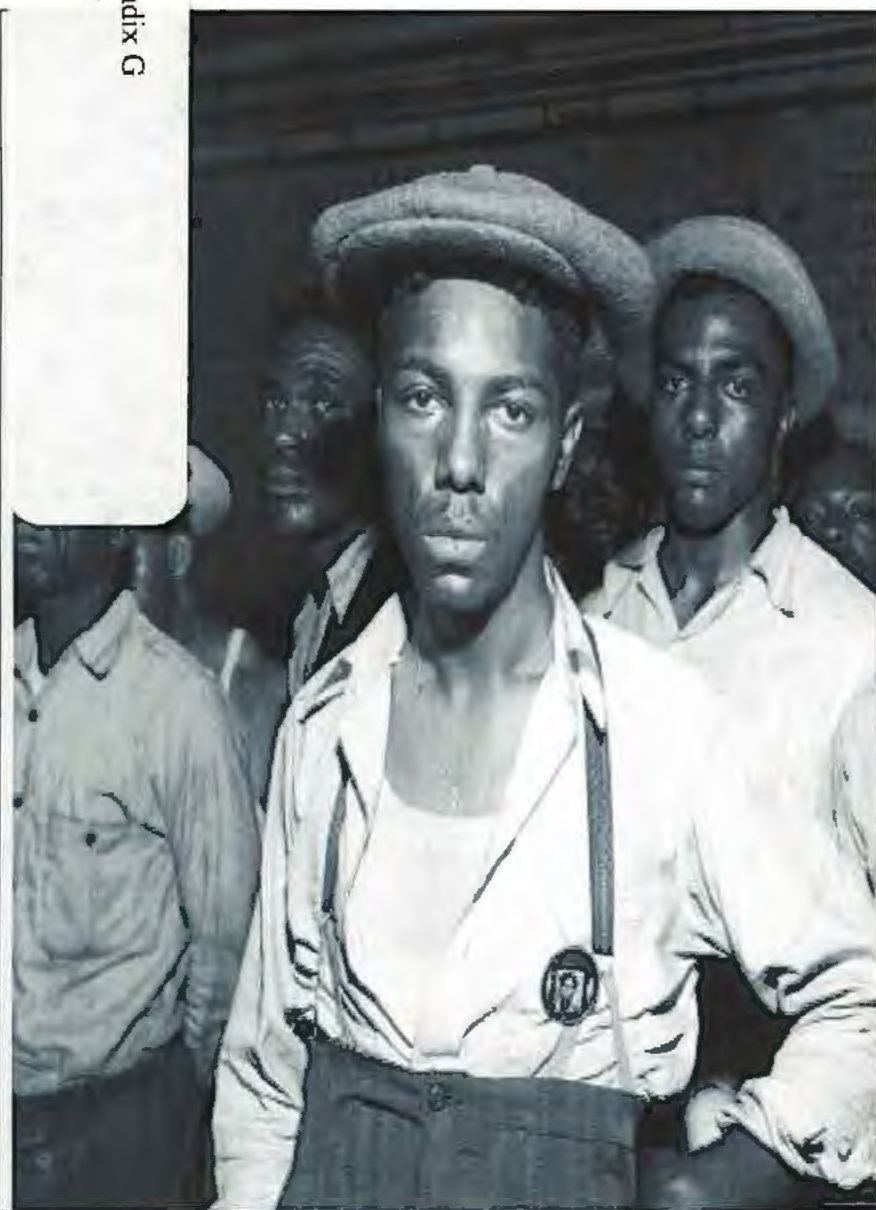
Spooky Action Theater

Universalist National Memorial Church

1810 16th St. NW Washington, DC

Students and Seniors \$10.00

General Admission \$15.00



**Empowering Artists Dreams
Present**

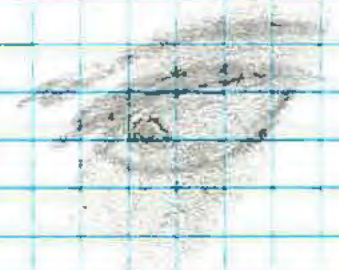
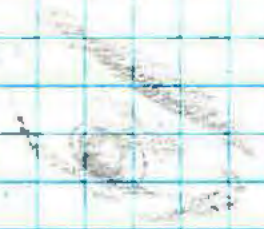
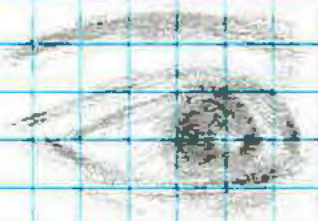
**for black boys who have considered
homicide when the streets were
too much!**

**Written by: Keith Antar Mason
Directed by: Cynthia L. Webb-Manly**

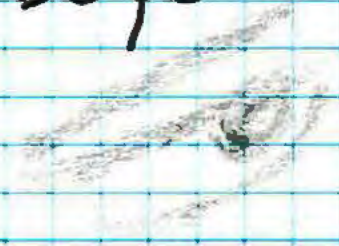
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And
Sunday, May 8, 2011 2:30 pm**

**Spooky Action Theatre Company
Universalist National Memorial Church
1810 16th St. NW Washington, DC**

**Students and Seniors \$10.00
General Admission \$15.00
Mature Audiences - Strong Language**



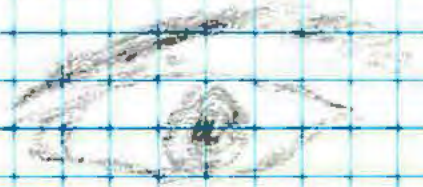
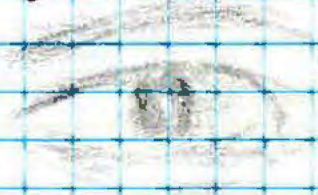
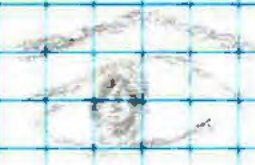
Boys



written
by: l

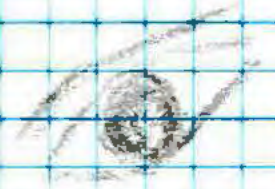
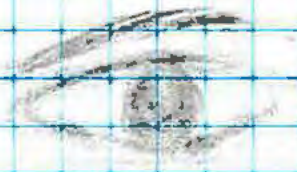
For

Black

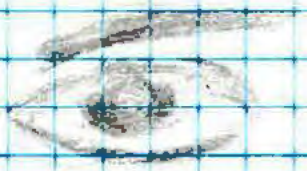
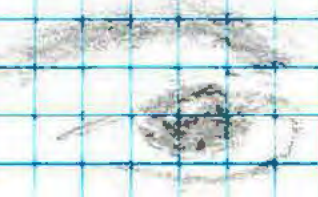


Who

Have

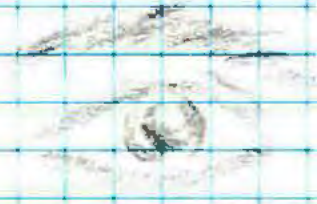


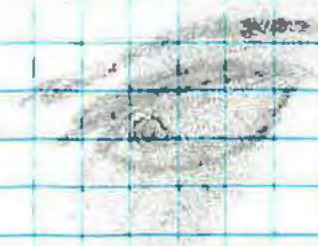
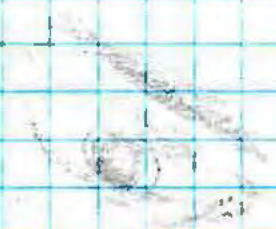
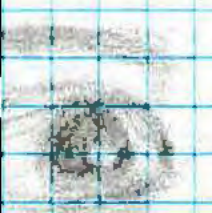
Considered



Homicide When The Streets

Were Too Much



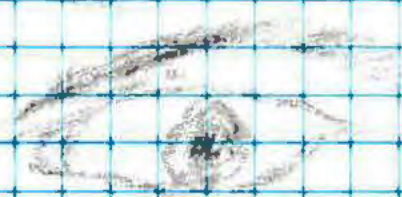
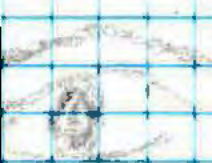


Boys

written
by: Keith
Antar
Mason

or

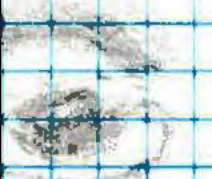
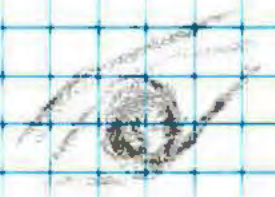
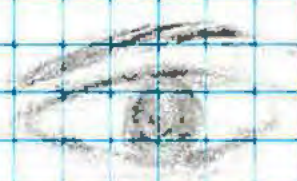
Black



Who

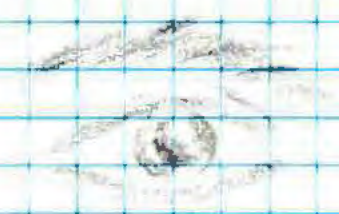
Have

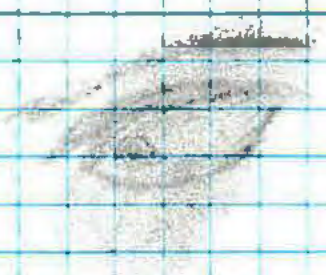
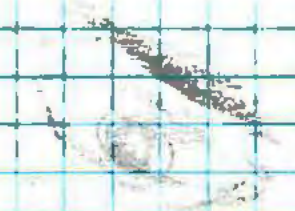
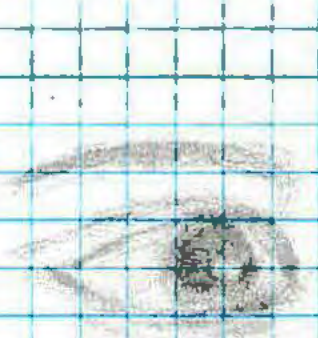
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Homicide When The Streets

Were Too Much



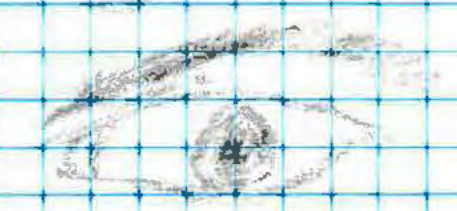
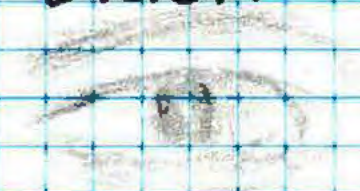


Boys

written
by: Keith
Antar
Mason

For

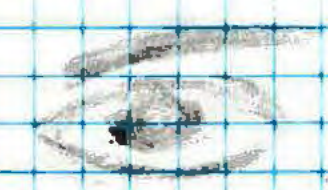
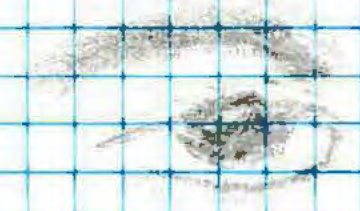
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Who

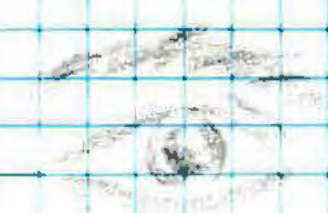
Have

Considered



Homicide When The Streets

Were Too Much



FOR BLACK BUSSES WE HAVE CONSIDERED HOW WE WILL HAVE WHEN THE

First Street

Main Street

Independence Avenue

STREETS WHERE TOO MUCH

written by: Keith Antar Mason

directed by: Cynthia L. Webb-Manly

Friday, May 6 @ 7:30 pm, Saturday, May 7 @ 3:00 pm and
Sunday May 8, 3:00 pm

FOR Black Boys Who Have

been
Hurted
on
the
streets
and
at
home



for

black boys

who have

considered

Suicide

when the

Streets

were too much

written by:

Keith

Antar

Mason

directed by

Cynthia

Webb-Marilyn

May

ACT 1 MUSIC

1- Marvin Gaye

2- Phyllis
Sunder

3- Eppers
Delight

4- RUNDME

5- Hsuke met
storm

6- storm

7- Mike Storme

8- siren
short

9- Helicopter

10 Siren

ACT 2 INTER MUSIC

- 1- If don't have
T. Partridge
- 2- Lady in my life
Mick Jagger
- 3- SANTANA
CLAPTON
- 4- HEARTS ON MIND
- 5- Secret garden
- 6- Backup to Texas
- 7- Wade in water
- 8 I'm so in love w/ you

NO MONOLOG

prezentarea



*VIDEO
Dress
Rehearsal*



Pre show



Empowering Artists Dreams



Letter of Agreement

This letter of agreement describes the basic terms and obligations as it relates to the use of For Black Boys Who Have Considered Homicide When The Streets Were Too Much, a graduate thesis project.

This letter of agreement, or contract, is designed to explicate the minimal responsibilities we owe to each other, in order to eliminate any confusion or misunderstandings. This agreement covers the terms listed below but does not and could not cover every issue that may arise.

The specific terms of the agreement are as follows:

1. This is graduate thesis project being directed by Cynthia L. Webb-Manly aka Empowering Artists Dreams who is able to pay an honorarium for the use of the writers (Keith Antar Mason) work in the amount of \$250.00.
2. The writer (Keith Antar Mason) and the director (Cynthia L. Webb-Manly) agree that Keith Antar Mason will be treated as an independent contractor and that no taxes will be withheld from payment.
3. The writer (Keith Antar Mason) and director (Cynthia L. Webb-Manly) agrees that any photographs, slides, or video tapes may be used for promotional and educational purposes only and that such items will be made available to the writer for archival purposes only.
4. The writer (Keith Antar Mason) agrees not to hold director (Cynthia L. Webb-Manly) or Empowering Artists Dreams liable for any loss of or damage.
5. The writer (Keith Antar Mason) and director (Cynthia L. Webb-Manly) agree that this letter of agreement shall be in force from the signing date below through May 8, 2011.

We look forward to working with you. Please complete the agreement by filling in the appropriate spaces on both copies and return a signed copy to the director.

Sincerely,

Cynthia L. Webb-Manly
Director

Andre M. Manly
Producing Manager

Agreed, this date 5-5, 2011

Keith Mason
Playwright
5650 Park Lane
St. Louis, MO 63136

Appendix K
Letter of Agreement
With Playwright

Please note:

This signature has been redacted due to security reasons.

Proposed and Actual Budget
 For Black Boys Who Have Considered Homicide When The Streets Were Too Much

Directed By: Cynthia L. Webb-Manly
 Produced By: Empowering Artists Dreams

Item Description	Purchased/Rented/ Manufactured	Needed/Wanted Justification	Proposed Cost	Actual Cost
Scripts	Photocopied (8 total)	Need	\$50.00	\$50.00
Royalties	2 performances	Need	\$125.00/ performance	\$250.00
Rehearsal space	Rented 4 day/week at \$10.00/hour 3 hours M/W/F 4 hours on Saturday	Need	\$500.00	\$500.00
Performance Space	Rented 8 days \$300.00/day	Need	\$1400.00	\$1400.00
Light/Sound	Rented 8 days	Need	\$25.00/day	N/C
Set up/Breakdown	Required	Need	\$250.00	\$250.00
Lighting Tech	Required 3 hours	Need	\$12.50/hr	\$36.50
PR	(flyers/posters	Need	\$50.00	\$80.00
Steps/theatre cube	Rented	Need	n/c	n/c
Wine bottles, soda cans, misc. bottles	Have	Need	n/c	n/c
Trash Can	Purchase	Need	\$29.00	\$31.00
Newspaper	Have	Need	n/c	n/c
Cell phone	Have	Need	n/c	n/c
Rope for noose	Purchase	Need	\$10.00	\$9.01
Knife (pocket)	Purchase	Need	\$12.00	\$12.00
Multi-colored tee shirts	Purchase 6 each (only purchased 4)	Need	\$4.00/each	\$16.00
Suede vest	Purchase	Need	\$4.00	\$4.00
Gray/black vest	Purchase	Need	\$4.00	\$4.00
Dress shirts	Purchase	Need	\$4.00/each	\$16.00

	6 each (only purchased 4)			
Neck tie	Need	Purchase	\$4.50	\$4.50
Sweater vest	Want	Purchase	\$3.50	\$3.50
Security Deposit	Need/to be refunded at end of production	Purchase	\$300.00	\$000.00
		Proposed Expenses	\$2787.50	
		Actual Expenses		\$2666.51