

CICELY A. KELLEY

Master of Fine Arts, Dance
University of the Arts
Philadelphia, PA

2021

PORTFOLIO

By

Cicely A. Kelley

Presented in
partial fulfillment of the requirements of
the degree of Master of Fine Arts in Dance
Low Residency Cohort

University of the Arts
Philadelphia, PA
2021

Director of Portfolio: _____ Director of MFA: _____
Jillian Peña Donna Faye Burchfield

MFA PORTFOLIO

Cicely A. Kelley

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

A RECOLLECTION OF WORKS & WRITINGS
CREATED FROM BIRTH TO SIMULTANEOUS
COMPLETION OF MY BA & MFA: 1982-2021

introduction

I'm so glad you're here with me to view, embrace, and experience a collection of my memories & works from adolescence to womanhood over the years. In truth, this process was an incredible healing journey for me as well as a lived experience of affirmations and warmth.

Through many fulfilling conversations with my parents while digging up pictures from my childhood, to speaking with colleagues and friends from my performance years, this portfolio will truly give you a glimpse into my growth and future self within my writings, drawings and pictures.

I'm just so damn proud and thankful that I get to share this with you!

Please enjoy this black woman's lived experiences!

table of contents

- 3** **INTRODUCTION**
welcome to my story
- 6** **LOVE LETTER**
a love letter to a dreaming
little black girl
- 7** **YA GOT IT FROM YA MAMA**
an ode to the black matriarch
& woman
- 8** **GRATITUDE**
homage to mom & dad
- 9** **MY BROTHER & I**
my dedication to you
- 10** **ARTIST STATEMENT**
my creative energy
- 14** **TEACHING STATEMENT**
my pedagogy
- 16** **PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION**
how i teach
- 22** **PRESS**
my work

32 **LIFE WRITINGS**
my story abbreviated

43 **BECOMING A SPELMAN WOMAN**
course writings & research

81 **UARTS MASTER'S RESEARCH**
Le Corps De La Femme Noir

98 **S.T.A.C.K.E.D**
a dance score

105 **BIG 42**
vision board

107 **WRITTEN NOTES**
summer study 2020

115 **RESUME**
career accomplishments

table of contents



hey cicely allyson,

I have tears of joy that fill my eyes as I write this love letter to you today, May 1, 2021. We are in the middle of a global pandemic, and you decided to complete not only your Bachelors degree, however your Masters degree simultaneously in addition to caring for your beautiful nine year old daughter Chloe Olivia. To add to this, you've also become a college professor at Spelman, you've traveled the world three times over, and have accomplished everything you placed on your purple wall in the bedroom at 1551 Boulevard Lorraine. You've suffered a lot of loss & disappointments, sacrificed damn near everything for these moments of success, got your heart broken, yet for whatever reason you continue to stand ten toes down to become a Master of YOUR craft and passion.

Dance never left us from when you started in the basement at Cascade United Methodist Church. Crazy how one moment as a child can literally change the projection of our future. I swear the turning points of this journey together is the reason you are who you are today. The woman, the voice, the mother, the educator, the friend.

At 39 years old, I have completely fallen head over heels with you. Every time I look at Chloe I see you. She loves the extra love too! She'll learn later in life why it's so passionate. Anyways, I'm so damn proud of you! Keep pushing my love!

Cicely A. Kelley

CICELY ALLYSON KELLEY, MFA

MY OLDER SELF TO MY ADOLESCENT SELF



Atlanta, GA. my mom Rhonda, Me, my little brother Jarrett. The Crab House at Rio Mall, Atlanta

you got it from ya mama!

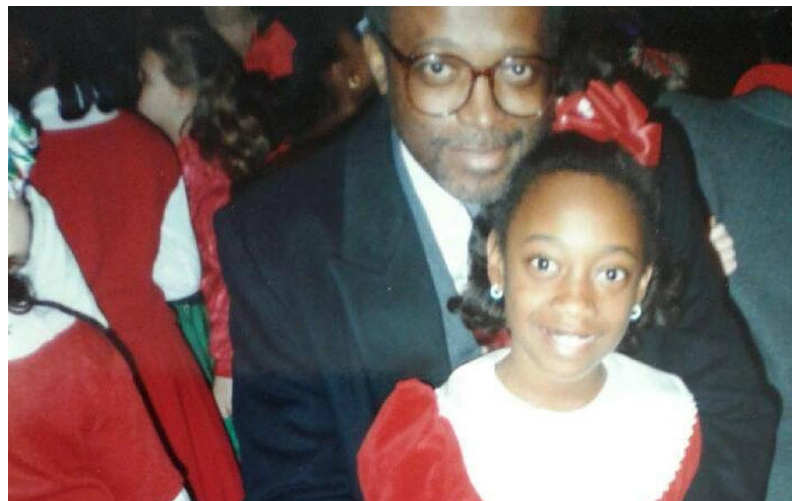
**FOCUS & INTENTION:
THIS BLACK DAMN BODY.**

The cool,
The calm,
The swag,
The anger,
The fear,
The color,
The passion,
The sexy,
The deviant,
The blood,

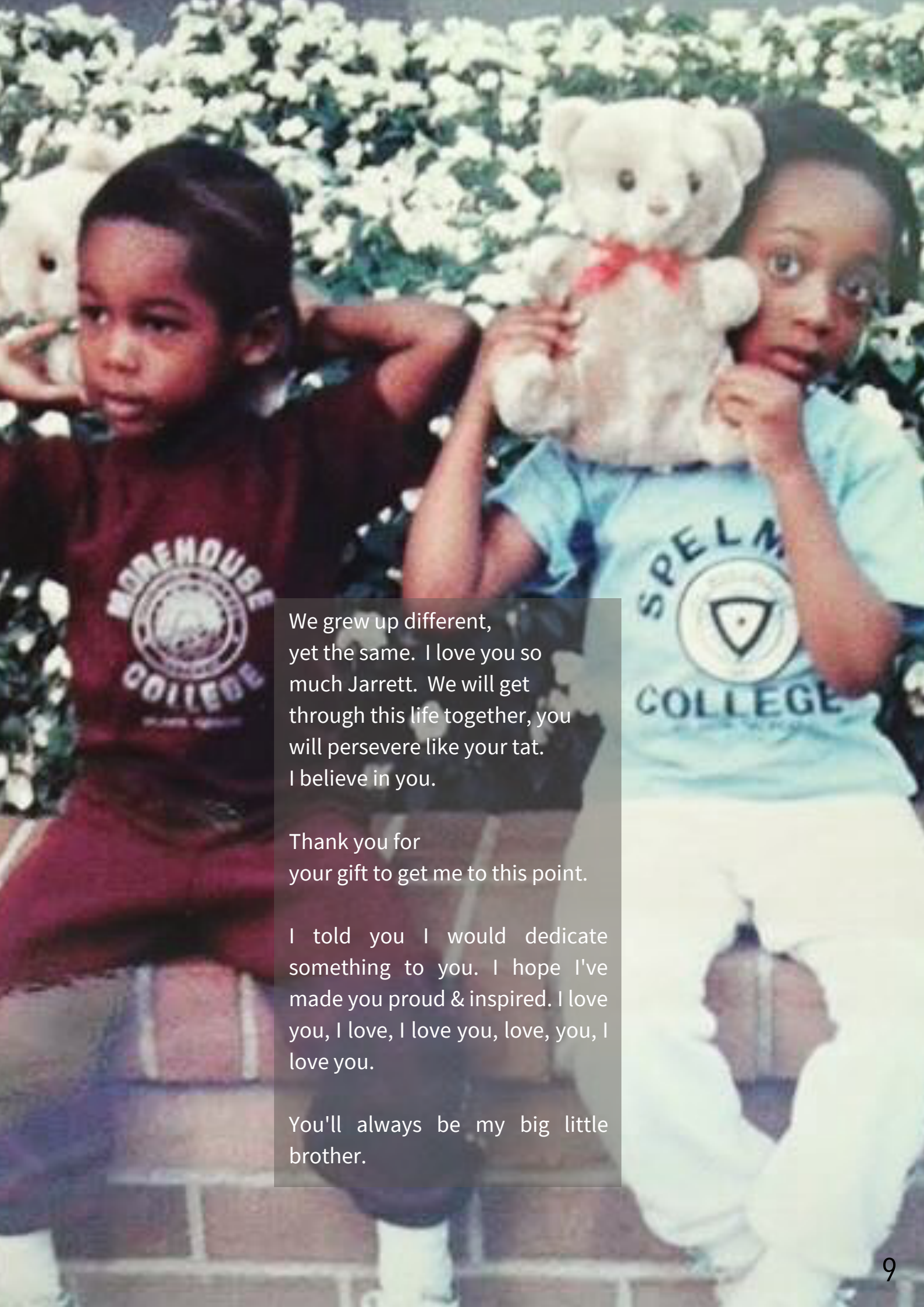
The sweat,
The freedom?
The hood
The classy
The queer
The beautiful
The pain
The BS
The bougie

My little Huxtable of a family. Amazing childhood, helicopter kisses, shelter. Black Love. Hidden pains, yet perseverance will be the definition to the nucleus of who we become. Last name Kelley from the Watkins & Bell bloodline. Silent pain, passive, non-confrontational & docile in nature. Yet prideful and the willingness to be adventurous. Yea... that sums us up!

roots, digging up &
living. embodied lived
experiences. life.
growing. my universe
within. future self.
gratitude.



mommy & daddy



We grew up different,
yet the same. I love you so
much Jarrett. We will get
through this life together, you
will persevere like your tat.
I believe in you.

Thank you for
your gift to get me to this point.

I told you I would dedicate
something to you. I hope I've
made you proud & inspired. I love
you, I love, I love you, love, you, I
love you.

You'll always be my big little
brother.

artist statement

As a creator, my passion is to create art that has all of the elements of my upbringing yet will be used as a vehicle to tell the stories of the black women, mothers, aunties, etc. for generations to come. I desire to make art that matters and inspires spectators to their core as well as make them challenge their own perspectives and biases. Work to make you think, fuel your soul, and/or frustrate you to induce change in whichever ecosystem you reside.

*I'm an ARTIST
& I'm sensitive about
my sh\$%!*

-Erykah Badu

Dance was never a choice for me. It truly was / is my destiny & purpose on this earth.

I'm always so nervous when asked this question...

In every space I've had the privilege to engage, I've learned so much about what this body can do and what it means within the context of my life's experiences. Not all were great, however I've had many *GRAND* experiences, enough to last a lifetime.

Photo Credits: Zack Lee, Ari Skin, Chuck Zlotnick, Black Coke, Self: MTV VMA's Back stage For Beyonce, Times Square at Radio City Music Hall, On set for BOLDEN, Working with Morgan Freeman for Last Vegas film, Toni Braxton Aruba Performance



teaching statement

My focus as an educator is to mold and cultivate dancers and artists, whose names may eventually be written in history books. My main objective is to develop talent that will transition seamlessly and successfully into the rigorous worlds of collegiate and professional dance.

Through committed partnerships, a firm curriculum and the skills obtained, mentees & students will have the opportunity to gain access to a vast network of career-enhancing individuals & experiences. These attributes will also help prepare aspiring talent for a successful and fulfilling career in the creative art form of dance.

My intentions are quite simple... I plan to develop artists with an emphasis & approach on commercial dance education, simultaneously with a strong foundation through excellent classical training, & a dynamic historical perspective. With the skills acquired, these individuals will become successful, as well as have the ability to provide for future generations with the same core knowledge, avant garde research, and a solid foundation.

BE REGULAR AND
ORDERLY IN YOUR LIFE,
SO THAT YOU MAY BE
VIOLENT & ORIGINAL
IN YOUR WORK.

-Gustave Flaubert

philosophy of education

Picture a classroom filled with dance students, intimately engaged within their own space, time, or phrase, experiencing their own unique breakthrough as an artistic vessel. Insert the voice and pedagogy of passion, determination, skill, research, encouragement and development of a work ethic from an instructor whose primary goal is to challenge students to achieve mastery of their skill and trust in their talent. This is my true belief on the instruction & development of a commercially and technically sound dance artist.

My philosophy and method as an educator is to build an undeniable strength in the foundation of my student's jazz technique, in conjunction with a theory and skill focused approach to grasping the strategy for a successful career in the world of commercial dance. My methodology begins with a sweat inducing center floor warm up focused on isolations, stretch, alignment and balance of the body, fused with the strength of the Horton Technique & polycentric rhythms of an Africanist Aesthetic . We then move to progressions across the floor where the student is challenged to focus on the transfer of their weight to quick paced phrasing emphasizing musicality, accents, and change of direction.

The experience concludes with challenging material that incorporates the technical development of the warm up and the stimulating phrasing from the across the floor progressions. The intent, focused while building the student's technical skill, is also layered with the language and theory of a real world commercial atmosphere. Students will gain an understanding of the structure and protocol for audition etiquette, expectations and comprehension of a casting breakdown, how to slate, creation of their resume and reel, and most importantly how to brand themselves for a reputable career as an educated artist.

The overview of all the instructed classes will be met with the expectation of the student to end their academic year with their very own artistic project. The project will include development of their resume, headshot, reel and website, to equip them with the necessary tools to enter the competitive world of commercial dance. To assess the student's skill development of their jazz technique as well as comprehension of the expectations for a viable commercial dance career, students will be tested for measurables with memorization & research of each section of the Horton-fused warm up.

Group and individual theory plus applied skill based projects will be assigned to test the student's approach to etiquette, protocol, and creation of their very own artistic project.

Success of my methodology can be found in many of the scholars I've mentored, trained, & artistically developed from ages 5 to adult. The success of my philosophy and methodology is reflected in the placement of my students on national and international tours of major artists, national commercials, SAG-AFTRA introduction, and numerous scholarships to attend intensive study in some of the world's most renowned dance institutions.

I continue to improve myself as a teacher with numerous research, development, & intensive dance classes to enhance my personal experience, as well as that of my students. Teaching truly is my passion and service to the future pioneers of the world of dance.

I will never forget the first time I was allowed to lead a dance class when I was a teenager. My dance teacher at Tazz School Of Dance, allowed me to become the assistant company rehearsal director, and for every rehearsal I would lead the warm up before we began company repertoire. The same happened when I was a senior in high school. I was given my own dance class to instruct for a grade to all of the incoming freshman dancers.

I had no idea this would mold me into the educator I am today.

I like to think that I am a vessel or a conduit if you will. I have such a passion for dance, and I only want the best for those I have the opportunity to instruct.

Photo Credits: Turn It Up Dance Challenge, Tyler Perry Studios, Complexions Contemporary Ballet, Spelman College, CBS, Illa A Hip Hop Musical



Press

Excerpt article. More can be viewed on my website:
www.cicikelley.me

Q&A: CiCi Kelley on choreographing the roots of jazz in *Bolden*, the motion picture

DARYL FOSTER

APRIL 30, 2019



Archival photo of Buddy Bolden, back row, second from right

New Orleans between 1885 and 1910 was a place like no other; jazz was born there amid a diversity of people, philosophies, and possibilities, and has proven the most definitive artistic symbol of American democracy. –Wynton Marsalis

I remember being a dancer in the process of bringing the motion picture *Bolden* to life, and the feeling was quite raw. Twelve hours a day were spent glued to my partner — connected on a soul level, connected to my ancestors and the incessant downbeat of Wynton Marsalis' score. When the dancers were called to set, we would often joke that it was time to "throw that ass in a circle," referring to a popular song at the time that perfectly described the movement. Bodies, connected at the hip, gyrated in a circular motion. Men lifted women high into the air while others dipped and scrubbed the floor with sensual abandon.

Our costumes depicted a working-class lot — in some cases, dingy from a hard day's work. The sweat and heat of the room meshed with the music to create an authentic vibe that will captivate viewers in the very real experience that is the birth of jazz.

Bolden — the \$100 million film that will be released in theaters Friday — tells the story of New Orleans musician Buddy Bolden, who is credited with inventing jazz. There are no recordings of his music, but Bolden was Louis Armstrong's chief influence, and his story is one of jazz music's greatest mysteries.

It has been nearly 21 years since producer and director Dan Pritzker began working on the film. In that time, several versions of the script were written and multiple edited versions of the current film were made, all because Pritzker wanted to ensure that this story was not only told but also told in such a way that showed Buddy Bolden honestly and completely.

Then Pritzker brought in choreographer CiCi Kelley, who, in partnership with dance-maker Charles "Bubba" Carr, successfully captured the spirit of Bolden's era. They cast more than 300 dancers whose backgrounds included ballet and tap as well as social, commercial and modern

dance genres. The energy and character brought forth from all of these styles combined with Kelley's sassy nature and her embodied blood memories of African American vernacular movement to recreate the energy of jazz clubs of that time. This was both the genesis of jazz music and where African American vernacular dance would begin its evolution toward swing, Lindy hop, vaudeville, jazz and eventually hip-hop.

An Atlanta native, Kelley has helped drive the Atlanta commercial dance industry forward. She has trained hundreds of dancers who now appear in film, television, music and sports industries. Kelley currently runs the program 3D (Dare Dream Dance), a passion project to train future dancers.



(Photo by Darius K. Jackson)

ARTS ATL: What is it about your background as an Atlanta native that was right for Bolden?

CiCi Kelley: My primary role on the choreography team was to embody and communicate the African American experience during the time period and life of Buddy Bolden. I was also able to be cast as a dancer in the film and live in the movement.

It was an honor to play and experience both roles surrounded by this beautiful dance community. Outside of who I am as an artist, I leaned on my grandfather, who is 97 years old, to gain some inspiration and insight on what America was like almost 100 years ago. His mini history lessons allowed me to translate the emotion and struggle into some captivating movements. That, alongside Bubba's creativity, made us a great team for this project.

ARTS ATL: As a woman of color, do you find it difficult to gain positions where you can take the lead as a choreographer, as you did in Bolden?

Kelley: In this new age of entertainment, I find that the process is vastly different from when I was a young dancer climbing the ropes. Then, it was about your level of training and the amount of work that you put into your craft. Now, there is greater aspiration to the celebrity lifestyle, and it is fairly easy to conquer, as long as you have a smartphone and a gimmick. Behind the scenes, it is still very male-dominated, with the male gaze and opinion very much [controlling] many of the choices being made. However, with the standing power of pioneer women like Oprah Winfrey, Shonda Rhimes, Beyonce and many more, the black woman has an undeniable presence and voice to express her experience and creativity.

ARTS ATL: How were you able to ensure the authenticity of the movement and prepare such large groups, scene after scene?

Kelley: There were over 300 dancers hired for this film with a wide range of talent and training. Everyone came with a different background and experience. However, it all came together once the movement was placed on their bodies and the intention was set. The authenticity of the movement was captured first through hours of research watching previous dance films and looking at printed images from that time. We also had many conversations with the dancers during rehearsals to gain an understanding of how the movement fit on their bodies and how they were choosing to use the movement to create their characters. Each couple had their own story, which makes a difference when you stand back and look at the entire group. You begin to see individuals.

ARTS ATL: What is next for Atlanta? Do you see another Bolden-sized film project for the dancers in our community? What do dancers in Atlanta need to do to get ready for the next wave of opportunities?

Kelley: There is so much in store for the Atlanta dance community, and with Georgia's tax credit, I believe there

will be more films of this scope coming to our city. To stay ready for opportunities, dancers need to stay in class. Train, train, train! Create a plan and invest in yourselves to reach these goals. You must create discipline within yourself, especially if you have a vision. There is nothing easy about pursuing a career in the arts; however, it is possible. It takes talent, a lot of discipline, education and self-awareness to make it. Don't get caught up in the hype. Follow your own path, seize and monetize it.

ARTS ATL: The film *Bolden* explored the history of jazz music and its founder Buddy Bolden. The film employed many black actors and dancers. Do you believe that is why Atlanta was chosen as a primary location for filming?

Kelley: Given the history of Atlanta and the rise of the elite African American family, Civil Rights leaders and Sweet Auburn Avenue, I do think Atlanta was the ideal home base to find talent for this film.

My family migrated to this city because the opportunities to “make it” were so great. Thus, the offspring from my parents’ generation have continued this legacy into the present day. With the birth of the Atlanta hip-hop music culture and the 1996 Olympics, Atlanta became the hot spot for many entrepreneurs and creative artists to prosper in their fields. I am truly a product of Atlanta.

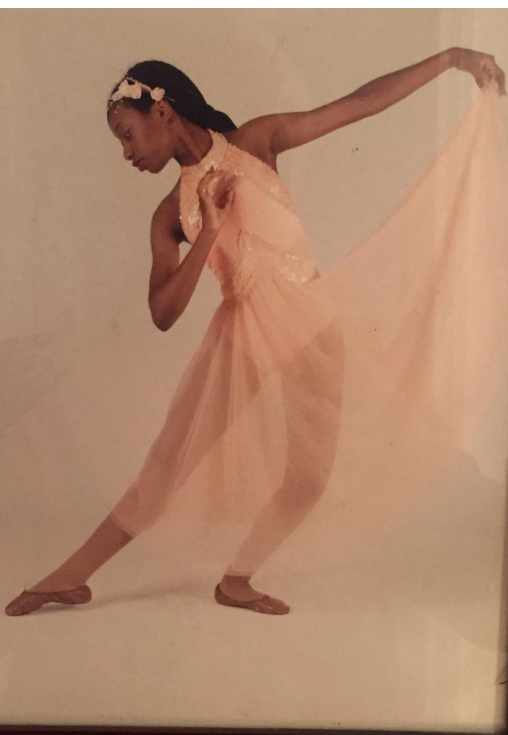
I learned at a young age that I was the "rainbow baby."

from my parents' marriage. I was supposed to be the middle child squished in between two boys!

I often wonder what life would have been like if Hank was here...

He is somewhere a part of my ancestral soul

Photo credits: Kelley, Bell, Watkins Family, North Atlanta High School,
Keiko Guest



Life Writings

My life story! So I definitely have a story to tell. My father always tells me that I need to write a book!

Though for some reason I have the hardest time talking about myself, however I do realize that in sharing my story it may help someone else if they desire to deeply contemplate their creative practice within their career field.

So, here we go.... I'm from Atlanta, GA, a city that is full of creative energy and black excellence. Dance has always been a focus in my life as it relates to how I contribute to the ATL creative vibe. I was introduced to dance in the basement of Cascade United Methodist Church,



as my mother needed a babysitter while she attended choir rehearsal. I don't know what it was about my black, pink, purple, and blue leotard with pink tights that drew me to the art form, however I never let it go from that day. From there, I continued to train throughout my adolescence, and into my teenage years. I sing praises to Gary Harrison, Asha Thomas, Terri & Dawn Axam, Lenard Roberson, & Nicole Murray.

I'll never forget that I actually quit dancing for two years because one of my teachers was so hard on me, and I didn't know how to handle the pressure. I eventually made my way back to dance and realized my lesson in that season was perseverance.

I've always been incredibly hard on myself...

I'm so thankful for the teachers from my youth that never gave up on me.

I graduated from North Atlanta High School in 2001, left Atlanta and was eagerly awaiting my freshman year at the University Of The Arts in Philadelphia. The training, theory courses, & faculty I engaged with was an experience like no other. My understanding of dance was completely revolutionized from what I thought I knew. I am literally who I am today because of the curriculum I embraced at UArts. I was only able to attend UArts for 2 years, as I had to take a leave of absence after my spring semester in 2003, due to my mother suffering a job loss at Morris Brown College. This job loss affected my brother's enrollment at Morehouse College as he was able to receive a waived tuition for his courses & study. Unfortunately 2 kids in college at the same time added additional financial stress on my family and I made the decision to leave my studies and go full throttle in pursuing my career as a professional dancer. I recall begging my parents to allow me to come out of school anyways so that I could pursue my passion back home as well as in LA or NYC.

Hindsight is 20/20, and I now realize in my adult life why they fought so hard to keep me in Philly, however life clearly had other plans.

"Baby girl, sometimes LIFE gets in the way of LIVING."

- Charles Kelley (my father)

Upon my return to Atlanta during the summer of 2003, I immediately hit the ground running with every audition, class and networking opportunity I could find. The dance industry in Atlanta in 2003 was a completely different field compared to what it is now. You truly had to hustle and be in the right place at the right time in order to be "seen." My first steady gig was traveling the night club circuit as a Go Go dancer in some of ATL's most prominent nightclub establishments. It was a wild and unforgettable time in my life. Go Go dancing is truly where I built my skill for free styling and capturing a crowd's attention while on stage. It was hard but fun work, because the club scene was a breeding ground for the next upcoming artist and possible opportunity. Coincidentally, this is where I landed my first professional tour. I'll never forget dancing my butt off at Club 1150, and being approached by the tour producer for Stir The Senses, who happened to be looking for one additional dancer for the LL Cool J and Music Soulchild leg of the tour. I booked the gig, and toured with these artist for a whole year.

Definitely one of the most confidence boosting moments in my career as a dancer.

Once I returned home from touring, I realized if I wanted to book bigger opportunities and more tours, I was going to have to spend some time in Los Angeles to increase my network & visibility. I never made it out to LA full time, however I was never afraid to purchase a plane ticket whenever I was made aware of an opportunity or audition. By this time, Atlanta was really becoming a powerhouse in the entertainment field as it related to film & tv, recording artists, and major productions utilizing the resources and tax credit benefit for producing work in the state of GA. One of my biggest career opportunities & accomplishments was a result of this benefit for artists and producers. In the summer of 2006, I auditioned for Beyonce's award winning album *B'Day* in Atlanta, and was selected to be featured in her "Get Me Bodied" Music video. Three years later, I was selected again to dance in her 2009 MTV VMA "Single Ladies" performance. It was by far the most intense audition I had ever experienced. I auditioned in Atlanta and then again in New York because I wanted to make sure they saw me! When I arrived at the audition in NYC, I'll never forget her former choreographer Frank Gatson asking me why I came to NYC to audition again. I simply stated, "because I want this job."

Two weeks later I received the call that I was selected, and flew out to Los Angeles to begin filming for two weeks with this iconic artist. Having this opportunity on my resume truly was a game changer for me for the future projects I was able to obtain. I always said that if I booked Beyonce, J.Lo, or Missy Elliot during my early dancing years, then I would be set and feel credible enough to transition into my choreographic practice. Thankfully, I landed Beyonce first and then J.Lo second for her feature in LL Cool J's music video "Control Myself."

Around late 2007 is when I began to transition my career into becoming a choreographer and really honing my artistic voice within the field. Within my choreographic practice, I was able to set work on some of the world's most prolific stages and venues. I quickly learned early on how to manifest my vision for these stages & on the many talents I selected to work with for these opportunities. The skill of choreography is vastly different than the art form of dance creation. One must know when you're literally doing too much and trying to cram 50-11 eight counts into a short phrase. It's simply not necessary to overwork the material and the dancers' bodies. I believe having this understanding is what has provided me with the longevity to still be very active in my field. Working with high profile artists, actors, or novice dancers will truly widen your range in relation to what you create. The magic will always be there through

Intelligent dance and transition choices, however I grew to embrace and understand that the goal was to make the entire production excellent rather than jumbled with ideas that may not fit! For some, this is a huge ego hit. When working in the commercial field however, it is about your signature style & professionalism, however most importantly it's about ensuring that the artist gives a stellar performance. This understanding translated over into my pedagogical practice as well.

From 2009 to early 2011, I worked with Toni Braxton as her choreographer for her film & TV appearances as well as her Russian tour and spot dates in the Caribbean. This was an exciting experience as I got to visit the Kremlin palace in Moscow, Russia. I had never seen history in this way, especially as a black woman. I don't recall experiencing any blatant racism, however I do remember the security detail being extremely overprotective of us. Thinking back on it, I question what the performance was for given this reality for extreme security.





Working for Toni Braxton brings back so many fond memories as it was my last official tour as a dancer and on the road as a choreographer. Reason being is I became pregnant in March of 2011, and soon gave birth to my beautiful daughter Chloe Olivia. I remained active throughout my pregnancy, however I focused my energy more into my passion for educating and mentoring. Teaching dance and performing dance always gave me the same high so it was a natural, necessary and a beneficial transition for me to embrace. I taught and managed primarily at Gotta Dance Atlanta, however I was able to set work and educate at many other local and national studios. My irons were sharpened during these formative years, for facilitating education within dance as a practice.

I learned how to create curricula for proper matriculation, designing portfolios, presentations, experiential marketing, and the importance of brand awareness. I produced a choreographers showcase that received national attention entitled Phazes Of Love for several years. I picked up so many important skill sets that would later land me in a dream role that I would've never seen coming as an adjunct professor at Spelman College.

In the fall semester of 2017, I started as a faculty member at Spelman College under the direction of Professor T. Lang. This woman is the main reason I was given the opportunity to instruct and guide Spelman Dance majors into the understanding of their greatness as dance practitioners & scholars. This opportunity and her avant garde style of leadership meant a lot to me, as it confirmed everything I had built and accomplished within my career as a dancer, choreographer, and educator.

Being around so many highly intellectual black women in addition to Spelman being my mother's alma mater, really inspired me to finish out my undergraduate degree to pursue a career in higher education. I enrolled as a Pauline E. Drake Scholar at Spelman during the fall 2019 semester, while also maintaining my classes as a faculty member. I knew I wanted to continue my career as an educator in academia, so I embraced

the next step to apply for my Masters in order to do so.

In the spring of 2020 in the middle of the pandemic, I was accepted back into my original alma mater at The University Of The Arts on a Lifetime Experience scholarship & Dance Fellowship in pursuit of earning my MFA in dance. During the summer of 2020, I studied remotely with my cohort via Zoom for all of my preliminary courses. During the fall & spring semesters of 2020-2021, I simultaneously studied for my Master's, Bachelor's, virtually instructed my third grade daughter, maintained all of my courses as a faculty member at Spelman, and choreographed three major film & tv productions. This was all done while living through a global pandemic and trying to maintain health and safety for myself and family. I don't know how I did it, however I ended the year with a 4.0 at UArts & a 3.7 GPA at Spelman College!

I'm now embracing and preparing for this next chapter of my life and my Big 42 vision board. I emphasize the number 42 as this is the age that I will be in three years, and I hope to accomplish everything I've set out for.

I'm thankful, I'm grateful, and I'm ready to embrace and embody the 40th chapter of my life in January of 2022.

Becoming A Spelman Woman

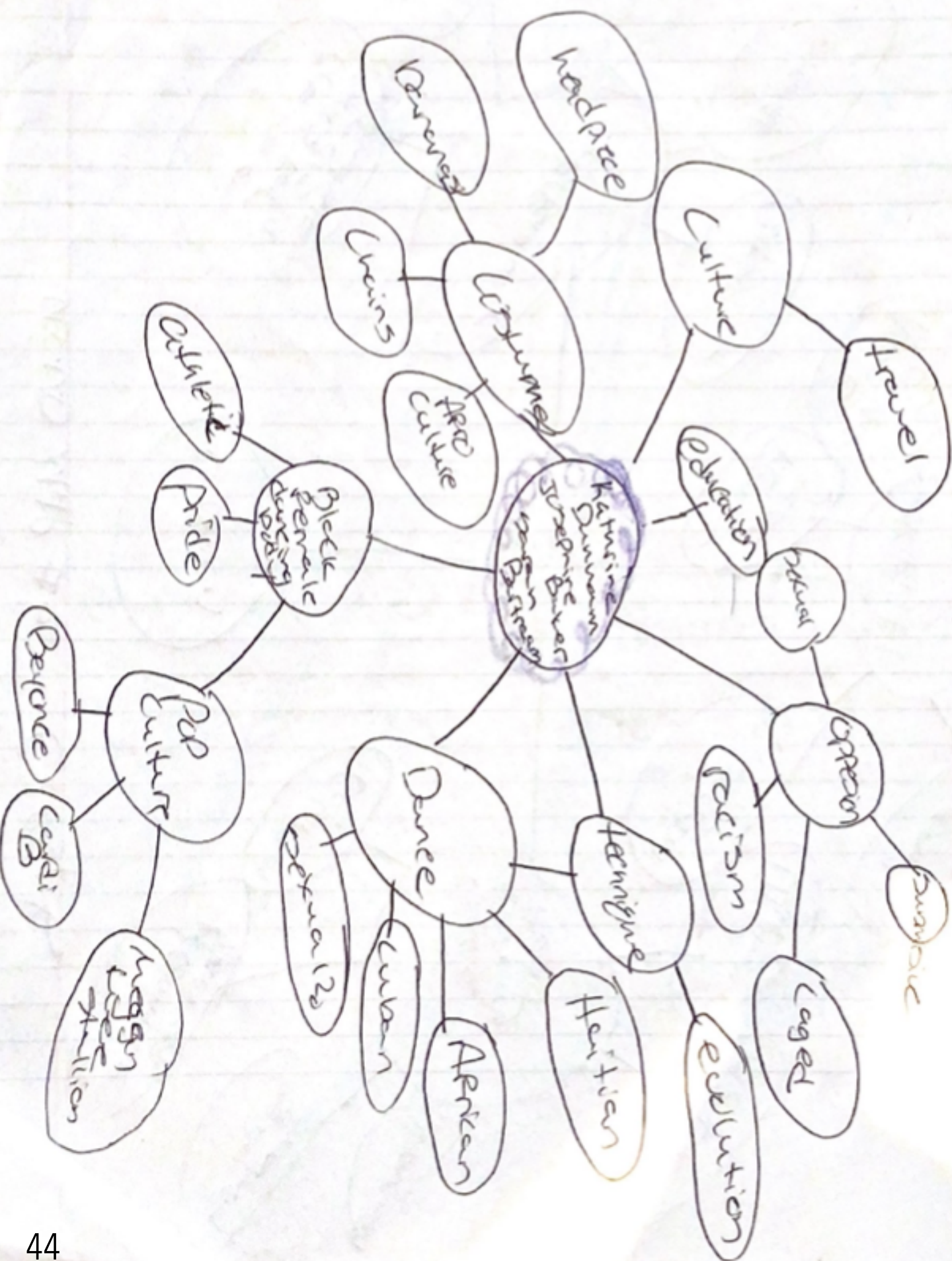
Excerpts of Course Research & Writings as a
Pauline E. Drake Scholar
At Spelman College
Fall 2019 to Spring 2021

Following The Legacy of the Six Women In My Family That
Graduated Before Me.

Graduation date: May 2022.

My Mothers Golden year of the 50th anniversary of her 1972
graduation.

10/11/20



Violence & Savagery: African People Vs. Anglo Saxon

Critical Essay

Whether subtle or intentional, the act of violence is a clear action to execute control over a subject or mass of people. On the contrary and quiet argumentative, the act of violence can also be a means to an end to accomplish freedom when met with desperate circumstances that violate the meaning and value of one's life. Through exploration of the Transatlantic & Indian Ocean slavery systems, the meeting of violence was a common occurrence from the colonizers against their captives. This brute force was brought on by a torturous and ruthless empire against people who were not equipped in weapon form to equally fight for themselves as captives; however there was one occurrence where the African people utilized their resources and accomplished a victory against their adversaries on Haitian soil (Haitian Revolution, Toussaint l'Overture). Drawing on these two similar yet differing perspectives on the use of violence, I would like to explore the question at hand as it relates to if our violent society is the result of the construction of knowledge. I plan to explore the practices of violence within the British Royal empire (Savage Warfare) and its use of violence as a means for control & power. This same thought process is what I would equally like to explore with the African Royal Empire (Songhi Empire) during the Transatlantic Slave Trade, and why violence between tribes was the common answer for power of land and neighboring tribes. To conclude I would like to discover how both empires in their own right and use of violence, came to a head in Caribbean soil, as well as how the use of violence from the past has affected both nations from then until current day.

Is the legacy of violence and savage behavior, a direct element within the genealogy of the British Royal Family or Anglo Saxon? Viewing my question through the lens of the Tudor dynasty with Patriarchy of King Henry VIII, the use of violence and unimaginable brute force against other kingdoms as well as the many women he laid with and married, was all to common under his rule of England. Within his youthful years, King Henry VIII was described as an athletic gentleman with a high powered sex drive and a very competitive nature toward anything where he can display his masculinity toward others. The testosterone driven man in my perspective was the perfect storm for the misuse of power as well as a possessive controlling nature to command people and even the church to move accordingly to his wishes and desires. Psychologist J. C. Flügel believed that Henry VIII had an Oedipus complex in that he wanted to get rid of his father and “succeed to his father’s place of authority” and possess his mother, and that this affected his marriages and the way that he treated women. He had conflicting tendencies: He desired, but also hated, a sexual rival... (Why Was Henry VIII a Tyrant, Claire 2010). In my humble opinion, King Henry VIII displayed tendencies of a classic narcissist. The calculated and day to day strategic decision making was built on self indulgence and display of grandeur power plus control.

Viewing this specific blood line of the British Royal family suggests in my opinion, that the need for power over people and nations was a direct reflection on a selfish motivation and indulgence for life. The need was based on what makes “self” happy versus what is best for the general body of people under his/their rule. This same mode of operation is easily noted in the violence and tyranny in later royal blood lines within British history. The constructed knowledge utilized to keep the African people in check mentally and violently physically, was based off the need for the European elite to live a care free lifestyle. Having the ability to enjoy exotic delicacies not found on European soil such as Sugar & selected fruits from the Caribbean, or tobacco & cotton from the Americas was a true luxury during the Transatlantic slave trade. However, for the upper echelon of European and furthermore American society, these enjoyable and seemingly innocent items were delivered by blood, violence, and unconscionable pillagery of human capitol. The vast wealth, considerable privilege, and seemingly limitless opportunity associated with American

elites were all achieved on the backs of impoverished Africans and subjugated Native Americans (Reversing Sail, Enslavement p.82).

Flipping my perspective to the other end of the spectrum as well as utilizing my findings as a point of comparison, I would like to set my sights on the African peoples use of violence as a means for control and pose the same question: “Is the legacy of violence & savage behavior a direct element within the genealogy of our ancestors African Tribes and kingdoms?” A black woman myself, I found the exploration and discovery of my ancestors use of violence a truly humbling experience. When viewing our history books, we are typically displayed as victims of European tyranny and not as the oppressors within our own communities. In truth, we weren’t necessarily innocent in our part of the Transatlantic Slave Trade...

With the root of the Transatlantic Slave trade being an economic movement, the many different tribes and kingdoms of Africa had blood on their hands as well in the involvement of the capture of slaves. “...It is equally undeniable that as was true of the Transsaharan trade, there were African groups and governments involved in the capture of other Africans, together with instances of cooperation between European and African Traffickers.” (Reversing Sail, Transatlantic Moment p.72). Most of the Africans that were sold or given to the European slave traders were cast out of the tribe for crimes committed within their community etc. Raids, kidnapping, and warfare produced most captives (Reversing Sail, Transatlantic Moment p. 73). In hindsight, this realization stirs emotion and insight into the many issues of our present day descendants.

The notion that our own African people sold us to European slave traders in it of itself is a form of violence. There is a disheartening psychological process that's endured when realizing that you are being sold into chattel slavery by your own home. The ramifications of this “black on black” violence is massively present in our current day communities. This innate distrust of your own people, plus the construction of knowledge once the Africans reached the Americas furthered the mental warfare of past and present day African Americans...

As a child, I never knew how much my grandma Sarah, great grandma mama Gail, & my grandma Lilliacae Mae would influence who I would become as a woman. My grandmothers were the epitome of "Big Mama."

If I could just lay my cheek in their hands or on their lap one more time...

They are THEE reason I love the way I do, and why I want to be big mama when I'm seasoned and wise.

Photo credits: Kelley, Bell, Watkins Family, Southwest Montessori School



Diversity & Equity

Racial, Sexual Identity, Age, Class, Gender, Ability

Upon viewing the historic crowning of Zozibini Tunzi (Miss Universe 2019), Nia Franklin (Miss America 2019), Chelsie Kryst (Miss USA 2019), and Kaliegh Garris (Miss Teen USA 2019), four black women will now lead this world into a new decade with many conversations and unique intersectionalities surrounding diversity, gender, colorism, and a interesting viewpoint on generational differences in contrast to the men and women of the diaspora that have positively or negatively laid the foundation as to how diversity and or affirmative action affects us present day. I plan to discuss how all of these identity intersections of the diaspora contrast generationally from this monumental moment for black women, by relying on the thoughts and written works from the likes of Booker T. Washington, Ida B. Wells, and Audre Lorde. The tense relationship between Booker T. Washington and Ida B. Wells sheds a powerful conversation on the roles and expectations of black people, women, and the social construct of what the society during their time expected black people to be. During their time frame, the thought of these incredible four young ladies would have been completely impossible, yet Ida B. Wells had this exact vision for our future.

Transitioning later into the 20th century, Audre Lorde was the seed that began to argue and move mountains as it relates to gender equality, race, and sexual identity. Tunzi, Franklin, Kryst, and Garris are virtually the daughters that are benefiting from the work of Ida B. Wells and Audre Lorde pioneered work and literature. Moving into the 21st century, gender equality, sexuality, and racial constructions are at the forefront of most debates and conversations, yet our present-day generation does not

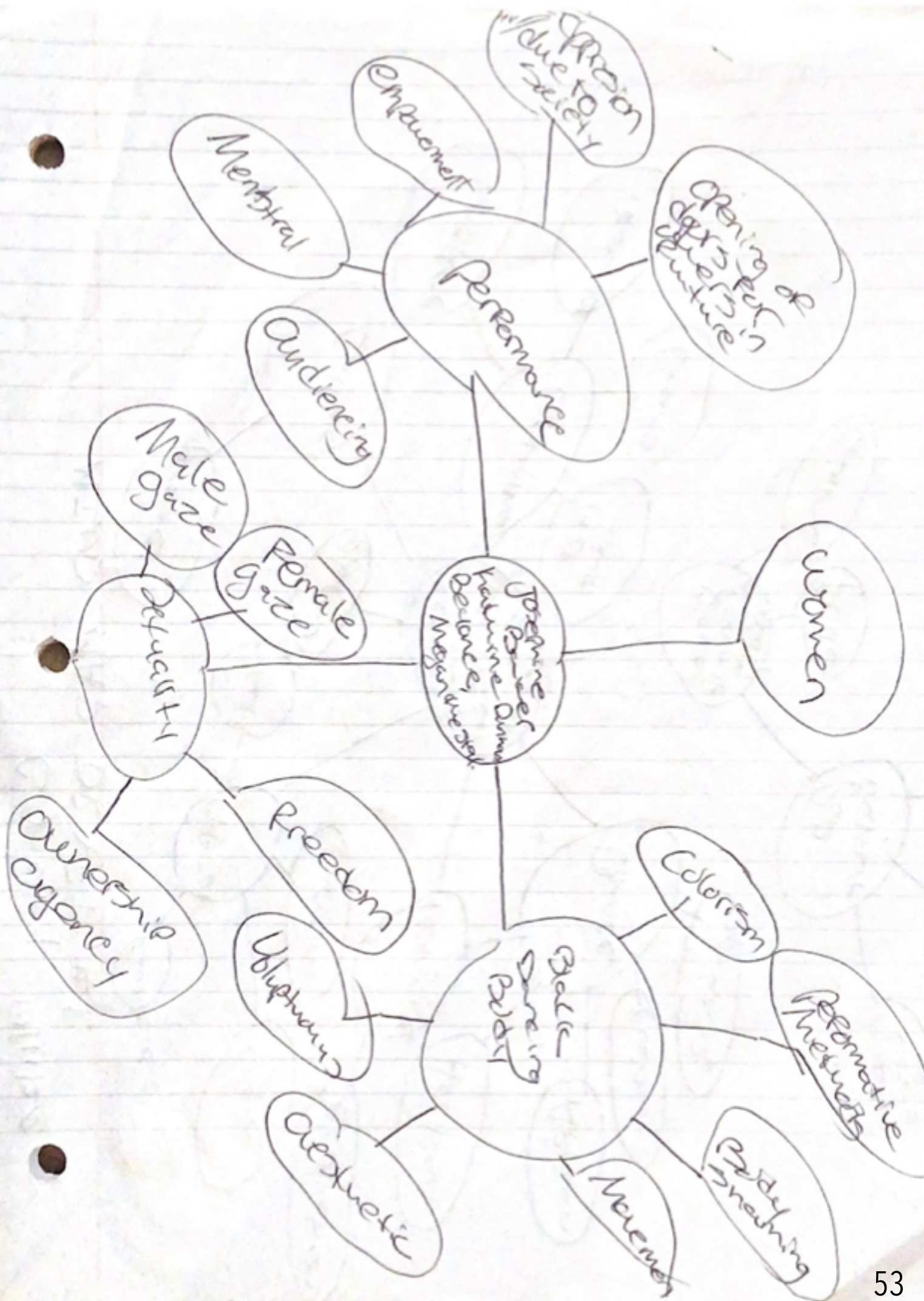
want to associate their triumphs with the term diversity, affirmative action, or equity. We simply believe that our right to exist should just be. Completely shattering the constructed knowledge of what was forced into our society of who a woman should be, the standard of beauty, or what a specific gender is expected to do.

A forefather of freedom and education, Washington's work became the bricks to society having to unlearn what they've been taught to think of who the black woman and man were as human beings and intellectuals. His stance on African American education was direct and intentional, even though some of his contemporaries criticized his theory for Industrial Education for the negro. Outspoken journalist Ida B. Wells was one of the powerful women that opposed his views on this specific subject, "Industrial education for the Negro is Booker T. Washington's hobby. He believes that for the masses of the Negro race an elementary education of the brain and a continuation of the education of the hand is not only the best kind, but he knows it is the most popular with the white south" (African Diaspora And The World, P. 133). In contrast, the argument of the Negro only being good for hard labor versus what our current Miss Universe Zozi Tunzi stands for and believes in especially for the black female is the exact reason Ida B. Wells fought so hard and had very strong feminist views relating to the rhetoric Washington preached. The variable within this argument is the society and generation in which Washington lived versus the society and generation Tunzi currently lives, concerning survival against any injustices they had to endure in their environment.

I believe Washington's perspective was based on survival and simply wanting black people to stay alive throughout the progressive era post-slavery. Ida B. Wells identified with the terror black people faced and strongly opposed them as well. "Our country's national crime is lynching. It is not the creature of an hour, the sudden outburst of uncontrolled fury, or the unspeakable brutality of an insane mob. It represents the cool, calculating deliberation of intelligent people who openly avow that there is an "unwritten law" that justifies them in putting human beings to death without complaint under oath, without trial by jury, without opportunity to make defense, and without right of appeal (Black Past)...

Citations:

- **African Diaspora And The World, P. 103 & P. 133. Spelman College**
- **Black Past. <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/1900-ida-b-wells-lynch-law-america/>**
- **Glamour. <https://www.glamour.com/story/miss-universe-zozibini-tunzi-is-not-a-diversity-win>**
- **Revel & Riot. <http://www.revelandriot.com/lgbtqia-black-history-makers/>**



Women & The Workplace

My Preparation and Current Experience

Though my perspective is a bit “seasoned” compared to my Spelman counterparts, I am finding myself re-inspired and challenged by the new material we are reading, learning, as well as I am receiving affirmations on how to proceed in a better direction into my respective future and field. Though I am an artist and creative at heart, I do enjoy utilizing my “administrative” brain and skills while engaging in my part time job for a restaurant management group for the Atlanta Airport. This is where I will primarily pull my focus from, as it is the ideal workplace to compare and contrast to Spelman and my other creative environments.

As the facilitator for Sarah Johnson's article, “How To Overcome Imposter Syndrome For Good,” I found myself a bit vulnerable to this reading. Producing each slide was an enjoyable experience, as I got to utilize my creative skills for design, however the content of her article is a subject all too familiar for me. As the article details, I do consider myself an overachiever, however I most certainly identify with and tend to “internalize” my flaws and faults. So much so that I may accidentally vocally project them in conversation. Utilizing some of her techniques to overcome this phenomena is a practice I do daily. Step 5 in her article asks you to “Look At The Data,” which is a reference to look at your own work so that you can realize who you are and what you have accomplished to land yourself in the position you are in or are pursuing. In my everyday life, especially while working at Spelman, I often find myself a little intimidated by the prolific women I am honored to work for as well as collaborate with. Because of this high regard and respect, I sometimes forget the many amazing accomplishments I have also completed as to the reason I am able to work alongside these women. Step 5 gave me the freedom to be “excellent” and check myself by viewing my resume and video footage catalog, to pump myself up and quiet the Imposter Syndrome that likes to appear from time to time.

One of the readings that stood out to me as I reflect on my administrative workplace environment at Mack II, is the reading by Cindy Pace, *How Women Of Color Get To Senior Management*. This article really struck a cord with me, as my senior vice president is an African American Woman. At this part time job, I am the human resources & payroll assistant for about 350 Atlanta Hartsfield-Jackson Airport employees, and I am responsible for all employee on- boarding, as well as issuing bi-weekly direct deposit payroll for everyone under the Mack II umbrella. My SVP is Mrs. Casandra Forehand, and she is tough as nails! Respectively so, she is in charge of steering this massive ship guided by the company founder and my God Father Mr. Mack Wilbourn. Together they have accomplished making his Popeye's Franchisee the number one Popeye's in the world for over all sales from 2013- current day. This is a huge accomplishment, and there is a powerful and incredibly intelligent woman at the reigns responsible for making this happen.

“Firms with the most ethnically diverse executive teams were 33% more likely to outperform their peers on profitability, and those with executive-level gender diversity worldwide had a 21% likelihood of outperforming their industry competitors.”

My boss Mrs. Casandra Forehand is the epitome of Cindy Pace’s article. I’ve learned so much from Mrs. Forehand simply through observations and how she communicates with employees and/or vendors. Women have a duality to their approach in the workplace. There is the nurturing yet tough love intersectionality approach Mrs. Forehand displays to processing employee concerns, to a very direct and blunt approach she displays when dealing with a vendor or corporate official. As a creative, these are not attributes I have to constantly pull on from day to day activities, as my field tends to be more passion driven and there are resources that surround the creative to handle these types of tasks. However with the new direction and career change happening in my current life, the readings and experiences as a student and faculty member at Spelman plus as a part time employee at Mack II have truly set in motion a path for endless success. For that I am forever grateful...

Mildred Thompson

“My work is a continuing search for understanding relationships in the universe. The subject matter comes out of an ongoing study of the physical sciences. These are personal, visual interpretations of various theories of energy, chaos and order...” -

Mildred Thompson, 1993

I viewed Mildred Thompson's work on 9/28/19 at around 2pm in the afternoon as I was en route to a Morehouse football game. I say all this to place everything regarding the timing into perspective for my reflection. I had absolutely no intention of stopping by the museum, however the black and white photographs of her as soon as you walk through the hallway in the museum to view her work captured my attention as they immediately reminded me of my grandmother for some reason. I observed these photos for at least 10 minutes. I happened to be one of maybe 3 persons in the museum on this day, so it was quiet and very easy to focus + allow the work to “speak” to me in its own voice. After passing through the hallway, it felt as though I had a special invitation to walk straight into Ms. Thompsons mind. The initial painting as soon as you walk straight ahead was this colorful madhouse so to speak. This is how I interpreted it. I felt drawn to it because of the bright colors however, I also felt a bit intimidated because there was so much to swallow and understand. I decided to migrate over to the right of the museum first to find more paintings very similar in stroke pattern to the initial one I viewed at first. The same feeling of intrigue came over me with her colors and stroke patters, however I still felt a very strong sense of being overwhelmed by it all. I took the energy in and decided to move forward to the left side of the museum. I was pleasantly surprised to view work that was completely opposite of the first pairings I observed. These paintings depicted her process before the color was added to the canvas, and for whatever reason I am very attracted to an artist’s process versus the final product. As a dancer, I prefer the rehearsal process way more than I do the show as I feel this is where the most growth is captured.

I ventured around to the video portion of the viewing in a very dark black room where I got the chance to hear her speak on her upbringing as well as music she created. She spoke on her childhood and how she got her first paint set from a teacher if I recall correctly, and how from then on she was a painter to her graduating from Howard University. Into her adult life, she spoke on her association to Spelman College as a professor as well as the many other works she created throughout her life.

As described in her paper “*Sometimes Awkward, Always Onward*,” Ms. Thompson speaks on her many accomplishments as well as workmanship as an intellectual. She literally travels the world to study her passion and medium of art, with a heavy emphasis of tutelage in Germany. Her statement above as well as her statement in her paper are truly the findings within and incredible artist.

“I was taught to be disciplined in my work as well as in my being. I was made to feel competent and confident in my abilities...”

Toussaint Louverture is one of the most prolific former slaves in our history books. Toussaint's legacy and what I feel inspiration to accomplish all that he did, was built on the pillars of him wanting to see his own people freed from the abomination of slavery. Especially when it came to his own “adopted” land of Haiti. With the intellect and knowledge he acquired to become a free man, he saw the demoralizing reasons as to why the Europeans needed slavery to thrive and stay as the social and economical structure. Europeans enjoyed the quality of life and wealth they gained from human capital, and couldn't bear to do the labored work themselves. Having slaves, and completely constructing their knowledge as to why white supremacy must prevail, was their winning ticket. Toussaint was one of the first slaves to educate himself against this way of life as well as to realize that he and all of the other slave outnumbered the European colonizers that occupied the land.

To bring his story into a current day perspective, it truly equates to the saying “knowledge is power!” Ensuring that you have an education as well as awareness of the world can allow you into spaces most wouldn't be allowed. Additionally, the negotiation tactics acquired when you understand that it's truly about the bottom line of a deal, allows you to work your way into and out of any situation. Toussaint's legacy proved that as he battled Napoleon and the other European Colonizers. Looking at the current day Haiti, you can also very apparently recognize the backlash and “ego trip” of the Europeans because of Toussaint's legacy and war accomplishments. The Europeans were completely defeated and humiliated by a former slave. The need to “hush” the fall out conversations about the Haitian revolution was purposely put in place so that the American slaves, Barbados slaves, and other colonies were not affected by this embarrassment. Yet another example of the basis of European constructed knowledge created to control the economy in their favor...

Analysis

RGB, Cardi B, Megan Thee Stallion & The Black Woman

As we enter the fourth quarter of such an unprecedented year for 2020, so many intersections, awakened mindsets, tragedy, and new realities are placed smack dab right into our faces that we must acknowledge. In addition to this harsh horizon, our presidential administration remains completely disconnected from the turmoil caused by horrid decisions that continue to erode basic human decency in the free world. I specifically would like to focus this analysis on the plight of being born a female and in specific a black woman.

Within the last 3 months, some pretty prolific events have taken place both in the artistic world, as well as the recognition of incredible leadership & legacy in social justice as it relates to women. Rappers Cardi B & Megan Thee Stallion dropped an electrifying and raunchy single entitled W.A.P., with some explosively sexual lyrics, dance moves, and imagery on film. On the complete other end of the spectrum, a true pioneer in women's rights who held one of the highest seats in the land has passed away. The late Associate Supreme Court Justice, Ruth Bader Ginsburg affectionately known as the Notorious RBG, died on Friday September 18th. Her legacy and leadership in the highest house of justice is one of the most paramount reasons women have been uplifted to basic human rights and control over their lives and bodies.

Analyzing these two moments as it relates to the intersections of a black female in America is extremely daunting. The first intersection is that of being a woman and a sexual being, who appreciates her God given assets though life experiences though social media may deter her from what she has been naturally blessed with. Assets that are often co-opted and manipulated to only benefit a certain demographic, as well as monetize and objectify to not benefit her in any way. Cardi B & Megan Thee Stallion's lyrics are a lot to digest on the surface hands down, however I do see another side to the debate of W.A.P. though I do agree that the song

is truly hyper sexualized. In the same breath I find confidence in two women of African ancestry completely owning their sexuality, their bodies, and their celebration of womanhood. There was not one ounce of testosterone in sight as the ladies paraded down the hallways of a Mad Hatter Themed production set, or splash vigorously in a pool of water with dancers & celebrity friends doing the same. The choreography was very sensual like a Horton figure eight mixed with some Dunham hip thrusting to each beat in the song. The Freudian imagery of snakes crawling all over them as they lay calmly on the floor, while caressing themselves and each other, to me portrayed complete dominance and control of their agency. A homogeneous reality went completely out of the window when W.A.P. splashed on to your timeline. Pun intended! These two women completely owned who they were and displayed the wholeness of their sexuality on film for all to see. From my perspective, was this the projected thought from the Womens Movement in the 60's & 70's as it related to our freedom & what we do with OUR bodies?

*“My mother told me to be a lady. And for her,
that meant be your own person, be independent.”*

*“I said on the equality side of it, that it is essential to a woman's equality with man
that she be the decision-maker, that her choice be controlling.”*

*“I ask no favor for my sex,
all I ask of our brethren,
is that they take their feet off our necks.”*

-The Notorious RBG

Her words, her poise, and her presence were all that was needed as it related to the fight for Women's rights. This end of the spectrum is seemingly the more respected version of a woman owning her agency in a dominating patriarchal society. Though all three women are owning their space, the respect is overwhelmingly skewed in the direction of RGB from women & men of all walks of life that knew her legacy or work. My rabbit hole pathway of thinking however, leads me to think and perceive

that if RGB did not do the prolific work that she has done for Women's rights, would Cardi B & Megan The Stallion's hit single W.A.P. even exist? Would the freedom of expression through sexual choreography be a reality of movement with the audacity to place it on film? I absolutely think not!

Thinking in line with Sarah Ahmed's Phenomenology, is W.A.P. the queered version of RGB's life's work, or is it deviant behavior?

To be a woman today, especially a black woman, the lines of social correctness and appropriateness are extremely blurred. We are either doing too much, or not enough at all. We are too hood fabulous or uppity and don't know our place. Owning our agency confidently and reclaiming our space is paramount in the survival of the one being that can create all races of humans. In analyzing the roles of these three women, especially as it correlates to the time frame of relativity during a world pandemic and social unrest, the black female body and performative role will always be a source of dissection to those who desire it, lust for it, and envy it. Ownership of her body and the way it can move plus produce evokes power and earth shattering thunderous movement that only SHE can create...

Chicken Soup

My Observation & Experience Of Blondell Cummings' Work

The deeper I intentionally dive into the experience and perspective of a black woman's life, struggles, joyous moments, and trauma, the closer I am finding the nucleus to some of the world's most artistic bodies of work to grace either film or a live stage. As a black woman myself, there is such a rich, bold, yet vulnerable nature to who we are as beings and vessels of light. We seem to gather and heal ourselves in silence, yet if our fire is lit this is where our art derives. Blondell Cummings' gestural body of work entitled "Chicken Soup," is the epitome of the black woman's plight and joy. The inspiration for the choreography created was from Cummings' observations of her grandmother, as she labored away to make ends meet as well as how she communicated with her friends. The gossiping manner in which Cummings portrayed, was almost like a secretive language I would imagine her grandmother and friends would practice so they wouldn't run into trouble from the house mistress or "massa". I found the movement of her hands as she was sitting at the table as well as the speed in which her lips moved plus the waving of her finger in the air, to be the code switch as well as the coded language that only the house maids would understand while communicating. It's closely parallel to how the slave women would communicate to loved ones miles away by placing rice grains in the cornrows of hair, or intricate dance moves that were practiced in secret in order to communicate a plan for escape. Black woman have always found creative ways to communicate and talk! One can view this body language in current day, with the hair whips, clapping of hands, and hip rolls, black women live a huge portion of their everyday life communicating simply with body language.

As Blondell continues to explore the familiar surroundings of the kitchen, one particular part that stood out to me the most was when she was on the floor scrubbing and she gave the most piercing look upward as if to say "I don't feel like doing this!" To me this is a great example

of the perseverance and resiliency of a black woman. The work will always get done, all the way down to the bone despite the pain and exhaustion she may feel. I'm sure when Blondell was a child and she had to observe this moment when her grandmother had to perform laborious work in this way, it was probably confusing to Blondell and humiliating to her grandmother. In one perspective, her grandmother is displaying work ethic and resiliency almost against her will. On the contrary, Blondell as a small girl is getting her first taste of oppression by seeing someone she loves dearly be treated less than & having to perform the only labor at the time that was available for black women. This experience and background is the perfect storm to ignite the flame within her to creatively express her trauma and or joy.

The further into the film, I also began to notice the ever prevalent multitasking motherly gestural movement coinciding with arms falling and pantomime screams to children as if she was telling them to get into the house to eat dinner. The way she moved seamlessly throughout the kitchen, while performing two iconic roles as a black woman, was truly profound to me. Cummings embodies so many stories and intersections as to the performative and realistic role a black woman plays, all within the confines of a kitchen. The comfort and ability to gossip with friends whether good or bad, the code switching for safety in the event someone comes in and shouldn't know what is being discussed. The pains of doing extremely hard work on top of being oppressed, and giving a side eye to anyone who complains or is ignorant in authority. When Blondell picks up the cast iron skillet, this immediately triggered me to my experiences with my grandmother and every black woman that has cared for me when I was a child. The most prestigious item a black woman can have in her kitchen is a black cast iron skillet! The smell of old fried oil and cornbread is the scent that permeates the room, as Blondell waves her hands and aggressively opens and closes her mouth to whomever is the receiver of her rage. She constantly swings the skillet back and forth, because even though she's laying down the hammer she still must provide a meal for her family. Her movement never leaves its post from cooking over the stove, however the story will still be told through her port de bra and imagined vocals...

Dance Reaction

The “Client” | Racism & Ignorance In Your Face

Growing up, I can remember one instance where I had to deal with blatant racism right in front of my face. I will never forget it as it was extremely jarring and confusing all at the same time. I was eight years old and just finished swimming with my family at Stone Mountain Park, and we proceeded to walk back to our family vehicle when out of no where, a truck zooms by and yells, “niggers!” My father was furious, however helpless in that moment from protecting his family from the ignorance. Fast forward to October 2020, and the same tense emotion became extremely overwhelming in an environment with so much productivity and juxtaposition as to the project I was working on. I won’t be able to detail too much about the project as I signed a NDA, however I will describe my feelings in an environment only 50 miles outside of the city of Atlanta.

Growing up in Atlanta, I’ve always known that city folk are way different than folk from the sticks or the country. The saying in Atl is “Always remember, Atlanta is liberal however Georgia is not.” It’s very easy to observe why Georgia is a red republican state when it comes to anything regarding politics as soon as you step outside the perimeter. I traveled 50 miles east on I-20 to work on a really cool project that was a direct and very creative way to look oppressive mentalities in the face and stand your ground. En route to base camp, I was immediately confronted with a lot of childhood memories, as I remember going to a sleep away camp at a

nature preserve called Rock Eagle right off the exit. I couldn't believe it! I hadn't seen the Rock Eagle sign since I was in the fifth grade. I became a bit emotional because I couldn't imagine sending my daughter on a bus to such a remote location in the midst of all the social turmoil that's our everyday existence. The route down to this small town was littered with confederate flags, #45 flags (I refuse to spell its name), and gun totting Dukes Of Hazard pick up trucks. I couldn't believe it, however you could smell and feel the ignorance in the air. The entire time I'm experiencing this loop in the matrix, I'm blasting my ATL Trap Rap music and embracing my agency of being a powerful black woman.

Once I arrived to set, I had to immediately go into creative mode and draw inspiration from a very peculiar statue. "Lest Not We Forget, Our Confederate Dead." A statue of a dead confederate soldier was the center of my world in that moment and space. There was definitely some anger, however I managed to channel my energy into some explosive choreography as a statement of defiance against ignorance. The song and the artist I worked with were the epitome of the no f's given generation Z. The age group of young adults ranging from 19-26 are extremely powerful and vocal about how they will be treated. The quote that precedes them reads like this, "We are not our parents parents, we will F you up." The artist embodied this energy fully which can be verified in her raunchy lyrics and provocative imagery. Mind you she's only twenty years old. Setting the choreography on my subject, I focused on gestural movement like the Blondell Cummings piece to emphasize the distain for the statue thats in the middle of the town. I focused my body to move aggressively similar to Krump style dancing and hip hop to give the energy of the youth of current day. In addition, I added a feminine flare for the artist to embrace who she is as a black woman...

Self Reflection

*“As I look back over my life,
And I think things over,
I can truly say
That I’ve been blessed,
I’ve gotta testimony!”*
- Rev. Clay Evans

Truthfully speaking, I am in total awe of what I have been able to accomplish within my career as a dancer, choreographer, and a producer. The imposter complex is very much real and can manifest itself in the most random of places when in conversation with others both in and outside of the dance industry. Even when in professional settings, I’ve noticed myself shrink for absolutely no reason at all, except that I think I am not who the resume or video footage says that I am. However, when I have opportunities to go back and look at my films, projects, interviews, and resume, I quickly realize that it’s the reason I am able to live off the residual of my current life and spaces I enter. I simply forget who I am sometimes. Whenever I get to glance at my HERstory, I do get a bit emotional and overwhelmed as the catalogue is so much bigger than the person I present myself to be. I definitely tend to be too humble and modest, as I was raised to not be boisterous about my accolades.

I think a little bit of my shrinking also comes from not wanting to upstage my younger sibling, as my career would always take over conversations whenever introduced to my father's business partners and friends. I simply wanted to blend in and shed some light on others, and not have the attention focused on myself.

While reading and dissecting Misty Copeland's biography, I quickly picked up on the exact same mental complex I struggle with in regards to imposter syndrome. I've never been able to place a name or word on the feeling honestly since I've attended Spelman. Just like Misty, she wanted to make sure she was deeply rooted with women who she admired in her dance world, such as Raven Wilkerson. This is in addition to her mentors within ABT making sure she was well surrounded by black female pioneers in any field, so that she can begin to fill in her own shoes of who she was destined to be. I took a similar path in regards to my personal space to develop the female empowerment so to speak sense of self. As it relates to business, especially within my shift in career, I've honestly felt most comfortable with you Dr. Goler. Though you are my boss and professor (weird, crazy, I know!) my energy and prayers led me your way in terms of guidance within the world of academia. Now that I am approaching the fourth decade of my life, I have learned way to many times that I should always lead with my intuition prior too making a serious decision. This is where I am...

While learning about Halifu Osumare's radical and creative career accomplishments, I found my similarities with her in regards to her independent and go getter spirit. Whether it's because I am an Aquarius or because of my upbringing, I've always been a super independent person especially when it comes to matters of importance to me. I found myself relating heavily to her time in Boston and then her departure to New York City. This segment of her life to...

In 2011, I became a mother to my beautiful daughter
Chloe Olivia.

I know this is cliché to say, however she has
truly saved my life and re-directed me to
accomplishing more than what I EVER imagined I
could do. Every time I show her affection and cuddles,
I feel it's me loving on myself when I was a child
to heal old wounds and affirm who she & I am
today.

She is the love of my life. I'm dedicating this
portfolio to you Chloe Olivia!

Photo credits: RaeVaughn Lucas, Zack Lee, Zebra Gallery, Ari Skin,
Impact Church,



Birth, Purgatory, Joy, Earth

A Black Woman's Story As Told Through Alvin Ailey's "Cry"

There were so many images that came rushing to my frontal lobes as I revisited my experience of watching Alvin Ailey's masterpiece in movement entitled, "Cry." I have small glimpses of memories ingrained within me from when I was a child while observing this piece in a modern dance class with one of my dance teachers, who was eagerly ready to show this prolific piece of choreography to give perspective to my young class of dancers. The long flowing white skirt with a white long sleeve leotard, and hair pulled back into a sleek bun was a classic costume ensemble coming up as a black dancer, especially in Atlanta during the 80's and 90's. The teachers that gave me this legendary perspective of black dance on stage were, Kappatola Williams, Terri & Dawn Axam, Gary Harrison, & Asha Thomas (former Principle Ailey Dancer). They were my conduits, my gatekeepers, my lineage, and the mothers of dance that parented me to understand the magic of who I was as a black child to now as an adult, and what the entirety of the imagery of "Cry" meant to be as a black woman. Hindsight is 20-20, and I'm just now embracing the impact of their teachings.

With the backstory given, this is how I find an innate connection to this beautiful work of art. The opening scene has so many meanings and interpretations, with Donna Wood simply

standing center stage with her arms raised with a long white cloth in hand. To me, it's representative of the performance of a baptism or a rebirthing of a young black woman as she re-enters life in preparation for womanhood. The waving of the cloth in mid air represents a giving back to the most high, the separation of the cloth simulates the letter "V," which to me gives off a virginal connotation as a sacrifice of the flesh and gift of the body back to God. Everything in the beginning of this piece gives off the energy of a yearning to be re-born and released from the purgatory of trials and tribulation that's a constant finding on Earth. In a stark contrast however, there is a weighted feeling that's also being delivered within the movement and expressiveness of the choreography. I've seen several different dancers perform "Cry," however there is a unique aesthetic that Ms. Donna Woods delivered, that encapsulates both the virginal innocence and the weighted heaviness of being born a black female in America.

Adding to the layers of the virginal cloth & the weighted heaviness that's a performed aesthetic, I find myself becoming intrigued by the lighting that surrounds Ms. Woods to further deliver the gift of the message of being born a black female in America. A very simplistic approach, Ms. Woods gives a beautiful high release within her Port De Bra while simultaneously lifting her head and gaze; all the while standing center stage in a dimly lit spotlight that has a yellow hue. The music reminds me of an Asian flair, yet there is a soulful melodic tone to the bass sound that's added to fill out the bottom of what we actually hear. Ms. Woods strides forward with several cross steps, and finally to a quick trot all while holding the long white fabric in place, as well as leaving the spot light behind her (for me) is interpreted as the new beginning of life. The stage is now washed in a simple white glow where you can see every crevice of her female shape and tone. I'm pretty sure Ailey's genius mind was thinking of every...

How does Cry grow out of, reflect, and/or comment on experiences of African American people—especially women?

To properly set the stage for this research, I am compelled to believe that at black women's intersectional life experiences, it all begins with her mother caring for her kinky, nappy, beautiful, luxurious coils. The stories that are told during these in home salon sessions, are the key to truly understanding the depth of emotional range that makes the black woman magic. For me, it was the burning sensation of my right ear, for my daughter however, it's the extreme tenderness of her scalp while in the process of getting her locks together. These experiences and stories passed down from big mama, are what I believe enhanced the emotional depth of Alvin Ailey's Cry performance featuring Donna Wood.

My already fraught relationship to (white) American culture is further complicated in the dance world: as a performer and a choreographer I am aware that I am always/already seen through my artistic ancestry. When people who know something about dance see me move through space, (I feel) they have assumptions about how and why I move the way I do, how I put phrases of movement together, and especially how notions of inherited movement affinities call into question with whom I have danced or studied. I question the focused squint of their gaze. Do they see my brown body first and then my inherited movement qualities? Or vice versa? (Casel, Gerald. "Lineage, Mimicry, and Ambivalence.")

When critically audiencing Alvin Ailey's Cry, I find myself pondering the perspective of the viewership and the intersections of life that they come to the theater with, while viewing this

black female body performing her embodied knowledge in front of the world. There's a sense of vulnerability when you think about it from the black female body, black family, and black cultural perspective. Everyone will be a witness to our secrets, methodology, and embodied practices in which we consider culturally sacred. Do we want to let them in to all of this juiciness? Though appropriation is emphasized through capitalism in America, it is a global force to be reckoned with, and it all centers around exploiting the black family unit while completely dissecting the black female body. "...White folks emerge enriched while Black folks leave empty handed. Folks that are hip to the history know that White participation in Black cultural forms has almost always been preceded by White abhorrence of the forms, followed by White appropriation (theft, as some call it). This process is completed (at least for the time being) when Black folks finally forfeit the form and invent something altogether new. "Like, ok, you want that? It's all yours. We're on to something else anyways." (Articulate While Black : Barack Obama, Language, and Race in the U.S). In my perspective and opinion, Ailey's *Cry* brings all of our "parts" back together to witness the toil, pillage, and pain, however to also witness the celebration, joy, and acceptance. It's almost as if having Donna Wood perform this masterpiece for what I assume within the context of the era of its debut was a mixed race audience, that this was an intentional reckoning of sorts to the white people that viewed and wrote about his creation from his mother's lived experiences. A black woman's body put together piece by piece and performed for the entire world to see.

What other questions help me to express my experience and/or reactions?

My brownness along with my "en-corporated" kinetic identities cohere around a series of identifying markers that position my body as a unique colonial subject — one that bi-culturally assembles while simultaneously erasing itself through movement. Because I work in the lineage of postmodern dance, my brownness cannot be unseen through the white gaze projected on its

white canvas. (Casel, Gerald. "Lineage, Mimicry, and Ambivalence). One of the other many thoughts I had as it related to Ailey's Cry, was the intention behind casting a mixed raced woman as the feature for this role. I bring this into the conversation due to the topic of colorism. I've noticed in later renditions of this beautiful work of art, that darker tones of melanated women have stepped into not only the process of embodying the presentation through their intersection and lived experiences, but also to perform the repertoire as Donna Wood would have executed. Out of respect, I totally embrace the artistic integrity that Donna Wood brought not only to her tenure within the company, however also to the stage. She came back to dance Cry, Alvin Ailey's tribute to black women. Her eloquent performance of this solo was especially notable for its changes of movement quality. She could be sorrowful one moment and compassionate the next, and then suddenly turn defiant. Yet these shifts of mood never seemed melodramatic gesticulations or mere strivings to make a theatrical effect. Rather, Miss Wood danced as if she were revealing the secrets of her heart. (New York Times. DANCE: AILEY TRIBUTE TO DONNA WOOD).

The thought that brings the topic of colorism to the forefront is the historical understanding that during the 80's, being a black woman of fairer skin immediately cast you within a different societal construct and hierarchy. Children of White slave owners and Black women were allowed, in relative terms, to ascend beyond their station (Frazier, 1957). In direct contrast to other enslaved persons, those of mixed heritage were privy to less strenuous housework, separate living quarters, more autonomy, and in particular cases, freedom (Drake & Cayton, 1945). Interestingly the mixed race elite was also responsible, in some respect, for the within-race division. In an effort to preserve their "purity" and status, they insisted on marrying other mixed race individuals and distancing themselves from darker skin African Americans. Such separation, in conjunction with the preferential treatment received from Whites, reinforced a hierarchical system in which light skin was superior to dark skin, and more important, laid the

foundation for intragroup conflict and mistrust among the Black population. (Virginia Commonwealth University. Red Bones and Earth Mothers: A Contemporary Exploration of Colorism and its Perception Among African American Female Adolescents. Pg. 6)



Did this racial construct from slavery have a deciding factor in who was cast in the role of the premiere of Cry? Was there a darker melanated female body that could have been cast for the role? Of course upon further research, I've come to the resolve that one of the many choices to cast Donna Wood (outside of being completely awesome within her own right) as the featured lead for the premiere of Cry, was to find someone that resembles his mother Lula Cooper Ailey as close as possible. Mrs. Ailey was not necessarily darker skinned, however she was a more light brown/almond toned. Casting Donna Wood was a very intelligent choice made by Mr. Ailey, especially

since the piece was curated to celebrate his mother and the black women within his family.

What understanding arose in me about black people, women, or the issues of contemporary life? What about the dance contributed to those feelings?

As I stated within my reflection paper for Cry, there is something so special for a young black girl to receive her first all white dance costume. The long flowing white skirt matched with the long sleeved white leotard was a staple for young black dancers in the 80's and 90's. Having this wardrobe adorn our bodies was a symbol of purity, tradition, and class. No matter what the occasion, there was a guarantee that you were to wear this traditional wardrobe ensemble...

Works Cited

Casel, Gerald. "Lineage, Mimicry, and Ambivalence." Stanley Gambucci in

Paramodernities #3, February 23–24, 2018 at ODC Theater. Series Organized By Cladia La Rocca

[Lineage, Mimicry, and Ambivalence : Open Space](#)

Articulate While Black : Barack Obama, Language, and Race in the U.S.

Author: H. Samy Alim, Geneva Smitherman

Oxford : Oxford University Press. 2012

Pg. 124 Chp. 4. The Fist Bump Heard Round The World

http://0-search.ebscohost.com/catalog.library.uarts.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e000xna&AN=503686&site=eds-live&scope=site&ebv=EB&ppid=pp_125

New York Times. DANCE: AILEY TRIBUTE TO DONNA WOOD

Jack Anderson. Dec. 23, 1983. New York Times Archive

[New York Times. DANCE: AILEY TRIBUTE TO DONNA WOOD \)](#)

Virginia Commonwealth University. VCU Scholars Campus.

Red Bones and Earth Mothers: A Contemporary Exploration of Colorism and its Perception Among African American Female Adolescents

Morgan Maxwell. 2013 Pg 6

[Red Bones & Earth Mothers](#)

Howard Dodson. America's Cultural Roots Traced to Enslaved African Ancestors

National Geographic. HOWARD DODSON PUBLISHED FEBRUARY 5, 2003

[HOWARD DODSON. America's Cultural Roots Traced to Enslaved African Ancestors](#)

UARTS

Masters Research

Obtaining My Masters Degree
From My Original Alma Mater Almost
20 Years Later
(2020-2021 middle of the pandemic)

Life Time Experience Scholar
Dance Fellowship

A Full Circle Moment

UNIVERSITY OF THE ARTS
MFA 2020 COHORT

LE CORPS DE LA FEMME NOIRE

A QUERY ON THE OWNERSHIP
OF THE BLACK FEMALE BODY
FROM THE PAST TO PRESENT

By. Cicely A. Kelley

Research Paper
January 2021
Prof. Thomas DeFrantz
Fields, Forces, Relations



Le Corps De La Femme Noire

A Query On The Ownership Of The Black Female Body From The Past To Present

“Nevertheless, black bodies, like all bodies, come in many shapes, sizes, and colors, not only the body “type” described [above]. That profile, like my own and seen as typical, is really stereotypical and, like all stereotypes, draws its strength from an ounce of fact buried in a ton of fable.” (The Black Dancing Body. Gottschild, p.1)

My intention behind this research paper is to dive deep into the awe, spectacle, empowerment, co-option, and bondage of the black female body, through historically infamous women and pioneers in & outside of the field of dance. I’m intrigued to discover the following theories & facts of what the black female body has transformed from slavery to pop culture, how we as black women own and or exploit the agency over our assets, and how the features of this body have revolutionized an entire industry (dance) as it relates to what’s aesthetically appropriate and what is typecast out of dance industry-related opportunities & context from my own personal lived experiences as a commercial dancer. Written down in history for their impact on the documentation of the black women’s body, I will focus my sights on the lives of Ssehura (Sara Saartjie Baartman), and Josephine Baker, all the way to pop culture phenomena such as Megan Thee Stallion, Cardi B, & Beyonce. The ancestral lineage is paramount to my research and discoveries as it relates to my thesis. I plan to rabbit hole my

way deeply into how their lives were affected by their bodies as well as the societal & racial constructs that played an enormous role in the obstacles and triumphs the aforementioned have endured and made. Within my findings, I truly believe that I will affirm a lot of my personal experiences not only as a commercial dancer, however most importantly as a black female dancing body.

Black Commercial Dancing Body

Casting calls, agent conversations, auditions, to the separation of racial status quo for a commercial dancer, this is what my early years of understanding my place & need for any particular project revolved around. The commercial dance world is full of exciting opportunities for dancers: music videos, Broadway shows, international concert tours. (Dance Magazine, Lauren Wingenroth). This particular niche industry is ever evolving and changing as it relates to how audacious a brand or artist decides to sell themselves/product to an insatiable audience with a never ending appetite for the newest “wow” factor. To put it plainly, a commercial dancing body is needed to either be or sell the product. With industry trends and the advancement of technology changing at an incredible rate, brand awareness and how companies dive into experiential marketing tactics, has an incredible role for how the world of commercial dance collaborates on creative initiatives. When I was a young dancer in my early days of entering the commercial world, I found it very exciting and intriguing however I quickly realized that my body type, skin tone, and racial features were to be interviewed and discussed before my talent was ever given the chance to perform. My first experience of recognizing that I am a black female dancing body in a world of the majority white, blonde or brunette seemingly preference, was for a Pepsi All Star Weekend performance with J.Lo as the headlining talent. Being from Atlanta, my body type and skin tone were praised and appreciated, so when I traveled to LA specifically for the audition I was met with a world & culture that was completely

foreign to my way of life. Nevertheless, I was naive, excited, and confident in my talent and that's all that mattered to me. I'll never forget standing in the line to enter the studio in observation of all of the women that looked like me, however they clearly had assimilated into what was the expected beauty standard. An ambiguous profile of a woman who's sex appeal carries her and grasps your attention at first glance. I quickly realized that I did not look like the women in the cattle call. My hips were more pronounced, my posterior was naturally lifted and very shapely, while carrying a smaller waist and modest sized breast. My rounded facial features and pronounced lips were becoming a pop culture trend, however the trend did not include my skin tone as the palette to carry the desired look. Needless to say, before I could even get in the door I was typecast out of the line and had to watch everyone else that was an assimilated version of my body type & features enter the studio for the opportunity. The impact that experience made on who I was then to who I am now inclusive of this research has been profound. All of the features of my black body were, in my mind, dissected and placed on a lighter skin tone version of me to be capitalized on without any regard for which it derived. How did this happen, how could pieces of me be acceptable, however because of my melanated tone, the entirety of me not be the prize? My parts are sexy, however my pantone skintone is not? How Sway?

This one lived experience amongst so many more, have led me to want to discover where the root of this co-option derives from. In addition to the co-option, I found my experiences of being a black commercially female dancing body to be swarmed with a hunger for sexual exploitation of black women, rather than my white female counterpart that was seen more as a prize to possess for elite status recognition. I found myself questioning if I would ever own myself and my sexuality as a black performing body, in the midst of my passion, talent and trained skill set I loved so much. With my life stories as my base and perspective, my dive into

the ancestral abyss will bring forth dark truths, relevance, and confidence as to the ownership of this goldmind.

Does my sexiness upset you?

Does it come as a surprise

That I dance like I've got diamonds

At the meeting of my thighs?

- Still I Rise Maya Angelou

Ssehura

Hottentot Venus, the immediate force of colonization of the black body once on American soil, was to strip an African person of their given native name, and chose a name to either have them assimilate into European/American culture or show ownership of their bodies and offsprings. The depiction of this process can be found in Alex Haley's "Roots," all the way to current day as to how we name our children to simply fit into society.

Kunta Kinte -> Toby

I have to admit that I am guilty of this process as a black parent when it came to the naming of my first born. The same goes for my parents as well. In truth, the naming of a newborn is somewhat of a big deal and conversation piece amongst new parents and their respective families. Though the process of mine & my daughters forename was not inhumane, the thought behind it was more for protection of our future. A shield of armour of sorts before a person ever meets who we are as black females for a potential employment opportunity.

A finesse tactic to get through being immediately type cast as I've previously mentioned. In the 1960s Blacks and Whites chose relatively similar first names for their children. Over a short period of time in the early 1970s, that pattern changed dramatically with most Blacks (particularly those living in racially isolated neighborhoods) adopting increasingly distinctive names, but a subset of Blacks actually moving toward more assimilating names. The patterns in the data appear most consistent with a model in which the rise of the Black Power movement influenced how Blacks perceived their identities. Among Blacks born in the last two decades, names provide a strong signal of socioeconomic status, which was not previously the case. (The Quarterly Journal Of Economics. P.767) The stripping or assimilation of the black name for the black body, is a practice vs. process with roots heavily enriched in slavery.

“Assimilation has always been a subconscious edict. Further complicating matters is the fact that we (Filipinos) have been colonized by numerous countries, so the colonial mentality is deeply ingrained in our psyches and subjugated bodies. Rather than harmonizing with the background, assimilation feels like blending in so as not to be registered as an alien — akin to camouflage.” (Lineage, Mimicry, and Ambivalence by Gerald Casel)

Hottentot Venus was the sexually exploited name and display of the black female body given by her captors. In September 1814, she was transported from England to France, and upon arrival Hendrik Cezar sold her to Reaux, a man who showcased animals. He exhibited her around Paris and reaped financial benefits from the public's fascination with Sara's body. He began exhibiting her in a cage alongside a baby rhinoceros. Her “trainer” would order her to sit or stand in a similar way that circus animals are ordered. At times Baartman was displayed almost completely naked, wearing little more than a tan loincloth, and she was only allowed that due to her insistence that she cover what was culturally sacred. (South African History Online).

Coincidentally, “Hottentot” was not the first time she was literally stripped of her native name. Similar to how post black panther movement African forenames were given to urban offspring that colonizers couldn't pronounce, Sara processed to Saartjie, who's agency and real identity is pronounced “Ssehura,” #sayhername. Sara ‘Saartjie’ Baartman was born in 1789* at the Gamtoos river in what is now known as the Eastern Cape. She belonged to the cattle-herding Gonaquasub group of the Khoikhoi. Sara grew up on a colonial farm where her family most probably worked as servants. Her mother died when she was aged two and her father, who was a cattle driver, died when she reached adolescence. Sara married a Khoikhoi man who was a drummer and they had one child together who died shortly after birth.

Due to colonial expansion, the Dutch came into conflict with the Khoikhoi. As a result people were gradually absorbed into the labour system. When she was sixteen years old Sara's fiancé was murdered by Dutch colonists. Soon after, she was sold into slavery to a trader named Pieter Willem Cezar, who took her to Cape Town where she became a domestic servant to his brother. It was during this time that she was given the name ‘Saartjie’, a Dutch diminutive for Sara. (South African History Online)

Though Ssehura was not a dancer, she was a performing body. Her illegitimate and absurdly illegal contract for performance was most certainly forced upon her even after her death. Something that strikes me so much that she was able to maintain & stand her ground on during her exploitation, was her adamant demand to keep her culturally sacred parts out of the forced performance by her captors. She refused to show her womb, which for a woman and the human race, is the exact most sacred area of the female body. The life force or God given machine in which all men and women are made. How she made this possible at the grotesque nature of her captors, truly bewilders me however, I can relate to the inner strength and courage it took to demand that it happened.

“She has become the landscape upon which multiple narratives of exploitation and suffering within black womanhood have been enacted,” yet amid all this “the woman remains invisible.” (Penned By Author Natasha Gordon-Chipembere, for Culture Trip).

Interestingly, this is where I find a sliver of connection to the women I’ve summoned for research. All have this exact energy in common, as it relates to some form of control over their black body especially while in performance. Though Ssehura is on one end of an extreme spectrum, so is current day artist Cardi B, Megan Thee Stallion, and Beyonce. The in between artist (only in a sense of chronological order), that got to experience some form of freedom that was not slavery, however was Jim Crow, were Josephine Baker, Kathrine Dunham, and a host of other prolific female black bodies. The bit of agency Ssehura was able to maintain was her womb, the connection I am interested to find with the other artist is what they were able to maintain for themselves, as well as their process to reclaim their black female body.

Josephine Baker

October 2, 1925, when she opened in “La Revue Negre” at the Theatre des Champs-Elysees. Baker both exploited and promoted European colonial fantasies of the sensual and exotic African. She brought jazz and the Charleston to Paris and soon became known for her uninhibited performances and scanty costumes. (Black Past. Zakiya Adair)

Born 90 years after the death of Ssehura, Josephine Baker reclaimed her frame by utilizing similar methods that Pieter Willem Cezar, Dunlop, Hendrik Cezar, Reaux, and George Cuvier used to exploit Ssehura by touring her performances all over Europe, however I question whether Baker was the full beneficiary of her assets she chose to place on display? I do believe

that she was the emergence of queering the perspective and ownership of the black female body as it relates to who is in control. By constantly changing the terms through which her audiences and the public read her, Baker carved out a subjective space where she could become in relation to her clothes without restraining herself to the identity categories normally allotted to black women. (Fashionable 'Formation': Reclaiming the Sartorial Politics of Josephine Baker. Sweeney-Risko, Jennifer. UArts Libraries).

With her hereditary talents for dance and singing from both of her parents, Baker grew up in a broken home and was subjected to a tumultuous life early on in her youth. Married briefly at the age of thirteen, Baker seemed to always have had a radical & sensational spirit within her that would soon be her star power in her later years. This spirit in conjunction with being an activist for the diaspora and a queer woman, were some of the pillars for her to become an American ex-pat. I even wonder if the word “coveted” existed before Baker. Her ability to live her life like she wanted was addictive. Her 1000+ marriage proposals would agree with me. Baker remarried to a man called Will Baker at 15 keeping his name after her marriage to Willie Wells at 13. Her next marriage was to a French man Jean Lion. This made her a devoted French citizen, which she showed by participating in the French resistance during World War II. She “became a sublieutenant in the Women’s auxiliary of the French Force earning a medal for her work on behalf of the allies”.

Baker loved women as well, possibly her most famous relationship was with Frida Kahlo. They were lovers with a lot in common, both bisexual women of color who were artists and activists. The women were radical, never dependent on men. Baker was unafraid to leave sour relationships. (Josephine Baker: Queer, Radical, Artist & Activist. Awa Gueye AfroPunk). With this understanding of Baker, I completely understand her objection of American societal constructs, verses the way she chose to freely live her life. Becoming an international star due

to her performance of *Danse Sauvage* in the summer of 1926 at the Folies Bergère in Paris, Baker's banana skirt became the fashion trend and sizzle that would have saturated any social media app in the present day. The skirt and performance was so iconic, that it can be found as artistic inspirations and replicated by pop star Beyonce in her 2006 hit single “Deja Vu.” Dance, like fashion, demonstrates personal expression -- a vital survival tool for oppressed peoples. (Dance Fashion. Steele. P.259, Intersections Of Movement And Style). Baker's inherent fashion sense pays homage and displays the importance as well as intention to present her black body in elegance such as the black performing bodies that came before her like Dora Dean & Charles Johnson in The Creole Show, New York 1889. Dean was known for her elegant costumes and fashionable style; she was the first black performer to wear thousand-dollar costumes, and the couple set a trend for convergence of high fashion and the Cakewalk. (Dance Fashion. Steele. P 260, Intersections Of Movement And Style).

The intersection of fashion is where I find numerous paths crossed for many women in general as a stance to protest vs protection in relation to the subjection of the black female body. My query as it relates to Baker, is did she and was she aware of the ownership or lack thereof of capitalization off her black female body? After all, France played a big part in the exploitation of Ssehura almost one-hundred years previous to Baker, by treating her like a zoo animal and sexually assaulting her at the same time. I have found from the past and to the present, the entrapment of the female black body, delves into the world of deviant fetish and fantasy for European men. Carole Sweeney in her book *From Fetish to Subject: Race, Modernism and Primitivism* (1919-1935), expounds upon a theory that one side of negrophilia—the obsession and fetishization of the black entertainer's body, kinesthetic awareness, charisma, and perceived libidinous energy—is an “inversion of the essentialist taxonomies of earlier derogatory stereotypes”.

This theory explains how France—the same country that once objectified indigenous African people by exhibiting them in “Human Zoos” at its World Fairs (Ssehura)—had become obsessed with the sexually-charged kinesthetics of black entertainers who danced the Charleston before the lustful gaze of European men. It is evident from the cabaret scene of Montmartre that black entertainers—who had been marginalized and oppressed on their native soil—duly exploited these inverted essentialist taxonomies. (Negrophilia and the Black Woman: The Exploitation of Essentialism. Emory University). Gaining an incredible understanding of Josephine Baker's pioneer paths for the diaspora, I find a bit of European taint on the reality of the ownership of her assets. Yes, she left America quickly in her adult years due to the unbelievable racism and Jim Crow laws that colored the soil and stages she desired to embrace and entertain, however it seems as though the blinding adoration had a sinister underbelly to it much like the current day co-option of the black female body with the likes of Beyonce (black female) and Kim Kardashian (non black female), to fashion trends with emphasized padding on the buttocks and old fashion bustles of the Romantic era. Josephine Baker was the emblem of European fantasy and fetish. She held the 9th arrondissement of Paris captive by the spontaneity and erotic undertones of her performances. She was at once beheld as both an icon of modernist art and pop culture. These performances not only played into the sexual fetishes of European men, but—for all the reasons listed above—resonated with the ethos of modernist artists who sought fresh inspiration for their work. (Negrophilia and the Black Woman: The Exploitation of Essentialism. Emory University)

Not Black Women?

So what brand of black woman do we actually like??? Not Beyonce. Not Megan. Not Cardi. Not Kamala. Not Michelle. Not Oprah. Not hood women. Not suburb women. Not corporate women. Not domestic women. Not mom with many children. Not women with no kids. Not women who hate sex. Not women who enjoy sex. Not women who are too aggressive. Not women who are too passive. Not women who like other women. Not women who like only men. Not women with natural hair. Not women with weave. Not women with braids. Not women with long nails. Not women with short hair. Not independent women. Not dependent women. Not educated women. Not uneducated. Not women who are too big.

Do we actually like black women? Do we love ourselves?

- Author unknown.

From the historical perspective to current day pop phenomena culture, the black female body while in performance or in ordinary life has been stuck in an urban hip hop culture term defined as the “trap.” Simply meaning, this body from pre pubescent years all the way into adult womanhood has been embroiled in a vicious never ending cycle that it’s not in control of. The environment in which it’s entrapped dictates what it’ll do, say, and seemingly feel at the discretion of its captors. If & when the black female body decides to fight for her freedom or even obtain it, she will be subjected to further exploitation and harassment. What I’ve found astonishingly interesting, is that present day pop stars like Megan Thee Stallion, Cardi B, & Beyonce have seemingly taken this narrative and revolutionized it to their benefit. There is still the ever present glare and judgment of a hegemonic society and extreme misogynistic cisgender males, however the attitude of the Millinial and Gen Z generation could seriously care less. Have we finally evolved to owning our agency? Do we actually like black women?

Beyonce

In my personal opinion, Beyonce is in a league of her own as it relates to the ownership and presentation of her art and body. This has been a strategically evolved act by the machine that powers her, however I truly believe she is the one in the driver's seat as to how her identity has been presented within the last ten years, especially since the album "4" debuted in 2011 during her first pregnancy. The last time she covered the mag (Vogue), in March 2013, journalist Jason Gay managed to pin her down for a carefully orchestrated chat. Even then he noted how every stage of her interactions with him seemed micro-managed to ensure she had the most possible ownership over how she was portrayed. Image control is not a joke to this woman, who has built a career on a winning combination of seemingly southern warmth, unattainable sensuality and a back-breaking work ethic. She stands alone as a sort of pop enigma. Whether you love her music and persona or wish she'd vanish off the face of the earth, it's rare to see a mainstream pop star who functions as both a standoffish auteur and a roaring commercial success – and seems to have a hand in just about every aspect of her creative output. (Beyoncé's Vogue cover shows just how her image control works. The Guardian. Tshepo Mokoena). Compared to the women that preceded her, Beyonce is seemingly in control of every aspect of the presentation and performance of her body. In addition to the radical way she has paved her career and persona, she also opened the doors to a more business savvy, empowered, sexually aware, and independent black female, as well as add the term feminist to her reputation and catelouge. Beyoncé has managed to become the biggest female pop star in the world while cultivating her marriage, her role as a mother, and her sexuality. And in doing so, she's ushering in a new wave of feminism. (Flawless: 5 Lessons in Modern Feminism From Beyoncé. Time. Eliana Dockterman). In my humble opinion, Beyonce is the reason Megan Thee Stallion and Cardi B can walk, as well as exploit the sexuality of the black female body in mainstream media in addition to being able to use their bodies as a source of power and

freedom of expression. In observation, both Megan and Cardi are proudly parading the body & features I naturally have, however was denied so many opportunities when I was a young commercial dancer in LA. Though their playlist is on the roucher side of musical taste, they're doing something that I wouldn't have been able to imagine fifteen years ago at the start of my career.

Megan Thee Stallion & Cardi B

With phrases like “Black Girl Magic” & “Melanin Goddess” on the rise in pop culture, it seems and definitely feels as though the adoration, acceptance, and correct identity or appropriateness of a black female body’s features is celebrated and owned by the persons that live everyday within this anatomical capsule.

Body-ody-ody-ody-ody-ody-ody-ody (hey, hey, hey, hey, hey, hey)

Ody-ody-ody-ody-ody-ody-ody (yeah)

Body-ody-ody-ody-ody-ody-ody-ody

Ody-ody-ody-ody-ody-ody-ody (ah, ah, ah, ah)

Body crazy, curvy, wavy, big titties,

lil' waist (yeah, yeah) Body crazy, curvy, wavy,

big titties, lil' waist (yeah, yeah)

- “Body” Megan Thee Stallion

Megan Thee Stallion is the embodiment, hood confidence, yet alternative quirkiness of the entire spectrum of what it means to be a black woman. Her lyrics are audacious,

aggressive, jarring, yet evokes an ancestral soul within the majority of the black women who listen to her music. Each feature of her frame, she unequivocally praises and shows off just for the principle of the matter. Her ancestral soul is empowered by her lived experiences, however

I would argue to say that in some alternate universe, she is the confident voice and agency that Ssehura never had the opportunity to embrace. If their body types were to be documented on paper, they would be identical in their featured make up.

Where I find the intersections of Cardi B, Megan Thee Stallion, and Ssehura cross, is in relation to the ownership and exploitation of their sexuality. With Ssehura on one end of an extreme spectrum, and Cardi B / Megan Thee Stallion on the other more current day end of the spectrum, All three women have significant impacts when it comes to the societal constructs that judged them or seemingly embraced them. Cardi B's racial makeup is always a topic of conversation, Megan Thee Stallion evokes mumbles of insecurities in cisgender males for being too confident and empowered in her black womanhood, and Ssehura was never allowed a voice to defend herself against her captors. The intersectionality however for all three women revolve around the sexual ownership of the black female body. Criticizing and suppressing women who harness their sexuality and discuss it in frank — even vulgar — terms is part of a long history of policing women's sexuality. So no, it's not surprising that some men are threatened when women display and celebrate their sexuality — it's unfortunately to be expected. Women's sexuality has long been a threat to cisgender men... (Teen Vogue)

This oppressive mentality, practice, and rhetoric specifically over the black female body began as stated in the life of Ssehura, when European colonizers illegally captured African indigenous people into the Transatlantic Triangular Slave Trade in the 15th century. With infamous deviant natured European scientists to the likes of Charles Darwin in a refuted attempt to animalize the black body as subhuman, to be born female and then to also be black was a double reduction in societal hierarchy and worthiness. This is one of the many reasons why Ssehura was treated as such, however it's also why centuries later, the descendants of this

prolific woman in black womanhood has given an aggressive and very frank voice to stars like Megan Thee Stallion specifically.

"...It's ridiculous that some people think the simple phrase "Protect Black women" is controversial. We deserve to be protected as human beings. And we are entitled to our anger about a laundry list of mistreatment and neglect that we suffer."

-Megan Thee Stallion NY Times

The overtly sexual and in your face power packing authoritative tone within the lyrics of songs like "WAP, Savage, Money, & Bartier Cardi," are a direct reaction to centuries of black women losing their lives or children's lives in search for basic human decency. Funneling this centuries long harnessed energy into the new voice of Generation Z, the inherent radical nature of Josephine Baker, & the barriers broken by iconic women such as Beyonce... you've birthed a new empowered black woman who only seeks autonomy & ownership where her presence is requested.

The lineage and clear connection of the women I've chosen for this research is clear. The black female body of today is the powerhouse that harnesses insurmountable change within all arena's we decide to present or perform. The appropriation of our bodies is no longer accepted, however it is called out and to be held accountable especially given the harsh reality of what these anatomical cells have been through. Present day, the black female body holds the second highest office in the world as Vice President Of The United States Of America in Kamala Harris. Through the incredible history of this body and through these women, the black female body can literally harness rage and cultivate into an energy that will change society and the world.

Dance Score “S.T.A.C.K.E.D”

Written By CiCi Kelley

Middle of this stage, I am stacked; ready to defend.

There’s bondage around my body: the constructs of my identity & character. Implicit is the color of your glare. You badly want to covet me, yet you equate my value to dog shit underneath your feet.

My breast; protruding. Tight ass garment, but I’m cute though.

My posterior extends like my sister Sarah Baartman — however you will not cut me open upon my death.

My stereotypes appear above my head.

You’ve compartmentalized me. I sway side to side like Mortal Kombat.

The color of my glare is rage, yet the inside... my adolescent voice shivering, needing protection.

You audience me in provocative understanding. To co-opt or opt out?

You want this smoke...

Chocolate melanin with the ability to create all flavors of life forms.

Balanchine who?

I move my body in stimulating positions with ancestral soul.

My thighs quake the earth with every stride of my chasse. With grace, with ferocious pride; I am aware of my sensuality. Twist to the floor, the show you salivate for, the assets of my frame my hips thrust, leave the cornbread-fed parts of me rebounding perfectly. That smoke you desire yet fear.

I finish & stand with my right leg tendu derrière.

Lifting my core, I draw my leg into passe, grab my ankle and extend. 180 degrees.

Yes, this temple is magic.

That smoke you desire yet fear.

Bibliography

Gottschild, Brenda Dixon. "The Black Dancing Body: A Geography From Coon To Cool." Publisher. Palgrave Macmillan. Copyright 2003.

Lauren Wingenroth. "How To Be A Commercial Dancer." **Dance Magazine.** 2.28.18
Pace University students. Photo by Eduardo Patino, Courtesy Pace University
[What It Takes to Make It As A Commercial Dancer](#)

Fryer, Roland G. Jr. & Levitt, Steven D. "The Causes And Consequences Of Distinctively Black Names". The Quarterly Journal Of Economics. Vol. CXIX August 2004 Issue 3. 2004 by the President and Fellows of Harvard College and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. P. 767
[QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF ECONOMICS](#)

Casel, Gerald. "Lineage, Mimicry, and Ambivalence." **Stanley Gambucci in** Paramodernities #3, February 23–24, 2018 at ODC Theater. Series Organized By Cladia La Rocca
[Lineage, Mimicry, and Ambivalence : Open Space](#)

South African History Online Towards A People's History. Sara "Saartjie" Baartman.
[South African History - Sara "Saartjie" Baartman](#)

Lange, Gill. "11 Things You Didn't Know About the Fascinating Life of Sarah Baartman"
Culture Trip. 11.13.17
[11 Things You Didn't Know About the Fascinating Life of Sarah Baartman](#)

Adair, Zakiya. **Josephine Baker (1906-1975).** **Black Past.** 2.6.08. Image courtesy Dutch National Archives.
[Josephine Baker \(1906-1975\)](#)

Sweeney-Risko, Jennifer. "Fashionable 'Formation': Reclaiming the Sartorial Politics of Josephine Baker." UArts Libraries. Department of Literature, Bard Early College, Cleveland, USA
[UArts Libraries](#)

Gueye, Awa. "Josephine Baker: Queer, Radical, Artist & Activist." **Afro Punk.** 6.3.19
[JOSEPHINE BAKER: QUEER, RADICAL, ARTIST & ACTIVIST | AFROPUNK](#)

Steele, Valarie. Dance Fashion. Intersections Of Movement And Style. P.259

by Valerie Steele (Editor), Patricia Mears (Contributor), Mary Davis (Contributor), Colleen Hill (Contributor), Melissa Marra (Contributor), Masafumi Monden (Contributor), Elizabeth Way (Contributor), Anna Winestein (Contributor), Emma McClendon (Contributor), Adelheid Rasche (Contributor).

McMillan, Jeremy Dr. "Negrophilia and the Black Woman: The Exploitation of

Essentialism." Stuart A. Ros Manuscripts, Archives, & Rare Book Libraries. Emory University. Scholar Blog. 7.5.19

[Rose Library Blog | Negrophilia and the Black Woman: The Exploitation of Essentialism](#)

Mokoena, Tshepo. "Beyoncé's Vogue cover shows just how her image control works"

The Guardian

[Beyoncé's Vogue cover shows just how her image control works](#)

Dockertermn, Eliana. "Flawless: 5 Lessons in Modern Feminism From Beyoncé" Time

Magazine. Opinion. Pop Culture. 12.17.13

[Beyoncé: Lessons in Modern Feminism](#)

McNamara, Brittney. "WAP" Reaction Shows How Threatened Men Are By Female

Sexuality." Teen Vogue. 8.11.20

[Teen Vogue](#)

Megan Thee Stallion. "Megan Thee Stallion: Why I Speak Up for Black Women."

Opinion. New York Times. 10.13.20.

[The New York Times](#)

Revenir à Dieu

Back to God

Back To Self

All of who we are...

Is it a constant fight and a constant need to prove my blackness? Can I just be an artist, and just so happen to be black? (damn Oreo complex). Bill T. Jones, Gus Solomon.

Where is the integrity in just being an artist who just so happens to be black? What about the fight, the oppressive systemic bullshit? Is this Uncle Tom Syndrome, or simply living free minded without the chains of oppression?

How do I represent my people, however also live my life proudly as a free goddess?

Am I a Goddess? Aint I a woman? Sojourner Truth

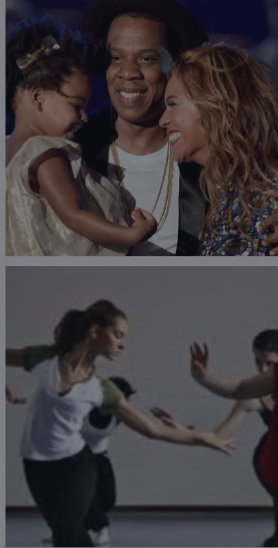
I will no longer shrink myself within a space to make you comfortable.



Photo credit: Zack Lee



ODWA
CADEN
ABLISHED



utton

\$435,990
Starting From

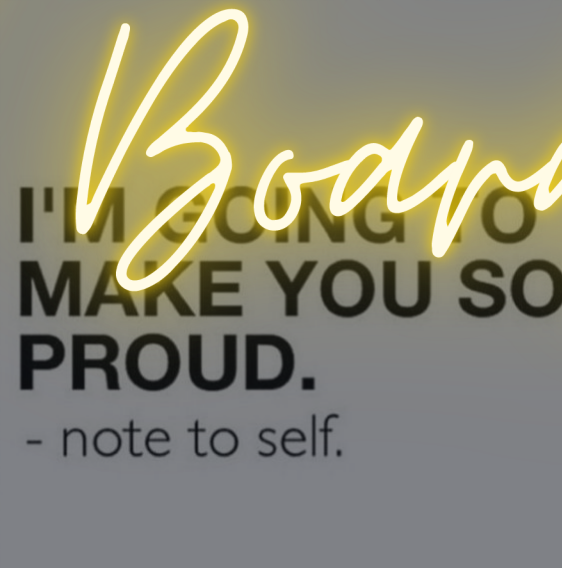
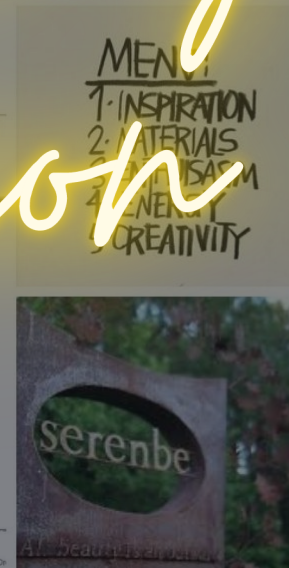
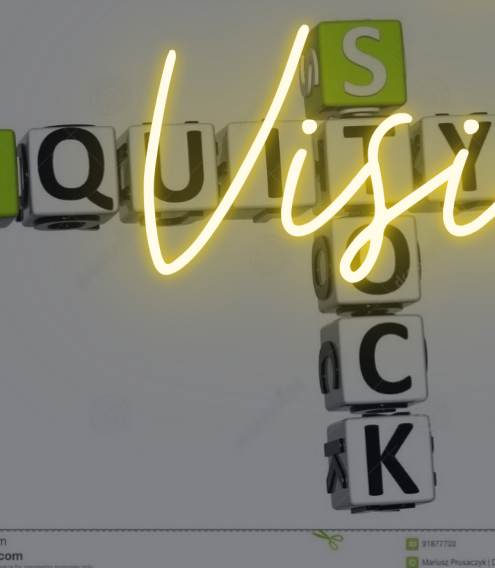
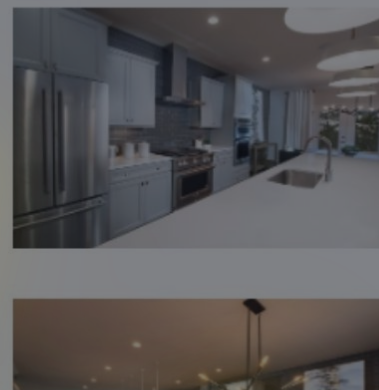
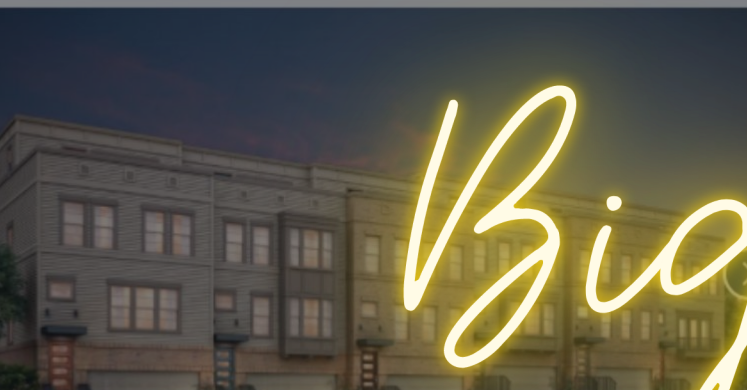
\$2,502/mo
Starting From

3-4
Beds

2.5-3.5
Bathrooms

2 Car
Garage

2,700+
Sq. Ft.



Dr. Cicely A. Kelley
The Ph.D. in Creativity

Written Notes

From MFA Summer Study 2020

Phenomenology

Specialized
oriented
tending toward

Queer

the other space
the something else
the other way of being

the way of thinking about ourselves.
Instead of asking about what we
really are, it focuses on phenomena,
these are experiences that we get
from the senses - what we see,
taste, smell, touch, hear and feel.

Racial Skin

What's assigned as
performative from society.

Social lines

Barriers, laws

Oriented

point of origin

Proximity - Distance - Objects

How we experience life

International studies.

7/7

Art making As Research I

- I believe we first encounter ~~the~~ emotion of finding every way we can express creativity, ~~that~~ we visualize in our mind. A sense of overwhelm may be the next sense we face, as the art itself + the medium of choice to execute can be quite demanding.
- Finding the inspiration to pivot ones thinking (for me) is the exciting part of art making. Collaborating with outside forces is the most rewarding aspect of research + art making.

Research as a new location for Agency I

- I believe so. the ~~whole~~ whole point is to question and challenge ones art to make it fulfilling. By questioning my agency, I am able to dig deeper within myself to further curate what captivates

Others when viewing my work.

Dancer Practice / lived inquiry

the truth, or the creator's truth is revealed. Any art medium can reveal a truth about the creator, what makes it fascinating, is gaining an abstract understanding of what the intention of the art is to manifest, that can/will then reveal a truth during audienceing.

Value

- I valued the commitment & energy of my training, especially once I saw development within my own self confidence and sense of community.
- I valued the respect for the craft and specified technique. Gaining the perspective & history, really gave me a sense of appreciation whenever I would perform.

Ahmed

Happiness

"Happiness for some involves
persecution for others. it is not simply
that this happiness produces a
social wrong, but it might even
be dependent on it. (105)

- I valued the shared love ~~for~~ from
my fellow community of dancers.
Having that synergy truly meant the
world to me.

Set your sights on your destination,
Not your circumstances.

-Charles Kelley
Fathers Day 2021
Juneteenth

TELEVISION

MTV VMAs w/ Lil Jon, Ying Yang, Petey Pablo Pepsi
Smash w/ Ying Yang Twins
MTV "Made" Coach
Tyler Perry's House of Payne Summer Promo's MTV
MADE "Head to Head hip Hop Challenge" BET Hip Hop
Awards "Snoop Dogg & The Dream"
Tyler Perry's House Of Payne
Toni Braxton Performance on The Monique Show
Toni Braxton Performance on The Today Show
Toni Braxton Performance Wendy Williams
Toni Braxton Performance A&E Sessions
Braxton Family Values
GA Lotto Flashmob Industrial
Georgia Lottery End Zone Celebration Commercial
Georgia Lottery/ Atlanta Falcons Holiday Celebration
Georgia Lottery Pre Cool Commercial
Xfinity Network HBCu Yardfest feat. Jade Novah
Apple Beats By Dre

FILM

Last Vegas W/Morgan Freeman, Robert Dinero
Footloose the Movie
The Identical
BOLDEN

MUSIC VIDEO

Wyclef Jean "Von Vile"
Alexis Jordan

TOUR

Akon/Fugees/Elvis White European Tour
Musiq Soulchild - Stir the Senses Tour
LL Cool J & Tribe Called Quest Tour
Toni Braxton Russia Tour

ARTIST DEVELOPMENT / STAGE

Phazes of Love Dance Showcase
JBS Hair Industrial/Bronner Brothers
Wilson Pickett Project
2011 Gator Bowl Half Time Show
2011 Holiday Bowl Master Class Series
2012 Russell Athletic Bowl
Georgia Lottery Falcons End Zone Celebration

SELECTED PERFORMANCE CREDITS

LL Cool J ft. J.Lo "Control Myself" Video
Cirque Du Soleil
Beyonce "Get Me Bodied" video
FW Productions "Jambalya"
SOBE/PEPSI Industrial
CMT Awards Dierks Bentley
Beyonce MTV VMA's Single Ladies